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VALE OF WHITE HORSE LOCAL PLAN 2031 (Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies)

EXAMINATION

STAGE 1 - MATTERS AND QUESTIONS

Matter 1 – Duty to Co-operate and other Legal Requirements

Has the Council satisfactorily discharged its Duty to Co-operate to maximise the effectiveness of Local Plan preparation in the context of strategic cross boundary matters, including in particular minerals and waste and housing?

1. Work is currently underway at both District and County level to consider the scale of Oxford's unmet housing need and its distribution between the authorities. The Inspector's attention is drawn to the Oxfordshire Growth Board agenda of 30th July 2015 and the Vale of White Horse Cabinet report on Oxford unmet housing need dated 7th August 2015.
2. Both documents demonstrate that significant work is currently being undertaken to consider how the districts will apportion the dwellings resulting from the inability of the City Council to accommodate its requirements. It is clear from the work carried out so far that it is inevitable that the Vale of White Horse will be required to accommodate a proportion of Oxford's unmet housing need; it is not clear what that proportion will be or how significant it could be in terms of the overall housing requirements for this district.
3. It is evident that the District Councils and City Council and the County Council are cooperating well in considering this issue; however it has yet to be resolved. The growth board papers include the post Strategic Housing Market Assessment work programme which sets out the timeline for dealing with this matter. The growth board makes it clear that it is undertaking an informal process which does not form part of the statutory planning system, but it is 'one that is intended to

demonstrate compliance with the duty to cooperate without compromising the principle of individual local plan sovereignty'. So it is relevant to this EIP.

4. The timeline set out in the Growth Board work programme indicates very clearly that is anticipated that all the Oxfordshire Councils will receive the recommendation on housing distribution between Districts in early 2016. This information could have significant implications for the Vale of White Horse Local plan. Therefore whilst it is true to say that the duty to cooperate is being taken seriously, it has certainly not been 'discharged' because the outcomes of the various aspects of the research and analysis necessary have yet to be produced.
5. The timescales are such that it seems unreasonable to progress the Vale Part 1 Local Plan before the outcomes of the duty to cooperate investigations and negotiations have been resolved. The fact that this work is currently ongoing and the outcomes are expected early in 2016 demonstrates that this Local Plan examination is premature because fundamental evidence in terms of housing numbers (and the associated strategic infrastructure) response which may arise from the additional housing requirements is not available. But importantly it will be available within a relatively short timescale. Therefore, the delay necessary to enable the duty to cooperate to be discharged will not be excessive, but it would enable the plan to be sound. It is therefore my firm view that the plan as drafted is unsound because the housing numbers and overall strategy for dealing with those numbers has not been justified in relation to the duty to cooperate.