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# Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031

## Part 1

Examination in Public

Statement of Common Ground between:

Vale of White Horse District Council  
Ptarmigan Planning Ltd.

**With respect to the Strategic Site Allocation: East of Harwell Campus**

September 2015



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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.0 This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared between Vale of White Horse District Council (VoWHDC) and Ptarmigan Planning Ltd. hereafter known as “the parties”. This document identifies the matters agreed with regard to the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and supporting documents to assist the Inspector during the Examination of the Local Plan Stage 1.
- 1.1 This SoCG particularly relates to the allocation of Land to the East of Harwell Campus for the development of around 850 homes and supporting facilities. The agreed matters have been structured to help inform the Inspector through Stage 1 of the hearing sessions. This SoCG does not relate to any matters that might arise at Stage 2.
- 1.2 VoWHDC proposes the site for allocation for strategic housing development in the Local Plan having considered reasonable alternatives including assessing the relevant evidence, and following consultation with stakeholders and the public.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND / CONTEXT - THE SITE

- 2.1 **The site and its surroundings** - The site proposed for allocation within the Local Plan is a greenfield site of approximately 62 hectares located to the east of Harwell Campus and to the north-west of Chilton. The site is bordered by open countryside to the north. The eastern boundary is formed by the A34, with further open countryside beyond. The western and part of the southern boundaries are formed by the A4185 with Harwell Campus, the housing development of Chestnut Fields and a development site beyond that. To the immediate south of the site, at the junction of the A34 and A4185, is a Garden Centre and some areas of woodland cut off by highways. A public right of way crosses the site from north to south and another, The Icknield Way, crosses from east to west.
- 2.2 **Site Opportunities and constraints** - the site has no overriding constraints which cannot be overcome through the careful design of any proposals and the inclusion of appropriate mitigation. The site lies within the AONB, adjacent to the major development of Harwell Campus itself.
- 2.3 **Details on site ownership** - Ptarmigan Planning Ltd. through working in conjunction with the Landowners has control of the land in its entirety and there are no ownership issues that would delay the delivery of development on the site
- 2.4 **Details on progress of the site** - Ptarmigan Planning Ltd. has, for some time been undertaking and preparing the necessary baseline work, documents and plans in relation to the site to support a planning application, at the appropriate stage. This includes all technical studies, landscape assessments and master planning design work. This work will be presented at Stage 2 of the Examination.
- 2.5 Ptarmigan Planning Ltd. has met with officers from the VoWHDC and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) regularly to progress work in relation to the master planning of the site in the context of both Harwell Campus allocations and the Campus itself.

### 3.0 STRATEGIC MATTERS ON WHICH THE PARTIES AGREE

- 3.1 The parties agree that the Sustainability Appraisal considers all of the reasonable alternatives for the provision of housing and employment land within the District and that the recognition of the unique offer at Harwell Campus and the Science Vale as a whole is appropriately considered in assessing those alternatives.
- 3.2 **The parties agree** that VoWHDC has sought to meet the full Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAN) as the housing target within the Local Plan Part 1, as identified within the Oxfordshire SHMA.
- 3.3 **The parties agree** that the implementation of Core Policy 2 of Local Plan 2031 Part 1 is the most effective approach to commit to the process of dealing with un-met housing need in Oxfordshire. The parties agree that this ensures that the Vale of White Horse District Council can proceed in getting a local plan adopted without delay while work progresses in tandem on the most suitable strategy for dealing with un-met need.
- 3.4 **The parties agree** that extensive work has taken place on the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) for the land surrounding Harwell Campus, including the strategic site allocation East of Harwell Campus. The weight to be given to the landscape considerations to the allocation should be evaluated against the wider strategic objectives of the Plan including:
- the long-term history of Harwell Campus itself;
  - the economic growth opportunities arising from Harwell Campus and the wider Science Vale; and
  - The need to support sustainable development over the plan period.
- 3.5 **It is agreed** that the unique offering that Harwell Campus provides in terms of its research and development activities within the wider sub-region and nationally cannot be provided for elsewhere and the principle of development within this area has already been established for many years since the former nuclear power station was on site and further formalised through the allocation of the Enterprise Zone in 2011.

- 3.6 The principle of development and investment on this site has therefore been established with significant infrastructure provision being bought forward (including from central Government). **It is therefore agreed** that to enhance the sustainability of Harwell Campus, the key considerations should be the most appropriate scale and form of development at this location.

## 4.0 EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

4.1 **It is agreed** that Harwell Campus is a unique and economically important site both in the immediate area, the wider region, nationally and internationally and is recognised as such through the ongoing commitment of investment. The growth forecast to take place on the Campus cannot realistically take place in any other location given its intrinsic links to the existing facilities on the Campus.

4.2 **It is agreed** that Harwell Campus is a world class centre for science, technology and innovation and currently hosts more than 150 companies which employ more than 4,500 people. A number of leading global science research facilities are located at Harwell, including:

- Rutherford Appleton Laboratories;
- European Space Agency (ESA) which seeks to capitalise on the country's world-leading expertise in space science and technology and is expected to be a key element of a much wider vision for the future of the UK's fast growing space economy, through the creation of an International Space Innovation Centre (ISIC) at Harwell;
- The base for the Atomic Energy Authority and hosts the UK's national synchrotron science facility, the Diamond Light Source, an internationally important scientific facility; and
- UK's Medical Research Council.

4.3 There has been a range of government and sub-regional investment into Harwell Campus in recent years in addition to the allocation of 92 hectares of the campus as an Enterprise Zone. The most recent investments are through:

- The Government's intention to invest a further £7 million in a new £14 million open innovation hub;
- The UK Medical Research Council investment of £50 million over the next 5 years for genetic research; and
- Contributions from the Oxfordshire LEP to contribute to a Sustainable Energy Research and Innovation Facility and a research village.

4.4 It is understood that the Inspector has requested VoWHDC to provide a Statement to be submitted to inform Stage 2 of the Examination to discuss the exceptional circumstances that exist to justify housing development in the AONB. Whilst a matter reserved for Stage 2 discussions, **it is agreed** that the following points also justify the exceptional circumstances which exist at this strategically important location in the heart of Science Vale and the 'Knowledge Spine' of Oxfordshire:

- Harwell Campus forms part of the knowledge spine within the VoWH. This knowledge spine, including the Science Vale, will make a considerable contribution to delivering economic growth within the wider sub-region;
- The internally renowned status of Harwell and the investment to take place over the coming years demonstrates that it is an exceptional facility and its success and development is in the public interest. Its expansion therefore meets the exceptional circumstances test;
- The site is both internationally important for its innovation scientific research and a major source of employment in a key sector identified for economic growth in the UK economy. The Government's continued commitment to developing employment in these sectors is unquestionable and ensuring that land is provided for its expansion is therefore in the public interest ;
- Harwell already employs a very significant number of people and the City Deal emphasises that the Oxfordshire authorities and the Government have agreed a continued investment package to support the continued expansion of the Harwell Innovation Hub, which will be focused on open innovation, as part of an ambitious network of innovation and incubation centres. The City Deal acknowledges that the campus is already home to "big" science facilities such as the Diamond Synchrotron and the recently relocated European Space Agency and Space Catapult Centre; and
- This continued investment is anticipated to deliver a significant number of additional jobs to the campus, which is currently supported by very little residential housing in the locality. People working at Harwell presently have to commute in from neighbouring town and villages, which is clearly unsustainable. Major employment sites and planned employment growth needs to be matched with residential growth both to address the unsustainable nature of the current situation and to assist in attracting people to work in such a location. A residential allocation to meet the needs of the internally important operations at Harwell Campus is therefore an exceptional circumstance in the public interest.

## **5.0 SITE SPECIFIC MATTERS - DEVELOPMENT TEMPLATE**

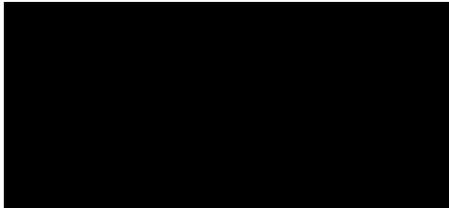
5.1 In terms of site specific matters, these will be discussed within the SoCG prepared for Stage 2 of the Examination and will include the following points:

- Key Objectives;
- Urban Design Principles;
- Utilities;
- Access and Highways;
- Social and Community;
- Environmental Health;
- Landscape Considerations;
- Biodiversity and Green infrastructure;
- Flood Risk and Drainage; and
- Site Delivery.

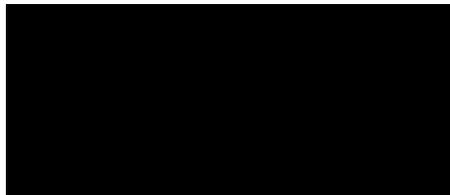
## 6.0 CONCLUSION

- Ptarmigan Planning Ltd. and the Landowners support the allocation of land East of Harwell Campus within Policy CP4 and the parties agree that the site is suitable, available and deliverable for sustainable housing development.
- The unique circumstances of Harwell Campus support the delivery of housing in close proximity to support the ongoing expansion of the Campus and its internally renowned tenants funded by a variety of means, including the Government.
- The parties are working jointly to enable delivery of the planned development at the earliest opportunity and will continue to work cooperatively on all matters of mutual interest.

Signatures



Date: 11/09/2015



Date: 11/09/2015

Adrian Duffield  
Head of Planning Service  
Vale of White Horse District Council