

Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan 2031 Part Two Main Modifications: Vale of White Horse Liberal Democrat Group Comments
25th March 2019

Response Prepared by: Cllr Emily Smith

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The Liberal Democrat Group on the Vale District Council represent communities across the Vale that will be impacted by Local Plan Part 2. Despite modification we do not believe the Vale Local Plan Part 2 is sound and would like further changes made.

MM2 Core Policy 4a: Meeting our Housing Needs

We remain unconvinced that the number of homes required across the Vale as defined by the 2014 SHMA should be the numbers we are using to determine housing need. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 will not be using the SHMA, but the new government OAN calculation to provide baseline housing need figures, which are lower, and this leaves the Vale LPP2 out of step with the Oxfordshire spatial plan.

Oxford's unmet need is yet to be determined and we believe it is possible for Oxford to meet more of its own need with the city boundaries. Not having this figure make it hard for Vale to plan housing and deliver the necessary infrastructure without knowing which developments will happen. This uncertainty is made worse by a fall in the number of planning applications and a slowing build rate.

Policy 4a should make clear that 2200 is a maximum and will not be required if Oxford does allocate more housing sites – and Vale should encourage them to do so.

The reasons for removing the allocating of 1000 homes from Harwell is not clear. This site is close to a major employment site other council policies seem to support development here, so it needs to be made clearer why this site is no longer included in the allocation to help meet Oxford City's unmet need.

We object to the addition of 400 homes in Grove as part of MM2. Wantage and Grove are already having to accept thousands of new homes and an additional 400 will add further to the problems of congestion, pressure on GP surgeries and other amenities. No major changes are planned to the rail or road network to accommodate this extra traffic – the roads out of Grove are single carriageway and all have constraints which impact on traffic flow. Grove station should be open before any more homes are built in this area. There are already traffic jams during rush hours especially in central Wantage and routes to the south and east. Residents are very fearful of the impact on this of approved houses yet to be built. The existing growth brings no extra employment space so all new residents will need to commute by road adding to the intolerable situation. If this site must be developed it should be for employment use.

MM4 Core Policy 8b: Dalton Barracks

We welcome the deletion of the safeguarding for the public transport/cycle connection between Dalton Barracks and the proposed Park and Ride at Lodge Hill and fully agree with the Planning Inspectors comment that “these routes are not justified and should be deleted from the plan.” We also support the deletion of the “potential for higher growth in the longer term...” in relation to housing numbers at Dalton Barracks in numerous places in the plan.

However, the decision to allocate 1200 homes at Dalton Barracks and Abingdon Airfield is yet to be proven as sustainable’. The agreed policy refers to provision of a highly sustainable development and “*ensuring excellent public transport, cycle way and footpath connections to Oxford and Abingdon-on-Thames*”. This potential is listed as one of the justifications for removing Dalton Barracks and Abingdon Airfield from the Green Belt and allowing the development of 1200 homes.

But in the “Additional Transport Evidence” for this site (dated 30th November 2018), there is no indication in this of any excellent public transport, cycle way or footpath connections, in fact quite the contrary.

The focus of this report is on mitigating the impact of additional motor vehicle movements from the 1200 new houses. There is little evidence that any thought has been given to how the pattern of movements of occupants of the existing dwellings at Dalton Barracks will change when the base closes down. Proposed cycle links to Abingdon consist primarily of 1.5 metre wide advisory cycle lanes on some of the existing roads, exactly where parked cars, gullies and potholes are usually concentrated. On the route along Long Tow and the Wootton Road to the schools, college and other facilities in north Abingdon, only a length of shared footway/cycleway along Long Tow is proposed. Without improved segregation from other traffic you will not increase the proportion of trips by cycle.

Revised paragraph 2.61 (formerly 2.60) of the Local Plan refers to improving bus service levels to “turn up and go” frequencies. Paragraph 7.14 of the Transport Delivery Report for Dalton Barracks however suggests “*it is not unreasonable to rely on existing services, their routes and frequencies.*” Even though some new dwellings would be 1 km away from the existing 4 bus route, this is considered satisfactory! At the minimum, the housing layout should be designed so that buses can divert off their current route and do a short loop into part of it, to ensure residents are no more than about 400 metres from a stop. Frequencies clearly need to be enhanced from the current hourly service.

There is a suggestion that a shuttle bus linking the site to Abingdon via Dunmore Road and Oxford Road could be considered “subject to commercial viability and funding”. This could however adversely impact on the viability of other bus services on these roads, some of which are already likely to be dependent on limited contributions from other housing development in North Abingdon.

For 1200 homes to be justified more work on transport is needed to ensure that this allocation is consistent with Paragraph 2.58 (formerly 2.59) of the Plan’s aspiration for

“walking, cycling and public transport designed to be the most attractive forms of local transport”

MM5 Core Policy 13a: Oxford Green Belt

The removal of Shippon Village from the green belt is unjustified. The removal of green belt protection seems to be based on potential development on Dalton Barracks and Abingdon Airfield near-by. If this site is found sound, development wouldn't happen until 2029 at the earliest, and with so many questions about the sustainability of this site, and the potential Oxford to Cambridge Expressway route coming through the airfield, the development may not materialise before the end of the plan period. Therefore, there is a risk that Shippon will be taken out of the green belt prematurely and be vulnerable in the meantime.

Also, we do not accept that building 1200 homes next to Shippon Village should mean that green belt protection is removed from the village itself. Local Plan Part 2 policies have maintained green belt status for White Cross on the other side of the Barracks and Airfield and we do not believe the plan demonstrates the exceptional circumstances required for removing green belt protection from Shippon.

The council should keep Shippon village in the green belt and submit the final version of LPP2 on that basis.

MM6 Core Policy 12a: Safeguarding of Land for Strategic Highway Improvements within the Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe Sub-Area

Following a number of serious accidents on the Wootton Road to the north of Abingdon, the County Council are looking at creating a cycle and pedestrian path from the Wootton Road Roundabout, along Wootton road into Wootton Village. This will enable children from Wotton, Sunningwell and Shippon to ride or walk more safely to school in Abingdon. This is much needed infrastructure that has the support of highways officers but will only happen if land can be identified. MM6 talks about an enhanced path from Shippon but no reference to beyond Shippon.

We request that a strip of land for this purpose is safeguarded along Wootton Road as part of this plan.

MM7 Core Policy 14a: Strategic Water Storage Reservoirs

We would like to see the safeguarding of land south of Abingdon for a potential reservoir removed from the Plan. The County Council do not support the reservoir and while we welcome the modification to say this could be removed from the plan if the finalised Water Resources Management Plan 2019 does not include this site, or if Development Consent is refused, we are concerned this does not give residents in the Vale sufficient protection and would prefer this land was not safeguarded at this stage of the process.

MM14 Development Policy 1: Self and Custom Build

We welcome the inclusion of Self-Build in the Plan however, the policy as modified does not go far enough. We think self-build plots should be a requirement rather on all sites over a certain size than something the council just encourages.