

Chapter 6: District Wide Policies

Overview

The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 establishes a strategic policy framework to guide development in the Vale up to 2031.

This chapter sets out those strategic policies necessary to complement the Spatial Strategy (**Chapter 4**) and Sub-Area Strategies (**Chapter 5**) to ensure planned growth is sustainable. The policies will apply across the Vale and provide greater detail to ensure a balance is met between addressing local housing needs, supporting economic growth and conserving and enhancing the Vale's high quality natural, historic and built environment, and the quality of life in existing settlements.

The policies in this chapter have been developed where national guidance alone is not sufficient to deliver the Council's vision. The policies therefore build on, rather than duplicate, national guidance.

Some of the policies set out in the Vale Local Plan 2011 will continue to be saved and relied upon (and used alongside new Local Plan policies) for day-to-day decision making on planning applications until they are reviewed as part of the Local Plan 2031 Part 2. The Council has published an assessment of the consistency of Saved Local Plan 2011 policies when compared with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This will be used to help ensure that the saved policies are applied appropriately alongside the NPPF.

The policies are structured into the four thematic areas, which are common throughout the plan:

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

Building healthy and sustainable communities

Introduction

- 6.1 The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 has a key role in helping to build sustainable communities in the Vale and helping to meet the diverse needs of the people living there. This will be achieved in part through the Spatial Strategy (set out in **Chapter 4**) that seeks to direct new development to the most sustainable locations and in communities with the best range of services and facilities. Furthermore, the Sub-Area Strategies (set out in **Chapter 5**), are focused on addressing more location-specific issues and the needs of different parts of the District.
- 6.2 **Chapter 2** of this plan identified a number of key challenges and opportunities facing this thematic area for achieving sustainable communities and these include the high cost of housing and the disparity between income levels and housing costs in the district. It showed the long-term demographic trends towards an ageing population and a higher number of smaller sized households. For these reasons, our vision and objectives (**Chapter 3**) seek to increase the supply of new housing and ensure that the right size, type and tenure of housing is delivered to address the needs of existing and future residents. They also seek to address the specific needs of vulnerable groups (such as the elderly and those with disabilities).
- 6.3 We have set out a number of site specific proposals and policies relating to housing in our Sub-Area Strategies included within **Chapter 5**. This section includes policies that apply across the whole district. These are:
- **Core Policy 22: Housing Mix** – which seeks to ensure that the right mix of housing sizes, types and tenures are provided on all residential development sites.
 - **Core Policy 23: Housing Density** – which seeks to ensure that residential dwellings are provided at an appropriate density to reflect the need to use land efficiently whilst also taking account of local circumstances.
 - **Core Policy 24: Affordable Housing** – which sets out the Council’s approach to the provision of affordable housing as part of new residential development.
 - **Core Policy 25: Rural Exception Sites** – which identifies the circumstances in which affordable housing can be provided on ‘exception sites’ in the rural areas, where residential development would not normally be permitted.
 - **Core Policy 26: Accommodating Current and Future Needs of An Ageing Population** – which sets out measures to ensure new homes are well designed and easily adapted to the changing needs of residents throughout their lives.
 - **Core Policy 27: Meeting the Housing Needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople** – which seeks to provide for the needs of gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople.

Housing mix

- 6.4 It is important that housing provision across the district reflects the needs of an ageing population and growth in smaller households. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) provides details of the recommended mix of housing type and size. The assessment identifies that there is most need in the Open Market sector for 3-bed units with the lowest need for 1-bed units. For affordable housing, there is a greater need for 2-bed units with the lowest need for 4-bed units⁷⁴. It is important that new housing addresses any imbalance within the existing stock and the impact of demographic and household change. It is also important to provide the type of housing needed to attract people to live and work locally and built to a size and standard that supports a good quality of life.
- 6.5 The SHMA acknowledges the longer-term objective to deliver a more balanced stock, which reflects the identified needs of the area, but this objective must be seen in the context of viability. As a result, **Core Policy 22** adopts a flexible approach to the implementation of housing mix.
- 6.6 Additional policy detail will be set out in the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 to determine the specific needs of housing types and sizes on strategic housing development sites within the Science Vale area.

Core Policy 22: Housing Mix

A mix of dwelling types and sizes to meet the needs of current and future households will be required on all new residential developments. This should be in accordance with the Council's current Strategic Housing Market Assessment unless an alternative approach can be demonstrated to be more appropriate through the Housing Register or where proven to be necessary due to viability constraints*.

*Viability should be set out in an independent viability assessment on terms agreed by the relevant parties including the Council and funded by the developer. This will involve an open book approach.

Housing density

- 6.7 New housing should provide good quality, attractive and acceptable living environments. Density is an important consideration in delivering these high quality environments. Historically, some of the most successful settlements included high density development, such as medieval villages and town centres and Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian terraces. This is often the case in many of the District's market towns and village centres.
- 6.8 Land is a finite resource and should be used efficiently. Consideration is needed for local context of proposed development sites and new development should seek to achieve a target net⁷⁵ density of at least 30 dwellings per hectare. Higher

⁷⁴ Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2014) Tables 65 and 66

⁷⁵ Net Density excludes major elements of supporting uses such as open space, community facilities, infrastructure etc.

or lower densities may be acceptable and the approach to density should be justified in the Design and Access Statement and relate to urban structure, legibility, landscape and townscape context and creating enclosure to streets and spaces.

Core Policy 23: Housing Density

On all new housing developments a minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare (net) will be required unless specific local circumstances indicate that this would have an adverse effect on the character of the area, highway safety or the amenity of neighbours. Higher densities will be encouraged in locations where it will result in the optimum use of land, where there is good access to services and public transport routes, and where it would contribute to enhancing the character and legibility of a place.

Affordable housing

- 6.9 Affordable housing is provided for rent or purchase on a subsidised basis to eligible households who cannot meet their needs on the open market⁷⁶. There are currently three main types of affordable housing tenures: social rented, affordable rented and intermediate⁷⁷.
- 6.10 Securing new affordable housing on-site as part of new developments is the most effective way to provide new supply. The on-site provision of completed units by a developer is the Council's preferred approach and it is expected that the vast majority of residential developments will be capable of delivering affordable housing on the same site.
- 6.11 When a new application is submitted on a site with extant or lapsed planning permission for housing that did not need to contribute to affordable housing under previous policy requirements, affordable housing contributions will be sought in accordance with the policies within the up-to-date Development Plan.
- 6.12 The Council's affordable housing policy gives consideration for how viability can affect the successful delivery of development and has been informed by a Viability Study. The Study demonstrates that a 35 % target for affordable housing brings more sites into viability than that with a higher rate. However, this matter should be considered on a case-by-case basis and give consideration to wider infrastructure requirements, as set out in the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan. A Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is also being prepared alongside the Local Plan 2031 to support the delivery of necessary infrastructure (see also **Core Policy 7**).
- 6.13 Additional details on the Council's approach to delivering affordable housing will be set in out in the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Furthermore, policy detail relating to the specific need for affordable

⁷⁶ Eligibility for affordable housing is determined with regard to local incomes and house prices

⁷⁷ This is a form of affordable housing that can include shared equity. For further details refer to glossary in the Appendix

housing on strategic housing development sites in the Science Vale area will be set out in the Local Plan 2031 Part 2.

Core Policy 24: Affordable Housing

The Council will seek 35 % affordable housing on all sites capable of a net gain of eleven or more dwellings (sites of at least 0.1 hectare). There should be a 75:25 split for rented (either social or affordable) and intermediate housing respectively. In circumstances where it can be demonstrated that the level of affordable housing being sought would be unviable, alternative tenure mixes and levels of affordable housing provision, may be considered. Any difference in tenure mix or percentage of affordable housing to be delivered will need to be supported by a viability assessment*.

Any affordable housing provided should:

- i. be of a size and type which meets the requirements of those in housing need, and
- ii. be indistinguishable in appearance from the market housing on site and distributed evenly across the site

The Council's preference is for on-site affordable housing provision (with the exception of part units). Only in exceptional circumstances will any other scenario be considered. In such cases the following delivery hierarchy will be considered:

- iii. mix of on-and off-site delivery with the level of affordable housing to be achieved to be 'broadly equivalent' to that which would have been delivered on-site
- iv. full off-site delivery
- v. part off-site delivery and part commuted sum
- vi. commuted sum which shall be based on the open market value of units to be delivered on site in lieu of full-on or off-site delivery

In cases where the 35 % calculation provides a part unit, a financial contribution will be sought, equivalent to that part unit.

Off-site contributions and/or financial contributions for the provision of affordable housing in lieu of on-site provision will not be appropriate, unless it can be robustly justified that:

- vii. it is not physically possible or feasible to provide affordable housing on the application site, or
- viii. there is evidence that a separate site would more satisfactorily meet local housing need and contribute to the creation of sustainable mixed communities.

Planning permission will be refused for development proposals where it appears that a larger site has been sub-divided into smaller development parcels in order to avoid the requirements of the affordable housing policy.

*Viability should be set out in an independent viability assessment on terms agreed by the relevant parties including the Council and funded by the developer. This will involve an open book approach.

Rural exception sites

6.14 The 'rural exception site' policy is aimed at providing homes for local people,

who are unable to rent or buy a property on the open market in rural locations.

6.15 Schemes should be supported in principle by the local community, as represented by the relevant parish council. To facilitate this approach, a detailed housing needs assessment must be carried out following a methodology agreed with the District and to include formal engagement with the local parish councils before a planning application is made. The housing needs assessment must include the following information:

- the present housing circumstances and income levels of those considered to be in need, related to local house prices and rent levels
- the connection of the likely occupants with the village or nearby village, and
- the type and size of dwellings that would meet their requirements.

6.16 Housing schemes approved under the Rural Exceptions Policy must be genuinely designed to meet a specific local need. The homes will be allocated in accordance with the Council's allocations policy with priority given to those households with the required local connection which is clearly set out in the policy. The Council's housing team may be able to give a preliminary indication of whether there is sufficient need in the village to pursue a scheme.

6.17 Early discussion with the Council will be essential to establish whether a particular site is likely to be suitable for a rural exception housing scheme.

6.18 Secure arrangements must be made to ensure that the scheme meets the local needs that have been identified and remains affordable, both initially and in respect of successive occupiers. The precise nature of these arrangements may vary but will most often be achieved through a legal agreement or planning conditions. It will also be important to involve a registered provider or housing trust who can retain a long-term interest in the housing and thus control subsequent changes of ownership and occupation in accordance with the agreed criteria.

Core Policy 25: Rural Exception Sites

Affordable housing schemes will be permitted on sites that would not otherwise be acceptable for housing development, providing the scheme would satisfy the following:

- i. it meets a clearly established local need identified through a robust housing needs assessment in accordance with a methodology agreed with the District Council
- ii. it is designed to meet the established need of a village (or its neighbouring village) in terms of dwelling numbers, types, sizes and affordability
- iii. it includes secure arrangements to ensure that all the houses will be occupied by local people in need of affordable housing and that the benefits of the low cost provision will remain available to local people in the long term
- iv. it is located within or on the edge of a village and would not harm the character, visual amenity or setting of settlements, particularly in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The design, layout and materials of new housing complements and enhances its surrounding natural and built environment

- v. is consistent with Green Belt policy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and **Core Policy 13**
- vi. it will not adversely impact upon designated heritage assets or their setting (i.e. Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Registered Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Monuments, and non-designated Heritage Assets)
- vii. it is located in a sustainable location with good access to public transport, employment and local services/facilities, and
- viii. is consistent with **Core Policy 42: Flood Risk.**

Where robust evidence establishes that viability issues* would prevent the delivery of an exception site, the minimum level of market housing required to make the development viable will be favourably considered where it would ensure the provision of significant additional affordable housing to meet local needs.

Any market housing included in a scheme (where considered necessary for reasons of viability) should be constructed to reflect the character of the affordable units and be sympathetic to the rural location.

*Viability should be set out in an independent viability assessment on terms agreed by the relevant parties including the Council and funded by the developer. This will involve an open book approach.

Accommodating current and future needs of the ageing population

- 6.19 The district has an ageing population. Over the plan period the 65+ age group is projected to increase by 58 % between 2010 and 2030 to represent 26 % of the district's total population by 2030⁷⁸. The high level of growth in this age group is a key demographic driver and should be adequately addressed in the Local Plan 2031 to ensure that housing supply addresses the current and future needs of older people.
- 6.20 As the population of the district increases and ages, the level of disabilities and health issues amongst the older population is likely to increase significantly, along with the specialist housing to address their needs.
- 6.21 In delivering homes that will meet the current and future needs of the ageing population, it is important that new homes are adaptable to the changing needs of residents over time. The Council will consider a need to set out higher accessibility, adaptability and wheelchair housing standards through Local Plan Part 2, in accordance with the National Planning Practice Guidance in identifying optional technical standards.
- 6.22 There are a range of models that can play a part in providing specialist accommodation for the elderly. These include sheltered and enhanced sheltered housing, Extra Care housing, retirement villages, continuing care retirement communities and registered care homes both with and without nursing care. The Council's preference is for Extra Care housing or schemes which include an

⁷⁸ 2010-based sub national population projections available at <http://www.oxford.gov.uk/districtdata/>

element of Extra Care provision within them, in accordance with the County Council's Extra Care Housing Strategy⁷⁹.

6.23 Specialist accommodation for the elderly should be provided on a mixed-tenure basis wherever possible. Where the accommodation caters for mobile residents, it should be located on sites in or adjacent to the towns or within the Larger Villages⁸⁰. Where any scheme providing specialist accommodation for the elderly (with or without care) includes an affordable housing component, this can count towards the overall 35% affordable housing requirement if part of a wider development.

Core Policy 26: Accommodating Current and Future Needs of the Ageing Population

In order to meet the needs of current and future households in the context of an ageing population, the following requirements will be sought subject to the viability* of provision on each site:

- i. residential dwelling houses designed for older people (with or without Extra Care) should be provided in the strategic site allocations in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and other suitable locations.
- ii. where possible, residential dwellings designed for older people should be located within close proximity to public transport routes, retail and other local facilities, including for health care.
- iii. where residential dwelling houses for older people (with or without Extra Care) are provided, wherever possible it should be on a mixed-tenure basis in accordance with the requirements of **Core Policy 24: Affordable Housing**.
- iv. where standards that would apply to general housing have been relaxed in response to the special needs of the occupiers of the scheme, the occupancy will be limited to accord with the nature of the scheme.

*Viability should be set out in an independent viability assessment on terms agreed by the relevant parties including the council and funded by the developer. This will involve an open book approach.

Meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Show People

6.24 The needs of the Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show People communities are important to us to ensure we develop a fair and effective strategy to meet these needs, particularly through the identification of land for pitches.

6.25 The Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Show People Accommodation Needs

⁷⁹ OCC Extra Care Housing Strategy, January 2008

⁸⁰ A Framework for an Oxfordshire Extra Care Housing Strategy, Oxfordshire County Council, January 2008

Assessment (2013)⁸¹, prepared jointly with Oxford City Council and South Oxfordshire District Council, assessed the housing needs for the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Show People communities within these area.

6.26 For the Vale of White Horse District, the identified need is for 13 additional permanent Gypsy and Traveller pitches to be delivered during the plan period. For the Travelling Show People community, the assessment identified that no plots are needed within the district during this plan period.

Core Policy 27: Meeting the housing needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show People

The Council will enable or provide for at least 13 pitches for gypsies and travellers during the plan period to 2031. Existing sites will be safeguarded.

The identified need will be met by a combination of the following:

- i. implementation of extant planning permissions
- ii. extending existing sites where possible to meet the needs of existing residents and their families
- iii. allocating specific deliverable sites through Local Plan 2031 Part 2 to meet any remaining identified need.

Proposals to meet the identified need will be permitted where it has been demonstrated that the following criteria have been met:

- iv. the site is not located within the Oxford Green Belt
- v. the development will not harm the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, areas of high landscape or ecological value, or heritage assets and their setting
- vi. the development will not have an adverse impact on the character of the area, highway safety or the amenities of neighbouring properties
- vii. the site is located within a reasonable walking distance of key local services including a primary school, a local shop and a public transport service
- viii. the site can be provided with safe vehicular and pedestrian access, electricity, mains drinking water, sewage connections and waste disposal facilities.

⁸¹ Oxford City, South Oxfordshire District and Vale of White Horse District Council's Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Show People Accommodation Needs Assessment. Opinion Research Services 2013