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Professor Anthony Downs

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Planning Policy,
Vale of White Horse District Council,
Benson Lane,
Crowmarsh,
Wallingford,
Oxfordshire, OX10 8ED.

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27th November, 2014.

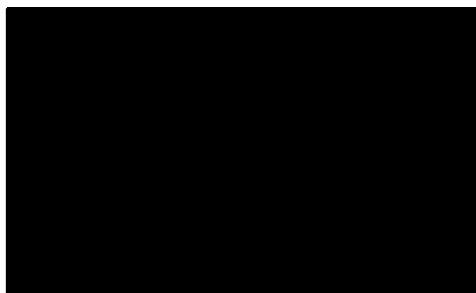
Dear Sir or Madam,

**VALE OF WHITE HORSE LOCAL PLAN
FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UP TO 2031**

COMMENTS

Please find attached my contribution to the public consultation on this plan. I have chosen to do this with hard copy delivered by normal mail despite being registered to make my representations on-line. The on-line form I find too limiting and with too many redundant boxes that need apparently to be ticked.

Yours faithfully,



VALE OF WHITE HORSE LOCAL PLAN FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UP TO 2031

COMMENTS

Local Plan 2031

- This submission is made by an Oxford academic, now retired, who has been a resident of St. Swithun's Road, Kennington, for 48 years and is therefore tolerably well placed to judge how the character of, and the quality of life in, the village and in the Thames Valley area between Oxford and Abingdon have changed over nearly half a century. What I have to say has mainly to do therefore with this immediate area of Abingdon-on-Thames and the Oxford fringe, but I have good reason to believe that some of the points must be relevant to the Vale of White Horse as a whole.

CPIB

- It is obvious that the original intentions of the whole Green Belt zone separating Oxford from Abingdon have been compromised in the past 50 years by piecemeal, private housing and other developments. This has led to the reassessment of whether the purpose of that Green Belt continues to be adequately served and to the entirely regrettable conclusion that the needs for extra housing in this area should transcend the inestimable desirability of having a significant green field area to maintain the quite separate identities of Abingdon and Oxford. **Nothing could be worse than the urban sprawl towards which the present housing plans are inexorably moving.** That Abingdon should become no more than a district of Greater Oxford – a sort of Hove to Oxford's Brighton – is a prospect too dismal to contemplate. It is exceedingly hard to swallow, but we are told, and can believe, that what is planned for new housing in Abingdon, Radley and South Kennington represents the **least of all possible evils.**

- Starting most reluctantly from this position, I expressed the view in an earlier comment on the local plans for the building of new housing, specifically in South Kennington, that I was not opposed to these plans *in principle*, but that the practicalities really hinged on **there being a radically improved infrastructure, i.e.** the facilities and services needed to “support this community and enable the local economy to thrive”, as one of the documents likes to put it.

CPS

- Having waded through the consultation documents and attended a public meeting in Abingdon Guildhall on 19th November, 2014, I find the plans for this infrastructure **quite inadequate to justify the case that adequate provision is in place, or is being made, to support the proposed housing plan.** The failings come under two general headings:

- (i) The presumption is plainly that **the existing infrastructure meets satisfactorily the needs of the present population. This is patently untrue.** I have already alluded to serious inadequacies regarding the present provisions in Kennington for health and policing but, most importantly, **transportation** (affecting roads, bus services, and railways). This last has to be seen as an area in which **the present provisions are quite unacceptable.** Anyone living in Kennington in the past 5 years or so and thereby suffering from flooding, persistent road works and closures, bridge replacement, frequently with restricted access to and from

Oxford, must have thought so. And so it is in varying degrees, surely, for anyone with direct experience and having eyes to see, **for the whole Oxford area** (that must include virtually all of what is described as the "Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe" sub-area) where total traffic gridlock is fast approaching – if it has not already arrived on some days.

- (ii) The plans overall show too little evidence of **joined-up, long-range thinking** with adequate input from all the different agencies involved (Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Water, Thames Valley Police, Highways Agency, Network Rail, and so on). Where specific plans are set out in just a few cases, they involve, for the most part, a relatively limited sticking-plaster solution with the capacity – **certainly where transportation is concerned** – to move what is already a problem from one place to another. Moreover, there seems to be no guarantee that many of the changes will actually be implemented or that they will be in place in due time. **Something much more radical and more committed is called for if this district is not to degenerate into an intolerably over-crowded, traffic-choked environment with an associated air quality unfit to support normal human life.**

• Although I note under "Education Needs" that St. Swithuns Primary School is to be expanded and a new primary school is to be established to the north of Abingdon, there is generally very little in the documentation by which to judge just what aspects of the present infrastructure are to be changed to meet the proposed increase of population in this area. Too many statements are generally bald and uninformative, notably those about Electricity, Health Care, and Emergency Services. At least Thames Water has tried to respond to the question of meeting the water and sewerage needs of the proposed development, but there is only limited reassurance to be gained from the prospects of the large resource schemes for water storage or of the upgrades to the sewerage network and treatment plants.

• **Transportation** remains, however, the elephant in the room where infrastructure is concerned. I note the plans for the Lodge Hill junction of the A34 and for the so-called "enhancement" of the A420 Oxford-Swindon road, and acknowledge their merit. But in these and the plans for other parts of the Vale, the emphasis is on the main roads in the area, **whereas it is much of the road network that needs serious attention.** No-one can be in any doubt about the problems of the A34, with its all-too-regular holdups and serious accidents; it should of course have been upgraded to a motorway years ago. There is no point, however, in having improved major roads and road junctions **that merely take traffic from, or deliver traffic to, sub-standard roads** of which that running through Kennington and leading to Radley and north Abingdon is just one obvious example. One bottleneck may be removed, but only to create another bottleneck elsewhere. Far too many of the roads in this area are too narrow, have inadequate foundations (witness Bagley Wood Road), and are poorly maintained for the traffic they have to carry. **Without due attention to this concern, I believe the plans to be hopelessly flawed.**

There is another aspect to transportation, namely **public transport.** This, too, I consider to be a major issue since only with improved public transport can there be any hope of treating one of the ultimate problems, namely that **there are already too many cars on the roads.** As it

CP8 is, the plans offer no useful help with what the residents of the Vale can expect. Admittedly the bus companies find it extremely hard as it is to operate a reliable service **when the road network falls so far short of the ideal, and numerous protracted, ill-managed road works have become a daily fact of life.** In the same context, I note too that the documentation contains no mention at all of the important potential contribution that might be made by Network Rail through radically **improved provision for railway passengers;** *more* as well as better stations with adequate parking facilities serving this and other parts of the Vale could play a significant part in relieving the traffic congestion already being experienced and which can only get worse as a result of the proposed housing development.

A. J. Downs

Professor A. J. Downs
27th November, 2014