

EIP Stage 2- comments from Chilton Parish Council

Key: *EiP/Vale text in red*

Chilton Parish Council comments/responses in black

6.2 See Matter 9

Matter 6 – Proposed Housing Sites in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

6.1 Having regard to the exceptional circumstances and public interest tests set out in para 116 of the NPPF, are the Strategic Housing Allocations (sites 12 and 13) proposed in the AONB soundly based? In particular:

(a) what is the need for the housing development, including in terms of national considerations?

The need for housing in these locations, particularly East of Campus Site 13 is NOT soundly based. Any need that exists can be better met by replacing the Site 12 allocation with one located entirely within Harwell Campus (Economic Growth Area B).

(b) what is the likely impact of permitting, or refusing, the housing development on the local economy?

1. To answer this question accurately, we think the Inspector must establish unequivocally whether any double accounting is occurring between the VWHDC and SODC Plans. Our reasons for doubt were reinforced during the EiP Stage 1 debate around Matter 2 - Objectively Assessed Needs for Housing and Employment Land, on 23 and 24 September 2015.

- One question asked was why the SHMA predicted an increase in housing numbers in South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) so much lower than VWHDC - 1.3% per annum in SODC and 2.0% in VWHDC. The answer was that the economic growth in one district should be absorbed by housing growth in the same district. Thus VWHDC is planning housing to cover all the predicted increase of jobs on the Harwell Campus.
- The SODC representative observed at the Thursday morning session that they had decided not to plan for residents in their district to work on Harwell Campus because the quality of roads east of Didcot was substandard.
- However, this assertion is incorrect and at odds with SODC's own Core Strategy http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2013-05-01%20Core%20Strategy%20for%20Website%20final_0.pdf adopted in 2012.
- In its Vision and Objectives, Section 3.14 p24, The SODC Strategy states:

At and around Didcot We aim to:

*.....(iii) **work with partners to help provide jobs for Didcot residents at Harwell Oxford and Milton Park;***

and in 6- A Thriving Economy, Section 6.18, p44:

Most housing growth will be in Didcot. Our strategy makes a strong link between the housing growth in Didcot and the business growth needs of Science Vale UK, including at Harwell Oxford and Milton Park outside the district. We are seeking with Vale of White Horse District Council to provide enough B class jobs to cater for Didcot's increased population, as well as catering for the increased population in the Vale of White Horse District. We have agreed with Vale of White Horse District Council that there will be a cross boundary allocation and 6.5 hectares of land will be allocated there to meet our needs for Didcot. Policies CSEM2 and CSEM3 show how we will distribute the remaining 13.5 hectares through new allocations and job growth.

SODC's policy of providing housing in Didcot for jobs within VWHDC at Harwell Campus and Milton Park pre-dates the VWHDC Local Plan, and VWHDC must have been aware of it when preparing their Local Plan.

By allocating housing sites for 100% of the jobs to be created within its district VWHDC is double-counting with SODC's policy of housing growth at Didcot linked to the business growth needs at Harwell and Milton Park.

2. The recent announcements about Didcot Town being awarded Garden Town status further emphasises the need for coordinated Local Plans from VWHDC and SODC to ensure that housing provision has been appropriately addressed across both districts.

[Ref: SODC news release on its website after the Housing & Planning Minister announced on 7 December 2015 that Didcot is to become a Garden Town which will help with the delivery of 15,000 houses]. It states:

"Housing growth and employment growth in the garden town will be intimately linked with 20,000 new high-tech jobs created over the next 15 years on the Harwell, Milton Park and Didcot Growth Accelerator Enterprise Zones and other smaller sites."

www.southoxon.gov.uk/news/2015/2015-12/introducing-didcot-garden-town

The release echoes the Core Strategy statements cited above, that houses to be built in Didcot (SODC district) are expected to provide homes for people working at Harwell Campus and Milton Park (VWHDC district).

We believe the evidence for any double counting must surely lie in the SHMA for Oxfordshire and its allocation to individual Districts. It is vital for the Inspector to ensure the sum of the parts adds up to the total which was the subject of Stage 1 of the EIP.

3. Even with the uncertainty described above, the refusal of the Harwell East allocation of 850 dwellings (site 13) will have no adverse impact on the local economy, because the 15,000 houses to be built in Didcot will address any shortfall. We do accept, however, that some housing allocation within the historic boundary of the Campus would be beneficial as, being under its control (not a developer), homes construction could match the actual rate of economic development of the Campus rather than uncertain predicted rates. A Campus masterplan could cater for this parallel development.

(c) is there scope for providing for the housing development outside of the AONB?

Yes many more houses could be easily accommodated outside the AONB at Didcot Power Station (Economic Growth Area D) than the 400 proposed there. These would still be located close to planned new employment opportunities and enable conjunctive use of a large brownfield area close to town amenities (see previous submission). Alternatively, the uplift in numbers at Valley Park could be used to negate the need to build within the AONB other than within the previously developed area of Harwell Campus (airfield brownfield site)

(d) what is the likely effect of the development on the environment, landscape and recreational opportunities having regard to the potential for moderation?

No moderation that will adequately address its impact is possible for the Harwell East Site 13 allocation. The impact of the development of a Campus part of Site 12 (see Campus Partnership's alternative) would be moderated by constraining it to the brownfield elements of that proposal and using the existing greenfield elements of the proposal (Site B and western part of Site A) to act as landscape buffers for this significant new development.