An aerial photograph of a lush green valley. A river winds through the center, surrounded by rolling hills and fields. The sky is clear and blue. The text '2 Key Challenges and Opportunities' is overlaid on the top left in a large, white, bold font. A white arrow points to the right at the bottom right of the image.

2 Key Challenges and Opportunities

Overview

The Vale is a predominantly rural area located in south-west Oxfordshire and is bounded to the north and the east by the River Thames and by the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which runs through the south of the district. It is an attractive and popular place to live and contains parts of the Oxford Green Belt.

The district contains the historic market towns of Abingdon-on-Thames, Faringdon and Wantage, the local service centres of Botley and Grove and a number of larger and smaller villages.

The Vale is located between the larger centres of Swindon, Oxford and Didcot, which are all expected to continue to grow in the future and it is important we plan effectively to deliver coordinated development across the Vale and with our neighbours.

The district includes the majority of the Science Vale area, an internationally significant location for innovation and science-based research and business. Within the Vale, this includes the two Enterprise Zone sites at Harwell Campus and Milton Park. These sites are expanding and will provide for both new jobs and wider opportunities to the district as a whole.

This chapter identifies some of the key challenges and opportunities faced by the Vale of White Horse that the Local Plan 2031 aims to address.

This chapter is structured around four thematic areas that are central to the Local Plan 2031 and are carried through the document. These are:

- building healthy and sustainable communities
- supporting economic prosperity
- supporting sustainable transport and accessibility, and
- protecting the environment and responding to climate change.

2 Key Challenges and Opportunities

Introduction

2.1. The district takes its name from the 3,000-year-old figure cut into the chalk downs near Uffington. It is a largely rural district and covers an area of some 580 square kilometres (224 square miles; see **Figure 2.1**).

2.2. The main settlements within the Vale of White Horse are the three historic market towns of Abingdon-on-Thames, Faringdon and Wantage, which provide essential services for the surrounding rural areas. There are also two 'local service centres' at Botley and Grove. Botley consists of parts of North Hinksey and Cumnor parishes and is a mainly residential area on the outskirts of the city of Oxford. Grove is a large village located to the north of Wantage and functions as a significant centre for housing and employment in its own right.

2.3. There are more than 70 villages across the Vale, ranging from small hamlets, to large villages. Beyond these, in the wider countryside, there

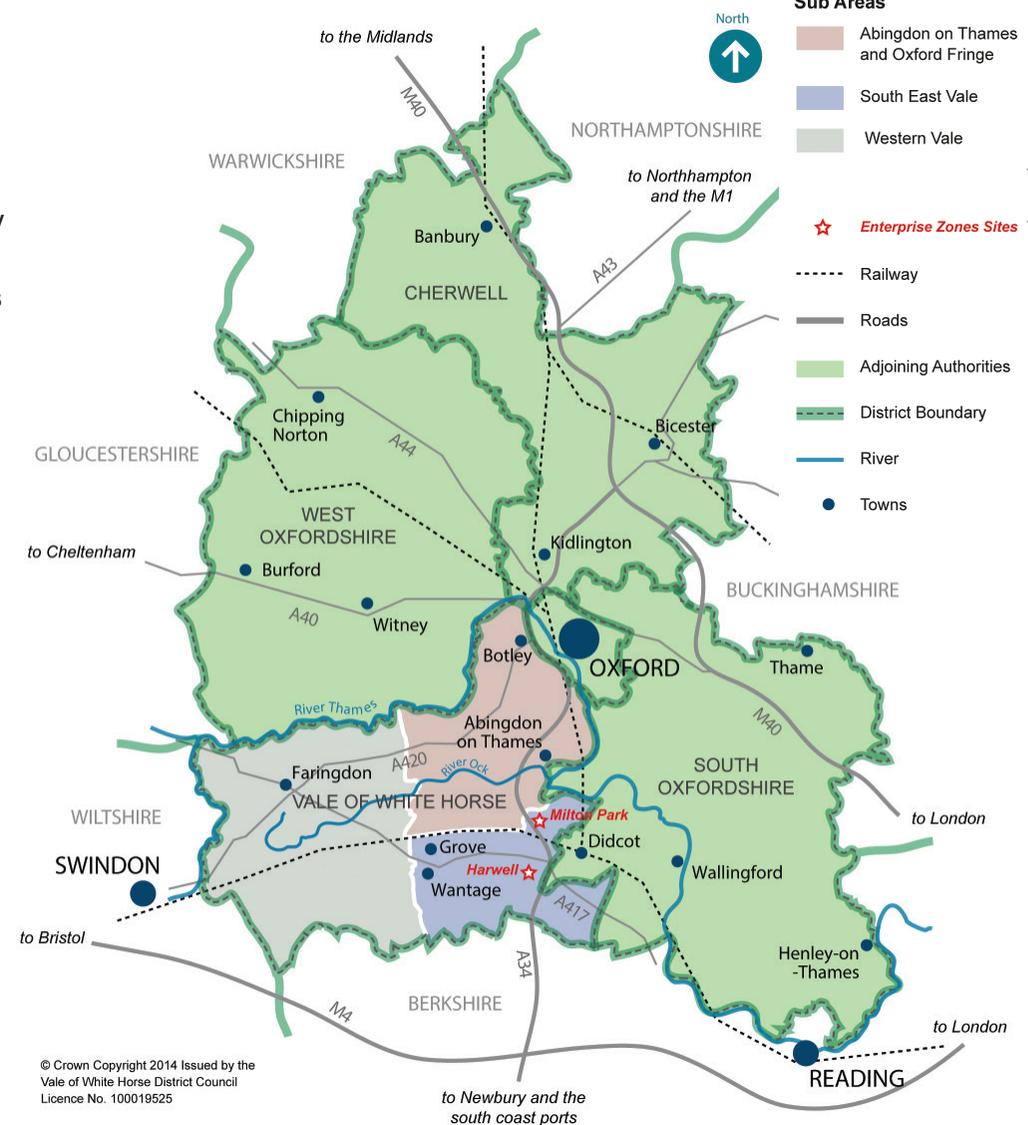
are many isolated farmsteads and small groups of dwellings.

2.4. The Vale falls between the larger centres of Oxford to the north-east, and Swindon to the south-west. Didcot lies to the south-east boundary of the Vale in neighbouring South Oxfordshire. All three of these centres are expected to accommodate major growth in the next decade and beyond. Although the town of Didcot falls mainly within South Oxfordshire, its associated growth to the west of the town extends into the Vale district.

2.5. We need to plan effectively for the Vale in partnership with our neighbours and have a 'duty-to-cooperate' on key cross boundary issues. This process ensures that proper sustainable planning can be achieved across administrative boundaries¹⁷.

2.6. This chapter summarises the key challenges and opportunities facing the district that the Local Plan 2031 should address.

Figure 2.1: The Vale of White Horse District and its wider setting.



¹⁷ Duty to Cooperate Topic Paper. www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/evidence

2 Key Challenges and Opportunities

➤ Building healthy and sustainable communities

2.7. People in the district generally enjoy a high standard of living and there are relatively low levels of deprivation. The Vale is ranked 306 out of 326 authorities nationally, with 326 being the least deprived local authority¹⁸.

2.8. The planning system plays an important role in creating the right environments to enhance existing communities and to create new ones. This includes creating places that:

- facilitate the right type of housing in the most sustainable locations
- provide for or seek contributions towards the provision of services and facilities to benefit the community including libraries, schools, health and leisure facilities
- sets out a physical layout that enhances connections between residential areas and town and village centres, education, employment and recreation opportunities

- sets out a physical layout that is intuitive to navigate using street hierarchy, landmarks, buildings form and function to form visual clues in the townscape, and
- safe and accessible streets and spaces, including high quality useable public open space for the benefit of the local community.

Key challenges and opportunities

Providing for our housing need

- Providing for the objectively assessed housing need of 1,028 units per annum, which has been identified for the district (this equates to 20,560 new homes between 2011 and 2031)¹⁹. It is important the Local Plan 2031 meets the objectively assessed housing need by providing enough new homes of appropriate type and size and in sustainable locations.
- Providing for sufficient affordable

- homes in our towns and villages (273 affordable homes are needed per year between 2011 and 2031)²⁰
- Meeting the needs of an increasingly ageing population over the period of the plan to 2031. The total number of people aged 55 and over is expected to increase by almost 50% during the plan period.
 - Meeting the needs of gypsies, travellers and travelling show people, and
 - Making an appropriate contribution to addressing any identified unmet need for housing across the Oxfordshire Housing Market Area (see **Core Policy 2**).

Providing new community facilities

- Ensuring high quality and accessible services and facilities are provided in accessible, viable locations as part of new development when they are needed, so existing and new residents can enjoy a good quality of life.

Meeting the needs of our rural areas

- Supporting some development across the rural areas to retain and enhance services to help improve the vitality and sustainability of our rural communities.

¹⁸ The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2010 prepared by DCLG

¹⁹ GL Hearn (2014) Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment- http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-04-14_Final%20SHMA%20Report.pdf

²⁰ GL Hearn (2014) Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment- http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-04-14_Final%20SHMA%20Report.pdf

2 Key Challenges and Opportunities

Supporting economic prosperity

2.9. The Vale benefits from a very strong knowledge-based economy and has almost 5,500 businesses located within the district²¹. The Vale's workforce is highly skilled with a higher than average proportion of managers, professionals and associate professionals²². The levels of unemployment in the Vale are also relatively low at less than half the national average²³. Furthermore, the Vale is consistently ranked within the top 20% of districts in the UK Competitiveness Index²⁴.

2.10. The strategic focus for economic and employment growth in the district is the Science Vale area, which extends east-west from Culham and Didcot to Wantage and Grove (**Figure 2.2**). Science Vale is an internationally significant location for innovation and science based research and business and one of the key growth areas for Oxfordshire identified within the Strategic Economic Plan. As such,

Science Vale has attracted significant government investment to help unlock and maximise the area's world class assets and economic potential, including City Deal, Local Growth Fund and Enterprise Zone status for Harwell Campus and Milton Park. It is also home to around 13% of research and development jobs within the South-East of England.

Key challenges and opportunities

Providing new employment land and supporting science and innovation

- Providing sufficient employment land across the Vale to ensure that suitable sites are available to support the projected employment growth of 23,000 jobs up to 2031²⁵
- Maximising the opportunity to nurture science, research and innovation and attract new high

value businesses to the Enterprise Zone sites at Harwell Campus and Milton Park so that Science Vale continues to make a major contribution to both the Oxfordshire and UK economy

- Using Local Development Orders (LDO's) such as that at the Milton Park site to speed up delivery on sites, including potentially at Harwell Campus²⁶
- Retaining other notable employers and employment locations in the district such as Williams F1 in Grove and Abingdon Science Park
- Supporting the economy of the towns and rural areas in the district and for providing a range of employment opportunities close to where people live
- Didcot A Power Station is a site in a prime location on the edge of Didcot and provides a key opportunity for redevelopment for further economic growth and other mixed-use development within the Vale.

Supporting a skilled workforce

- Maintaining a highly skilled labour force that will meet business requirements, including the particular skills needed to support Science Vale. Initiatives such as the Oxfordshire Skills Strategy²⁷ will help to support skills provision, which will in turn benefit the local population who can share the benefits of economic success and will reduce the need for in-commuting.

²¹ ONS Business Demography 2012 dataset

²² Labour Market Profile: VWHDC (www.nomisweb.co.uk)

²³ Based on Job Seekers Allowance data

²⁴ <http://www.cforic.org/downloads.php>

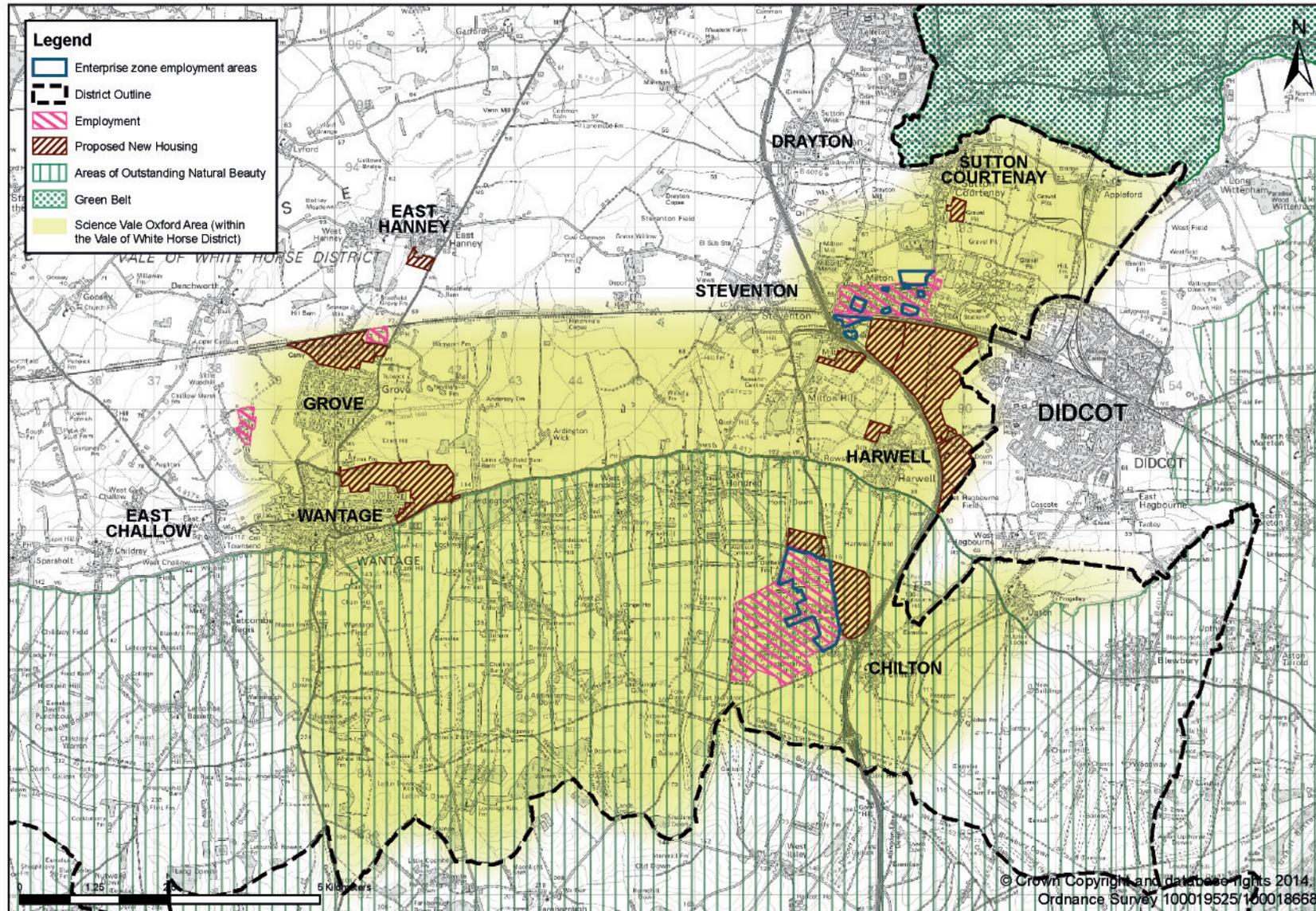
²⁵ Employment Land Review addendum (2014)- <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/evidence>

²⁶ The LDOs will provide a simplified planning framework to help make it easier to deliver new development at these sites more quickly.

²⁷ Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) (2014) Oxfordshire Skills Strategy to 2020: Building a responsive skills support system, available at: <http://www.oxfordshireskillsboard.org/news/oxfordshire-skills-strategy-2020/>

2 Key Challenges and Opportunities

Figure 2.2: Science Vale area within the Vale of White Horse District.



2 Key Challenges and Opportunities

Promoting tourism

- The tourism industry in the Vale generated approximately £202 million worth of income for local businesses in 2011²⁸. However, a significant proportion of this was generated by day visitors.
- Increasing the economic impact and value of tourism by taking steps to convert day visitors to overnight visitors, in particular by addressing the shortage of hotel accommodation²⁹
- Supporting growth in conferencing and business tourism stimulated by anticipated growth in the Enterprise Zone.

Supporting our rural economies

- Supporting the growth and expansion of rural businesses (including village shops and public houses) to maintain sustainable rural settlements and reducing the need to travel
- Supporting the agricultural economy including appropriate farm diversification schemes will help to maintain a healthy rural economy.

Supporting the role of our main settlements for retailing

- Supporting market towns and local service centres to maintain their vitality and viability in meeting local retail needs in the face of competition from nearby, larger centres, such as Oxford, Swindon and Reading, which many people visit for their non-food (comparison) shopping
- Successfully redeveloping the Charter Area in Abingdon-on-Thames and the Central Botley area provides an opportunity to strengthen these key centres in the district
- Creating attractive town centre environments, which appeal to visitors and shoppers alike and incorporate vibrant evening economies, would strengthen the role of the centres in the Vale in the face of competition from larger nearby centres that have a greater diversity of facilities.



²⁸ The Economic Impact of Tourism on Vale of White Horse (2011), available online at: http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Vale%20Tourism%20Economic%20Impact%20Estimates%202011_1.pdf

²⁹ Hotel Solutions (July 2014) Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire Hotel Needs Assessment, available at <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/evidence>

2 Key Challenges and Opportunities

Supporting sustainable transport and accessibility

2.11. The Vale of White Horse is easily accessible from other parts of the UK, particularly the south west and east, and the midlands. The A34 trunk road provides good access between the M4 to the south, and the M40 to the north. The A420 and A417 roads cross the district and provide links to Swindon in the west and Didcot in the east.

2.12. Whilst there are two railway main lines (Bristol to London and Oxford to London) running through the district, there are only two stations on the Oxford line and none on the Bristol line within the Vale.

2.13. It is important that growth across the district effectively addresses any highway constraints and helps to deliver a shift towards more sustainable modes of travel.

Key challenges and opportunities

Supporting sustainable travel and improving public transport

- Maintaining the very good bus services, particularly between the main settlements
- Providing viable bus services in the more rural parts of the district, that provide an attractive alternative to the car
- Ensuring that employment and housing growth is located to reduce the need to travel by car and encourage walking and cycling for short journeys
- Supporting improvements to public transport, cycling and walking to provide attractive alternatives to travelling by car and to help minimise traffic congestion, particularly between the district's main employment and service centres

- Supporting the ambition of re-opening of the railway station at Grove to help increase access to the national rail network within the district.

Providing for new road infrastructure

- Addressing congestion, particularly at peak times on the A34 trunk road within Abingdon-on-Thames, Botley and around Science Vale. It is important the road network operates safely and efficiently for the economic success of the district to be maximised
- Working with partners to help address any capacity issues to ensure new development can be adequately accommodated whilst addressing congestion and safety on the road network
- Facilitating the implementation of the new infrastructure (such as new roads) identified in the Science Vale Area Strategy³⁰ to help maintain a safe and efficient transport network

- Balancing the delivery of major investment in new roads and public transport with the wider needs for other infrastructure improvements arising from proposed development.

Helping to make our rural areas more accessible

- Continuing to help people in rural areas without a car to access the services available in the market towns and local service centres.

Supporting the delivery of superfast broadband

- Increasing provision of superfast broadband coverage across the district in line with the Better Broadband for Oxfordshire Project³¹ and to deliver the roll-out of next-generation mobile broadband.

³⁰ Oxfordshire County Council, Local Transport Plan 3, 2011-2030

³¹ <http://www.betterbroadbandoxfordshire.org.uk/home>

2 Key Challenges and Opportunities

Protecting the environment and responding to climate change

2.14. The high quality and rural nature of the Vale is borne out by the many designations that cover the district (such as Oxford Green Belt and North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 52 designated Conservation Areas). It is important that development protects and maintains the special characteristics of the built and natural environment of the Vale to ensure it remains a popular place for people to live, work and to visit.

2.15. The Vale has a long frontage to the River Thames and contains the River Ock and its tributaries including the Letcombe Brook. It also contains a significant proportion of the route of the Wilts and Berks Canal, the subject of an ambitious restoration project.

Key challenges and opportunities

Responding to climate change

- The Vale will need to play its part in meeting Government targets for

reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions through low carbon and renewable energy generation, improving the energy efficiency of development and promoting more efficient use of materials and natural resources

- Equipping new development to adapt to the warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers that are predicted for the UK³².

Protecting water resources

- Ensuring there is enough water available to meet needs through prudent water resources management, including preventing flooding through the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and climate change adaptation
- Waste water treatment facilities and resources within the district are in need of upgrading and new facilities are required to allow new housing and employment growth to be sustainably delivered
- Improving access to waterways that

add diversity and interest to the locality, enhancing open spaces and providing corridors for recreation, tourism and wildlife.

Protecting our high quality landscape

- The landscape of the district is central to the rural character of the Vale, from the Corallian Ridge to the Lowland Vale to the North Wessex Downs AONB. Key landscape features need to be respected, retained and enhanced to maintain the local character and distinctiveness of the landscape of the Vale.

Protecting biodiversity

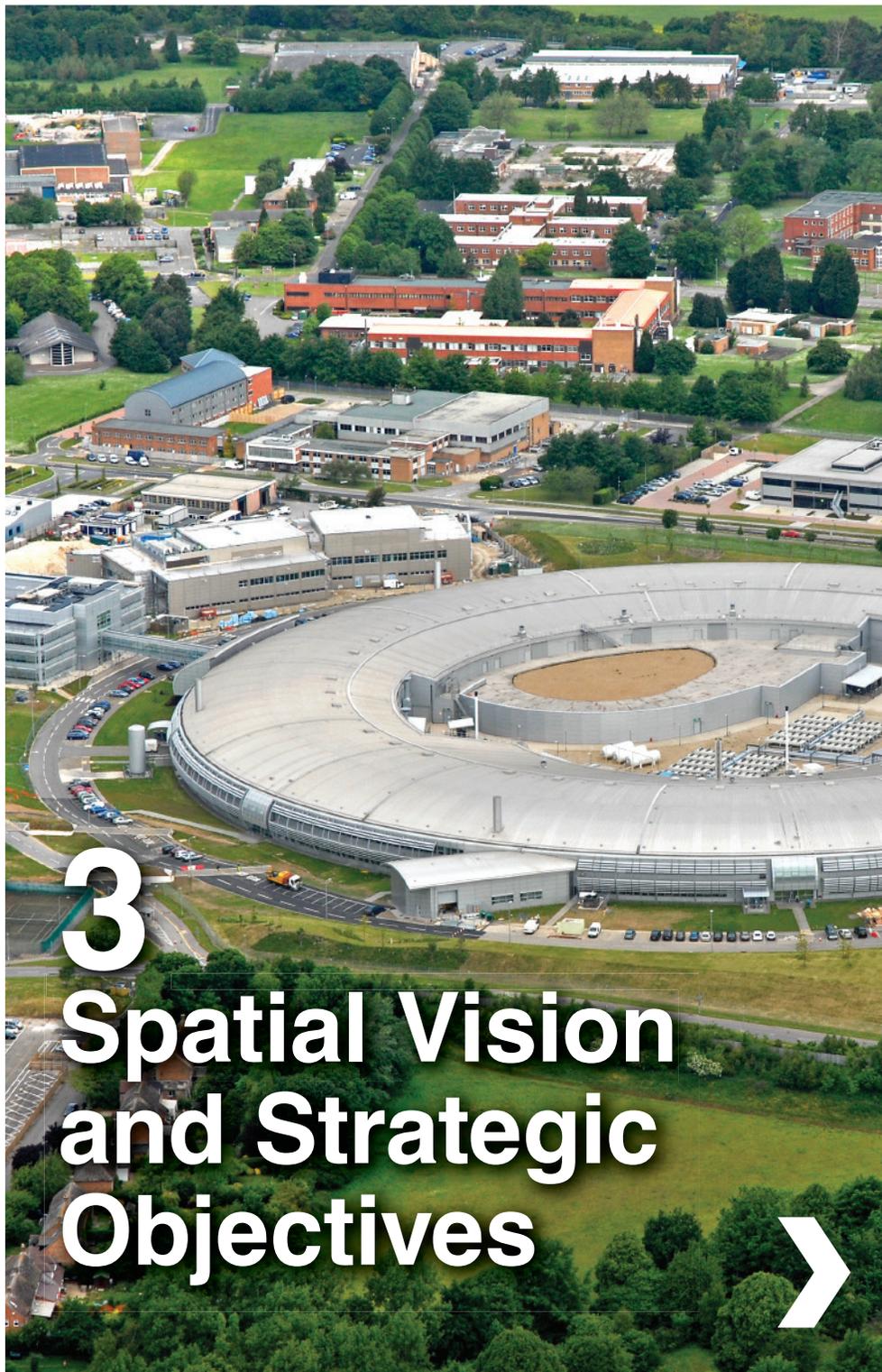
- Biodiversity in the district is supported by a network of local, national and international wildlife designations. These will need to be protected and improved where possible through enhancing, restoring, expanding and linking key wildlife habitats and species populations.

- Supporting informal recreation and providing open spaces and Green Infrastructure (this term is discussed in more detail on Page 62) to accommodate a rise in local populations and have due regard to the existing value of the natural environment for both people and biodiversity.

Conserving our historic environment

- The Vale contains 52 designated Conservation Areas, over 2,000 Listed Buildings, eight registered parks and gardens, and 68 Ancient Monuments, as well as non-designated heritage assets
- Conserving and enhancing these historic assets and their settings for future generations to enjoy is important. Opportunities exist for new development to re-create the quality and character of these historic places to inform a high quality urban environment.

³²<http://ukclimateprojections.defra.gov.uk>



3 Spatial Vision and Strategic Objectives



Overview

The Vale of White Horse District consists of a network of historic market towns and other settlements set in a diverse and attractive rural landscape. The district benefits from excellent connectivity to nearby urban centres and beyond, and houses an internationally significant cluster of research and innovation businesses.

The district benefits from many opportunities, particularly associated with the potential for growth and job creation. However, the district also faces a series of challenges to realising this potential.

The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 focuses on how places function and where development should take place to meet identified needs. In planning for the future we have a clear vision of what we want the Vale of White Horse to be like in 2031.

This chapter builds on the key challenges and opportunities identified in **Chapter 2** and sets out the Spatial Vision and Strategic Objectives for the plan period up to 2031. The Spatial Vision and Strategic Objectives will help us plan effectively for the future and ensure we strike an appropriate balance between meeting the needs of existing communities and ensuring the necessary growth is sustainably accommodated.

The Spatial Vision reflects national and local priorities, including those set out in the Strategic Economic Plan and the challenges and opportunities facing the Vale. It establishes the direction of travel for future development and investment in the district.

The Strategic Objectives will help us to deliver the Spatial Vision and ensure the plan is focused on the key challenges and opportunities facing the area.

This chapter is arranged into the four key thematic areas:

- building healthy and sustainable communities
- supporting economic prosperity
- supporting sustainable transport and accessibility, and
- protecting the environment and responding to climate change.

3 Spatial Vision and Strategic Objectives

Spatial Vision

3.1. The Vale Local Plan 2031 Part 1 – Spatial Vision is shown in the box on the right.

Strategic Objectives

3.2. A series of Strategic Objectives (SO) have been developed to help us deliver the Spatial Vision for the Vale of White Horse. The Strategic Objectives are focused around the four overarching themes and the key challenges and opportunities faced by the area identified in **Chapter 2**. Information about the monitoring of these objectives is set out in **Chapter 7: Implementing the Plan**.

Spatial Vision

By 2031 the Vale of White Horse will have thriving and prosperous communities that have benefited from economic growth and our strength in science and innovation continue to be internationally recognised. The Science Vale area will have become a first choice location for high value added business and research. New residential and economic growth will have been focused on the Science Vale area and will have delivered balanced and sustainable growth that has made a significant contribution to delivering important infrastructure. Strategic road and rail improvements will have been implemented, including those at Harwell, west of Didcot and at Wantage.

The Vale's main settlements will provide healthy and sustainable communities where everyone has a decent place to live and work with good access to leisure and community services and facilities. The service centre roles of Abingdon-on-Thames, Botley, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage will have been maintained and enhanced. The Vale's villages will continue to provide thriving rural communities where appropriate growth has supported local services.

New development will have respected the local character of the Vale, protecting its outstanding and distinctive natural and built environment and will continue to conserve and enhance its important heritage. High design and environmental standards will have been achieved through new development, which will be resilient to the likely impacts of climate change.

3 Spatial Vision and Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objectives:

➤ Building healthy and sustainable communities

- SO 1:** Provide for a range of homes across the district to deliver choice and competition in the housing market and to meet the identified need, including for affordable housing.
- SO 2:** Cater for existing and future residents' needs including the needs of different groups in the community and provision for a growing older population.
- SO 3:** Direct growth to the most sustainable locations in the district, ensuring development is integrated with and respects the built and natural heritage and creates attractive places in which people will want to live, as well as being supported by a sufficient range of services and facilities.
- SO 4:** Improve the health and well-being of Vale residents, reduce inequality, poverty and social exclusion and improve the safety of the Vale as a district where everyone can feel safe and enjoy life.



Strategic Objectives:

➤ Supporting economic prosperity

- SO 5:** Support a strong and sustainable economy within the district, including the visitor economy.
- SO 6:** Support the continued development of Science Vale as an internationally significant centre for innovation and science based research and business.
- SO 7:** Maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of the Vale's town centres and local shopping centres in order to strengthen their service centre roles.

3 Spatial Vision and Strategic Objectives



Strategic Objectives:

➤ Sustainable transport and accessibility

- SO 8:** Reduce the need to travel and promote sustainable modes of transport.
- SO 9:** Seek to ensure new development is accompanied by appropriate and timely infrastructure delivery to secure effective sustainable transport choices for new residents and businesses.



Strategic Objectives:

➤ Protecting the environment and responding to climate change

- SO 10:** Maintain and improve the natural environment including biodiversity, landscape, Green Infrastructure and waterways.
- SO 11:** Ensure all new development achieves high quality design standards and conserves and enhances the natural, historic, cultural and landscape assets of the Vale.
- SO 12:** Minimise greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution (such as water, air, noise and light) across the district and increase our resilience to likely impacts of climate change, especially flooding.