

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 sets out a framework for how future development across the district will be planned and delivered and how it will be used to inform decisions on planning applications.

This chapter summarises the role of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and outlines our approach to its preparation.

In particular, this chapter describes how the plan is consistent with, and has been informed by, national policy and how it meets the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) with regard to being:

- positively prepared
- justified
- effective, and
- consistent with national policy.

This chapter sets out two core policies, which underpin and inform the Local Plan 2031 Part 1. These are:

Core Policy 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
Core Policy 2: Cooperation on Unmet Housing Need for Oxfordshire

What is the Local Plan?

1.1 The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 provides a policy framework for the delivery of sustainable development across the district. It replaces the Local Plan 2011 and is made up of a number of separate parts. The most significant include:

- **Local Plan 2031 Part 1: Strategic Sites and Policies.** The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 sets out the Spatial Strategy and Strategic Policies for the district to deliver sustainable development. It identifies the number of new homes and jobs to be provided in the area for the plan period up to 2031. It makes provision for retail, leisure and commercial development and for the infrastructure needed to support them.

The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 sets out the Spatial Strategy for the location of development across the district and allocates large-scale (referred to as strategic) development sites. It includes district-wide policies to ensure that development contributes to meeting the Strategic Objectives of the plan, such as policies relating to sustainable construction and conservation of the built, historic and natural environment.

- **Local Plan 2031 Part 2: Detailed Policies and Additional Sites.** The Local Plan 2031 Part 2 will set out policies and locations for housing for the Vale's proportion of Oxford's housing need unable to be met within the city boundaries. This document will also contain policies for the part of Didcot Garden Town that lies within the Vale of White Horse District and detailed Development Management policies to complement Local Plan 2031 Part 1. It will replace the Saved Policies of the Local Plan 2011, and may allocate additional development sites for housing and other uses¹.
- **Adopted Policies Map:** This shows the sites identified for development and areas where particular policies apply. It will be updated as each part of the Local Plan 2031 is adopted.

1.2 The Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) sets out the timetable for preparing each part of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 and is available on the Council's website².

¹ A number of Saved Policies in the adopted Local Plan 2011 will continue to apply for planning applications, until they are reviewed as part of the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 (**Appendix G**)

² <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/lids>

The Development Plan

- 1.3 The Local Plan 2031 prepared by Vale of White Horse District Council will be used to inform decisions on planning applications across the district, in conjunction with any Development Planning Documents (DPDs) relating to minerals and waste prepared by Oxfordshire County Council, and any neighbourhood plans prepared by the community.
- 1.4 Neighbourhood plans can be prepared by either town or parish councils, or a neighbourhood forum, and make up part of the 'Development Plan' for the district as described above. They can provide an important layer of planning for local areas and set out in more detail how a community wishes to see its area develop.
- 1.5 Where neighbourhood plans are prepared they must be in general conformity with the policies set out in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and any other strategic policies set out in future planning documents in accordance with The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012³.
- 1.6 The Council will continue to support communities who wish to prepare neighbourhood plans. Details of how the Council can help with the preparation of neighbourhood plans are set out on the Council's website⁴.
- 1.7 These documents together make up the 'Development Plan' for the district (see **Figure 1.1**). All planning applications will be determined in accordance with the 'Development Plan' taken as a whole, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

³ The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/637/note/made>

⁴ <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/neighbourhoodplans>



Figure 1.1: An illustration of the documents that make up the Vale of White Horse Local Plan and Development Plan

National Planning Policy

- 1.8 Government planning policy and guidance is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). The NPPF sets out the Government’s planning policies for achieving sustainable development and is complemented by the NPPG, which provides additional guidance for practitioners.
- 1.9 The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 has been prepared in compliance with national policy. In particular, the NPPF states that for a local plan to be considered sound, it must comply with the legal and procedural requirements of plan making, such as the ‘duty-to-cooperate’⁵ and demonstrate that it is:
- a. positively prepared
 - b. justified
 - c. effective, and
 - d. consistent with national policy.

⁵ CLG (2012) *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*, Paragraph 182

a. Positively prepared

1.10 The NPPF states that:

“the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development”⁶.

1.11 Vale of White Horse District Council is working in partnership with its neighbouring authorities under the ‘duty-to-cooperate’ and significant weight has been attached to ensuring that the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 delivers the necessary sustainable development.

1.12 To ensure these requirements are fully incorporated, the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 is therefore underpinned and informed by two core policies that are described further below:

- **Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development, and**
- **Cooperation on Unmet Housing Need for Oxfordshire**

Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

1.13 Sustainable development is defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs⁷. This means that we should consider the long-term consequences of development alongside our short-term priorities.

1.14 The NPPF provides the Government’s view of what sustainable development in England means in practice for the planning system. Broadly, there are three dimensions to sustainable development, which need to be considered together. These are:

- **an economic role** – contributing to building a resilient, responsive and competitive economy through the timely delivery of sufficient land in the right locations to support growth and by coordinating development requirements such as the provision of infrastructure
- **a social role** – supporting vibrant and healthy communities through the provision of housing, the creation of high quality living and working environments and accessible local services, and

⁶ CLG (2012) *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*, Paragraph 182

⁷ CLG (2012) *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*, Page 2

- **an environmental role** – protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment, using resources prudently, ensuring climate change resilience and supporting the move to a low-carbon economy⁸.

1.15 When considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the NPPF in accordance with **Core Policy 1**.

1.16 The Council will work proactively with applicants to ensure that proposals that will achieve sustainable development can be approved.

Core Policy 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

Planning applications that accord with this Local Plan 2031 (and where relevant, with any subsequent Development Plan Documents or Neighbourhood Plans) will be approved, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the Council will grant planning permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise, and unless:

- any adverse impacts of granting planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole, or
- specific policies in the Framework indicate that development should be restricted.

Oxfordshire Unmet Housing Need

1.17 The ‘duty-to-cooperate’ set out in the Localism Act is both a legal duty and test of effective plan-making. It requires cooperation on issues of common concern in order to develop sound local plans.

1.18 Within Oxfordshire, co-operative working is managed through the Oxfordshire Growth Board (superseding the former Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership Board, SPIP). The board comprises the leaders of all Oxfordshire Councils supported by an executive committee and officer working groups. Vale of White Horse District Council also works directly with authorities within and outside the county area where it is necessary to plan effectively on matters of strategic and sub-regional significance or cross border interest that are not Oxfordshire-wide.

1.19 As part of implementing the ‘duty-to-cooperate’, the leaders of all Oxfordshire authorities, including the Vale of White Horse, have agreed

⁸ CLG (2012). *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*, Page 2

a joint Oxfordshire Statement of Cooperation⁹. This sets out that all the Oxfordshire Councils agree to engage constructively, actively and on an on-going basis in any process that involves the following:

- the preparation of Development Plan Documents
- the preparation of other local planning documents
- the planning and prioritisation of infrastructure and investment in Oxfordshire to support economic growth of the area
- activities that support any of the above so far as they relate to sustainable development or use of land that has or would impact on more than one of the parties, and
- the parties also agree to act expediently when undertaking joint working to avoid unreasonable delay

1.20 In particular, the Oxfordshire Statement of Cooperation sets out how the outcomes of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment¹⁰ would be managed, should any of the Local Planning Authorities in Oxfordshire not be able to meet their full objectively assessed housing need. The statement includes a diagram of the process to review the findings of the SHMA and identify how any unmet need should be met in the housing market area. This is reproduced as **Figure 1.2**.

1.21 The steps identified in **Figure 1.2** are not necessarily sequential and will be applied flexibly and strategically to ensure the process is implemented in the most effective and efficient way. The Growth Board is working with a former senior planning inspector and ‘critical friend’ advisor to establish a robust process and timetable for this work, which has started, but is likely to take at least 12-18 months to complete with the active participation of all Oxfordshire Councils¹¹. Supporting technical work includes an Oxfordshire-wide Strategic Green Belt Review¹², which was informed by the local Green Belt Review prepared to support this Local Plan 2031 (see **Core Policy 13**).

1.22 Within Oxfordshire, the Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Council’s are all reviewing their ability to meet their housing needs as identified in the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment, by completing reviews of their Local Plans already at an advanced stage of preparation. South Oxfordshire District Council has initiated a review of its 2012 Core Strategy. Oxford City is undertaking a

⁹ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/oxfordshire-growth-board>

¹⁰ Local Planning Authorities are required to prepare a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) to identify the objectively assessed need for housing in their housing market area.

¹¹ The Oxfordshire Growth Board signed a Memorandum of Cooperation – 26 Sept 2016 – which agrees the apportionment of unmet housing need for Oxfordshire; <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/communityandliving/partnerships/growthboard/memorandumofcooperartion.pdf>

¹² LUC (2015) Oxford Green Belt Study; available at: <http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=11057>

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) to inform its ability to meet its own housing needs but has stated that it does not expect to be able to accommodate them in full as the city area is constrained, particularly by areas of flood plain and the Oxford Green Belt.

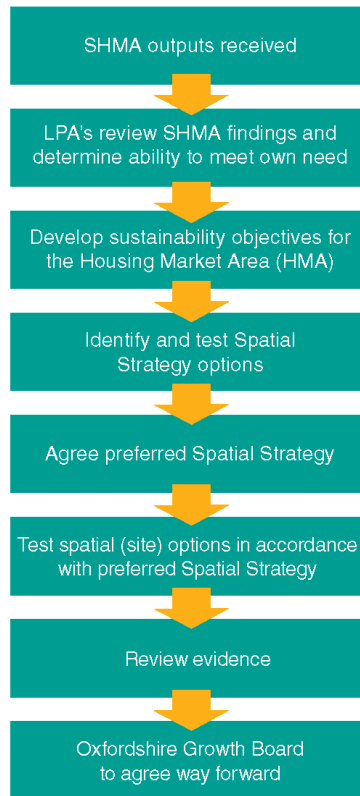


Figure 1.2: Proposed Duty-to-Cooperate process for any unmet housing need

- 1.23 The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 will meet, in full, our own objectively assessed need for 20,560 homes between 2011-2031 (see **Core Policy 4: Meeting our Housing Needs**). This is a first and important step towards meeting the full needs of the housing market area without unreasonable delay.
- 1.24 The Council also acknowledges the need to plan for any overspill of unmet housing from the wider market area, in particular Oxford City. Core Policy 2 sets out how the Council will work cooperatively to address overspill of unmet need from other parts of the housing market area. The Vale of White Horse approach (set out in **Core Policy 2**) is to address unmet need through the preparation of the Local Plan 2031: Part 2. This will ensure the quantum of unmet need, to be provided for within the Vale, is addressed in a timely manner and is informed by a robust approach to plan making, in accordance with national policy and legislation.

- 1.25 In November 2015, the Oxfordshire Growth Board agreed a working assumption unmet need housing requirement figure of 15,000 to inform the Growth Board process to apportion this level of housing between the Oxfordshire authorities¹³. The figure of 15,000 is a ‘working assumption’ to be used as a benchmark for assessing the apportionment of unmet need in each Local Planning Authority area.
- 1.26 The preparation of the Local Plan 2031: Part 2 will be closely informed by the Oxfordshire Growth Board process to apportion the ‘working assumption’ unmet figure of 15,000, and is currently expected to report in October 2016¹⁴.
- 1.27 Whilst the Local Plan 2031: Part 2 is in preparation, the Council’s housing requirement will be 20,560. However, if the Part 2 plan is not adopted within two years of the adoption of Local Plan 2031: Part 1, then from that time until the adoption of the Part 2 plan, the Council’s housing requirement will be 20,560 plus the agreed quantum of Oxford’s unmet housing need to be addressed within the Vale of White Horse District¹⁴.

b. A justified plan

- 1.28 The NPPF states that:

“the plan should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence”.

- 1.29 To help understand the issues facing the district, the Council has gathered a range of background evidence¹⁵ and taken into account the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) to develop locally distinctive policies.
- 1.30 The Council has also taken account of its other plans and strategies and those of other organisations and those produced at the local level, including the Sustainable Community Strategies for the Council, the Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP)¹⁶, Strategic Economic Plan (SEP)¹⁷, and the strategies and programmes of the District Council, town

¹³ Oxfordshire Growth Board (2015), Agenda and Minutes of Oxfordshire Growth Board, 19 November 2015. Available at:

<http://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/ielistdocuments.aspx?cid=528&mid=2807&ver=4>

¹⁴ The Oxfordshire Growth Board signed a Memorandum of Cooperation – 26 September 2016 – which agrees the apportionment of unmet housing need for Oxfordshire;

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/communityandliving/partnerships/growthboard/memorandumofcooperation.pdf>

¹⁵ A series of topic papers and technical studies are available from the Council website: www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/evidence

¹⁶ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/connecting-oxfordshire>

¹⁷ Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) (2014) *Strategic Economic Plan* - <http://www.oxfordshirelep.org.uk/>

and parish councils, neighbouring authorities and other organisations. The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 will help to facilitate the delivery of many of the aspirations and objectives set out in these other plans and strategies.

- 1.31 A series of reasonable alternatives were developed and considered to inform the Publication Version of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1. The reasonable alternatives are set out in our previous stages of consultation and topic papers. The alternatives have also been assessed through the Sustainability Appraisal (SA), which is described further below.

c. An effective plan

- 1.32 The NPPF states that:

“the plan should be deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities”.

- 1.33 To ensure the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 forms a realistic, deliverable and viable plan, we have worked closely with landowners and developers to ensure the proposed strategic development sites are deliverable. A Local Plan Viability Study has been published alongside this Publication Version of the Local Plan¹⁸.

- 1.34 The Council has worked closely with organisations such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England, Highways England, Thames Water and Oxfordshire County Council who are responsible for providing or managing key services including water resources, education and transport.

- 1.35 The Council’s commitment to working with our partners ensures that proper sustainable planning can be achieved across administrative boundaries, with examples including:
- the Oxfordshire Statement of Cooperation agreed in advance of the publication of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Oxfordshire and ongoing work with the Oxfordshire Growth Board
 - a statement of common ground between the Vale of White Horse, Swindon Borough Council, Oxfordshire County Council and the Western Vale Villages to ensure cross boundary infrastructure issues are adequately addressed (see **Chapter 5** for more details)
 - working jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council to ensure we plan effectively for job growth and housing needs along with supporting infrastructure across Science Vale, including Didcot Garden Town (see **Chapter 5** for more details), and

¹⁸ www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/evidence

- a memorandum of understanding with South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council to agree an approach to delivering strategic highway infrastructure across the Science Vale area, including those that span the district boundaries.

1.36 The approach to preparing the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 is fully consistent with the Localism Act 2011. We have worked collaboratively with local communities, stakeholders and neighbouring authorities and consulted widely to ensure, as far as possible, that the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 reflects a collective vision and a set of agreed priorities for the sustainable development of the Vale. Where communities are working to develop neighbourhood plans, these have also helped to inform the preparation of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1.

d. Consistent with national policy

1.37 The NPPF states that:

“the plan should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the framework”.

1.38 The preparation of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 has involved the testing of reasonable alternatives through Sustainability Appraisal (SA), that incorporates a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). Both reports have been published alongside this document¹⁹.

Core Policy 2: Cooperation on Unmet Housing Need for Oxfordshire

The Council will continue to work under the ‘duty-to-cooperate’ with all other Oxfordshire local authorities on an ongoing basis to address the objectively assessed need for housing across the Oxfordshire housing market area.

As a first step, Vale of White Horse District Council has sought to accommodate the housing need for Vale of White Horse District in full in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1. The Council recognises that Oxford City is unlikely to be able to accommodate the whole of its new housing requirement for the 2011-2031 period within its administrative boundary.

In tandem, the Council will continue to work jointly and proactively with all of the other Oxfordshire local authorities and through the Oxfordshire Growth Board to address any unmet housing need. This will include assessing all reasonable spatial options, including the release of brownfield, the potential for new settlements and a full strategic review of the boundaries of the Oxford Green Belt. These issues are not for the Council to consider in isolation.

¹⁹ www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/evidence

To ensure Oxford's unmet need is addressed, the Council will allocate sites to contribute towards Oxford's unmet housing need within the Local Plan 2031: Part 2, to be submitted to the Secretary of State, within two years of adoption of the Local Plan 2031: Part 1. This will ensure that unmet need is considered and planned for in a timely manner and is tested through a robust plan-making process in accordance with national policy, national guidance, the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations, and the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

Whilst the Local Plan 2031: Part 2 is in preparation, the Council's housing requirement will be 20,560. However, if the Part 2 plan is not adopted within two years of the adoption of Local Plan 2031: Part 1, then from that time until the adoption of the Part 2 plan, the Council's housing requirement will be 20,560 plus the agreed quantum of Oxford's unmet housing need to be addressed within the Vale of White Horse District.