

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031

(Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies)

Stage 1 Examination

Matter 3 – Spatial Strategy and Housing Supply Ring fence

Statement on behalf of Commercial Estates Group

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement is submitted to the Examination into the Vale of White Horse Local Plan on behalf of Commercial Estates Group (hereafter referred to as CEG). CEG is promoting the whole of the draft North Abingdon-on-Thames strategic site allocation for around 800 dwellings.
- 1.2 This statement refers to Matter 3 - Spatial Strategy and Housing Supply Ring fence and the matters and questions identified by the Inspector in his 'Matters and Questions for the Stage 1 Examination'.

2 Question 3.1

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) and the core planning principle of the NPPF (para 17) to actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable?

- 2.1 Yes. The Local Plan seeks to deliver sustainable growth in accordance with its Spatial Strategy. One of the strategy's three key strands is to reinforce the service centre roles of the main settlements across the District by focusing housing growth at the Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Larger Villages and allocating strategic housing growth at Abingdon-on-Thames, Faringdon and Science Vale.
- 2.2 Core Policy 3 (Settlement Hierarchy) classifies Abingdon-on-Thames as a Market Town which has the ability to support the most sustainable patterns of living within the Vale. Market Towns are considered to have the greatest long-term potential to provide jobs and housing needed to support sustainable communities.
- 2.3 The Vale of White Horse is a predominantly rural area with three historic market towns (Abingdon-on-Thames, Wantage and Faringdon) and a myriad of smaller and more rural settlements. The sub-area strategies are centred on each of these market towns which contain the most significant concentrations of facilities, services and employment opportunities. Within these sub-areas, the Market Towns have the greatest potential for development to help sustain and enhance services and facilities and to support viable and sustainable communities.
- 2.4 Focussing development at the Market Towns will help support and enhance facilities and services within the towns, enable residents to access facilities by sustainable transport modes and deliver affordable homes where there is most need.
- 2.5 Abingdon-on-Thames is the largest settlement in the District and is a thriving market town providing accessible employment, community, leisure and retail facilities with strong links to Oxford. It is therefore a sustainable location to focus growth. However, the extent of housing growth that can be accommodated at Abingdon-on-Thames is constrained by a number of

factors, particularly any development to the south of the town as a result of flooding and transport constraints.

- 2.6 CEG supports the proposed distribution of housing development and the Council's clear preference to concentrate development at the main settlements to help support the vitality of the Vale's market towns, locate new housing close to more services and facilities, and to offer the best chance of securing new infrastructure. The Spatial Strategy, Sub-Area Strategies and Settlement Hierarchy comply with the Government's drive for delivering sustainable development.

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

- 2.7 Yes. The Council has correctly sought to strike a balance between focussing housing growth at the larger, most sustainable, settlements in accordance with the settlement hierarchy and sub-area strategies, as well as allocating land for strategic housing growth within the Science Vale area to support the Plan's proposals for employment growth and to improve self-containment of the area reflecting sustainable development principles.
- 2.8 The Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe Sub-Area in particular is well-related to Oxford, with the market town of Abingdon-on-Thames itself being the largest settlement within this sub-area and a focus for housing growth. The A34 is a key strategic transport route between the town and Oxford. Development of strategic sites at Abingdon-on-Thames will secure funding for the delivery of the A34 slips at Lodge Hill (as set out in the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan) which will further improve transport links between the town and City.
- 2.9 Abingdon-on-Thames is well served by public transport links with Oxford, with a regular service (City 35) linking the town with Oxford city centre and allowing an easy commute between the two. This route also serves Radley rail station which has rail links to both Oxford and London Paddington.
- 2.10 In addition, there is also a regular bus service providing links between Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxford Rail Station, Oxford city centre and the John Radcliffe Hospital.
- 2.11 Focussing development at Abingdon-on-Thames therefore clearly reflects the role that Oxford plays in providing employment and services for residents of the Vale of White Horse.

3 Question 3.3

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

- 3.1 The distribution of housing development focuses growth at the three sub-areas which are focussed on the District's three market towns. It then, in turn, focusses development in each of

these sub-areas according to the settlement hierarchy with growth at the Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Larger Villages.

- 3.2 Strategic housing growth is therefore focused at the most sustainable locations relative to their accessibility, range of services provided and proximity to existing and proposed employment opportunities (including those in Oxford).
- 3.3 Selection of the preferred spatial strategy was informed and found to be appropriate by sustainability appraisal.
- 3.4 There were two stages of options development to determine the preferred approach to spatial distribution in the Vale, consideration of the overall pattern of development and the assessment of the refined spatial options. The Overall Pattern of Development included six reasonable alternatives (see para 10.3.2 and 10.3.3 of the Sustainability Appraisal) followed by the development of two refined options, then a third, further refined option combining the best aspects of the two preceding refinements.
- 3.5 The Sustainability Appraisal of the preferred option finds that refined Option C 'Building on our Strengths' performs the best as there are a number of positive significant effects associated with it, including the provision of services and facilities, reducing the need for travel, improving health and well-being, reducing inequality and supporting a strong economy. It considers that this approach is the most sustainable and should also address areas of weakness, to try and achieve a holistic improvement across the Vale.
- 3.6 Accordingly, it is considered that there is no feasible significantly different distribution of housing that could be delivered.

4 Question 3.4

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?

- 4.1 We are of the view that the Local Plan as a whole meets the District’s objectively assessed housing needs in full, is compliant with the NPPF and is both deliverable and viable. We also support the Council’s housing delivery trajectory.
- 4.2 We do however recognise the additional safeguard of the ring-fence given the importance of Science Vale to the delivery of the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan. We also recognise the Council’s commitment to sustainable development principles and its spatial strategy. A policy approach which establishes two housing land supply areas is not precluded by the NPPF.
- 4.3 We have no further comment to make in this regard.