
Examination into the Vale of White Horse District Local Plan 2031: Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies

Written Statement on behalf of Ptarmigan Planning Ltd. and Landowners

Hearing Statement: Matter 3

Respondent Reference: 873607

August 2015

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Hearing Statement: Matter 3: Spatial Strategy and Housing Supply Ring Fence

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement is submitted to the Examination into the Vale of White Horse District Local Plan 2011-2031: Part 1 on behalf of Ptarmigan Planning Ltd. and Landowners (hereafter referred to 'our Client').

1.2 This statement refers to the following Issue, identified by the Inspector in his Matters and Questions:

- Matter 3 – Spatial Strategy and Housing Supply Ring Fence

2.0 MATTER 3 – SPATIAL STRATEGY AND HOUSING SUPPLY RING FENCE

Is the proposed distribution of new housing and employment land (policies CP4 and CP6) soundly based? In particular:

(a) does the proposed distribution of housing set out in policy CP4 appropriately reflect the settlement hierarchy (policy CP3)

2.1 Our Client considers that the proposed distribution of housing complies with the Council's settlement hierarchy outlined in Core Policy 3 and is considered sound in this regard. The emphasis for development being focused upon the market towns, local service centres and larger villages with the three Sub- Areas at Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe, South East Vale and Western Vale is appropriate with the proportioned growth for each settlement is set out as follows:

- Market Town – greatest long-term potential for development to provide jobs and homes;
- Local Service Centres- Provide the next best opportunity for sustainable development outside the market Towns
- Larger Villages- Unallocated development will be limited to providing for local needs
- Smaller Villages – Low level of services and facilities where development should be modest and proportionate in scale and primarily for local needs.

2.2 With specific reference to Harwell Campus, the settlement hierarchy acknowledges that it should be treated as a larger village, with a range of employment, services and facilities. The proposed allocations of Harwell will allow for further services and facilities to be provided meeting the needs of both the new and existing households and employees as a result of the job growth forecast within the Local Plan and coming forward from the City Deal and other government funding in the most sustainable manner.

2.3 Locating housing and employment close to one another is inherently a more sustainable approach to development. Given the level of job growth projected at Harwell/ within the Science Vale, it would not be appropriate for the housing to be re-distributed to other settlements, even if they were higher in the settlement hierarchy as they would not be able to contribute to a truly mixed use community based around the Campus, nor would they offer a sustainable solution to providing housing to meet the needs of job growth

at the Campus. There is an estimated 4,500 existing jobs at the Campus and with this number set to more than double as a result of the Enterprise Zone and other developments. The proximity of an element of the new housing proposed to both existing and expanding jobs will provide an attractive combination and help to capture local travel.

- 2.4 Not only is it a case of delivering additional housing to meet the needs of the District, but further to ensure that, as required under paragraph 34 of the NPPF, new housing development and facilities are located where the need for travel will be minimised. Providing housing as part of the Campus will enable local short distance trips, a high proportion of which could be made by foot and cycle. The distribution of housing proposed will provide housing to therefore serve the employment concentration of Harwell Campus.
- 2.5 An alternative distribution of across the District would inevitably result in a greater travel-to-work area to the key employment areas, especially given the intended employment growth within the Science Vale, which would be contrary to paragraph 180 of the NPPF. As such, it is considered the approach adopted by the Vale of White Horse (VoWH) to the settlement hierarchy and ring fencing a quantum of housing is considered the most sustainable option and therefore appropriate.
- 2.6 When considering the role of the Science Vale, and specifically Harwell Campus given its international significance, it is worth recognising similar campuses around the world to understand the importance of delivering the requirement housing and supporting infrastructure to deliver successful mixed use developments and thus by default sustainable growth – a key objective of the NPPF. By way of example, The Research Triangle (North Carolina), Zee Town (San Francisco) and Googleplex (California) business campuses incorporate housing, local centres, infrastructure and supporting community facilities which have assisted in the sustained the growth and success of the campuses. Similar concepts are also included within New Earswick and Bourneville in the UK. This matter will be dealt with more fully at later stages in the Examination.
- 2.7 With workers at Harwell, including specialist skilled staff from across Europe and beyond, providing a range of housing types, located within walking distance of the Campus, as part of a campus community, is likely to be far more attractive for such workers than having to live elsewhere and travel to Harwell. Living in a Campus location, only a short walk from Harwell and with good bus connections to Didcot for schools and other facilities would prove attractive. An alternative distribution across the District would not create the campus environment needed to secure its long term

success. Instead the Campus would grow in scale alongside a continued and greater travel-to-work area to the intended employment growth within the Science Vale. This would be contrary to paragraph 180 of the NPPF.

- 2.8 In light of the above, the approach to employment and housing distribution in the Local Plan as reflected within Core Policy CP3, is considered to be soundly based as required under paragraph 182 of the NPPF as it is the most appropriate strategy and would be deliverable over the plan period.

Does the distribution appropriately reflect the role of Oxford in providing for employment and services for the residents of Vale of White Horse?

- 2.9 The Council has recognised the role of Oxford in providing employment and services, although further extends the spatial strategy to ensure that its own District-wide housing needs arising from the anticipated employment growth are sufficiently planned for. The travel-to-work patterns across the wider Oxfordshire area, as reference at paragraph 179 of the NPPF, will be increasingly relevant once the unmet need of Oxford City is confirmed and the Council identify the most appropriate locations for meeting the specific housing needs of the City.
- 2.10 Whilst through the Duty-to-Cooperate the Council has recently committed to, as discussed at Matter 4, addressing the unmet need of Oxford and testing the most appropriate location for delivering the additional housing requirement, the quantum of employment growth anticipated within the VoWH itself should not be underplayed.
- 2.11 Paragraph 7 of the NPPF requires that sufficient land is available in the 'right places and at the right time to support growth' which is an approach the Council has sought to adopt within its spatial strategy. Paragraph 2.10 of the Local Plan identifies the strategic focus for economic and employment growth within the District being the Science Vale area, such as Harwell and Culham, given its international importance and the need to optimise its economic potential over the plan period. This demonstrates VoWH commitment to ensuring that any 'barriers to investment' as noted at paragraph 160 of the NPPF are sufficiently addressed over the plan period by seeking to adopt a spatial strategy which aligns the locations of economic growth with housing need within that location to ensure the delivering of sustainable development solutions over the plan period.

- 2.12 Given the intrinsic link between economic growth and housing need, VoWH has committed through Local Plan Part 1 to ensuring 'balanced and sustainable growth' by allocating land for strategic housing growth which support the self-containment of the Science Vale. Paragraph 4.17 of the Local Plan sets out that the economic forecasts for the Oxfordshire Housing Market Area indicate that almost 70% of the 23,000 new jobs to be created to 2031 will be within the Science Vale and as such, the VoWH strategic approach recognises the 'economic, social and environmental gains' of ensuring that there is sufficient housing provision in appropriate locations to support economic growth and achieve sustainable development. This approach aligns with paragraph 9 of the NPPF by widening the choice of high quality homes in close proximity to those locations in which the jobs will be created. Given the unique opportunities that the Science Vale provides, VoWH has tailored its strategy to reflect local circumstances, as discussed at paragraph 10 of the NPPF, and achieving sustainable development in such a way that is appropriate to local needs and supporting the employment growth for the wider Oxfordshire area.
- 2.13 The relationship between the Science Vale and Oxford is recognised given the links with the Universities, the transport network and business, and the Local Plan makes provision for the associated infrastructure requirements to support both the growth of the Science Vale but also to enhance accessibility to Oxford City. The Local Plan recognises both the importance of these two main locations by improving accessibility of both homes and jobs to support sustainable development and growth. This will further assist in planning for any unmet need of Oxford City by ensuring that there is infrastructure proposed to support additional development where it is considered appropriate.
- 2.14 As such, it is considered the Local Plan sufficiently reflects the role of Oxford, whilst also recognising the other sources of employment and job growth anticipated within the VoWH itself and the housing required to support that growth. The proposed housing distribution appropriately centres upon those areas of employment growth relating to the Science Vale, such as Harwell Campus and allows the housing to benefit from public transport provision to nearby Didcot from where fast and direct public transport services operate to Oxford City.

Is it feasible that a significantly different distribution of housing development from that proposal could be delivered?

- 2.15 VoWH has adopted a spatial strategy that is reflective of what is considered appropriate given the findings of the Sustainability Appraisal and the anticipated employment growth within the District supported through the evidence base to the Plan. To pursue an alternative strategy, which to date has been driven by a particular focus of providing the quantum of homes required to support the Science Vale, would significantly undermine that strategy and potentially compromise the ability for the anticipated growth of the Science Vale to be realised over the plan period.
- 2.16 With regard to Harwell specifically, VoWH has recognised the important role of the Campus both internationally and nationally whilst planning for housing which will support its function and growth over the plan period. Now is the correct time to support the growth and innovation in this location as set out at paragraph 7 of the NPPF and as such proposing housing in close proximity to the Campus will create a strong community with development which meets the specific needs of the area. The limited provision of housing presently at Harwell and the poor infrastructure links to surrounding residential areas hinders its the ability to build up its reputation, attract investment from the world stage and deliver the projected growth over the plan period. As recognised under paragraph 10 of the NPPF, Local Plans should recognise local circumstances and the opportunities for achieving sustainable development and in this regard, the approach to delivering additional housing to support the growth of Harwell Campus and the wider Science Vale area is the most appropriate strategy over the plan period.
- 2.17 VoWH has adopted a strategy which is therefore suitable and sustainable for the area and has taken into account the specific needs of both business and residential communities as required under paragraph 17 of the NPPF.
- 2.18 Given the level of economic growth proposed across Oxfordshire with the majority within VoWH, an alternative strategy would not be appropriate given that it would:
- Not provide housing in the most sustainable locations; and
 - Hinder the economic objectives and projections.

- 2.19 Therefore, a significantly different distribution of housing would not be appropriate or sustainable given the reliance on the Science Vale to deliver a considerable proportion of the economic growth for Oxfordshire and providing employment opportunities within VoWH. As such by directing new housing and infrastructure towards areas where there is a strong economic focus will assist in delivering sustainable growth.

Is the “housing supply ring fence” approach of policy CP5 to the delivery of housing in the Science Vale area (a) adequately explained in terms of its practical operation, (b) justified, (c) likely to be effective and (d) in accordance with national policy?

- 2.20 The approach taken to ring fence housing supply within the Science Vale is considered appropriate given the scale of economic growth that will occur within VoWH over the plan period and has been sufficiently explained with regard to its practical operation at paragraph 4.16. This paragraph references how the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan with support from the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership identifies the Science Vale as the ‘Oxfordshire Knowledge Spine’ indicating the strategic role the area plays in unlocking economic growth. The need to ensure that the Science Vale remains attractive to new and existing research establishments by virtue of being in an accessible location with sufficient housing and infrastructure to support the workforce, is an approach advocated within the Plan and explained at Figure 4.1 This has provided the foundations for VoWH to ensure that sufficient housing is provided within the Science Vale itself to avoid barriers to investment in the location over the plan period and has thus informed the spatial strategy identified within the Local Plan.
- 2.21 The justification provided by VoWH within policy 4.17 and the approach to ensuring that housing is located in close proximity to the key employment areas within the Science Vale would contribute to creating ‘thriving local places’ as required under paragraph 17 of the NPPF, in contrast to further expanding isolated key employment areas within poor connectivity and little housing provision. Given the strength attributed to the Science Vale and its role in delivering economic growth over the plan period, VoWH is justified in its approach to directing development towards such areas to support the business function over the plan period given 70% of economic growth across Oxfordshire is anticipated within VoWH itself. If housing were to be located elsewhere in the District with poor infrastructure to the Science Vale area, as stated at paragraph 4.20 of the Plan, the economic growth of the area could be jeopardise which would result in far reaching impacts across the wider Oxfordshire area with regard to the delivery of jobs, housing and infrastructure. Given the above, the Plan seeks to address cross-boundary strategic issues such as acknowledging the quantum of economic growth within the

District and planning for the appropriate level of housing in the right locations. As such, the Plan will be effective in both meeting the economic and housing needs sufficiently resulting in a plan that is deliverable and contribute to achieving sustainable development.

- 2.22 With regard to Harwell Campus, given its allocation as an Enterprise Zone and VoWH and the Oxfordshire LEP's continuing commitment to strengthening the scientific and research provision, the provision of housing and facilities to support the economic function is imperative to ensure the economic growth prospects are realised. Without such provision, the location of additional housing elsewhere in the District will fail to support the economic offer of this area and result in longer travel-to-work times for employees, thus not delivering sustainable development through the spatial strategy. In this regard, the Plan is considered effective in delivering the housing and infrastructure to support the future growth of Harwell Campus and thus will be deliverable over the plan period.
- 2.23 As such, in line with paragraph 182 of the NPPF, VoWH has identified the most appropriate strategy based on existing evidence and a Local Plan which is deliverable over the plan period by proposing housing allocations in locations which will support the sustainable economic growth of Science Vale and Oxfordshire more widely. As such, the proposed approach seeks to deliver sustainable development in line with national policy and as such accords with paragraph 156 of the NPPF as it will:
- Ensure that economic growth secures higher social and environmental standards (paragraph 8 of the NPPF);
 - Widen the choice of high quality homes within the Science Vale area (paragraph 9 of the NPPF);
 - Take local circumstances into account and responding to different opportunities to achieving sustainable development (paragraph 10 of the NPPF);
 - Proactively drive and support the sustainable economic development of the Science Vale through providing homes, business and infrastructure to support its function (paragraph 17 of the NPPF);
 - Support a pattern of development that will maximise sustainable transport solutions (paragraph 30 of the NPPF); and
 - Achieve each of the economic, social and environmental dimension of sustainable development (paragraph 152 of the NPPF).

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