

Comment

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Comment by	Mr Francis Walsh
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Q1 Do you consider the Local Plan is Legally Compliant?	No
Q2 Do you consider the Local Plan is Sound (positively prepared, effective and Justified)	No
If your comment(s) relate to a specific site within a core policy please select this from the drop down list.	N/A

Q4 Please give details of why you consider the Local Plan is not legally compliant or is unsound or fails to comply with the duty to co-operate. Please be as precise as possible. If you wish to support the legal compliance or soundness of the Local Plan or its compliance with the duty to co-operate, please also use this box to set out your comments.

I write these comments as a Wantage resident of 15 years and, prior to that, of Uffington for 21 years.

The length and verbosity of the Local Plan documentation is such that very few residents will read it in its entirety and therefore few will make submissions about it. The documentation has been many months, if not years in the making but concerned parties have just a few weeks in which to read, analyse and respond to it. The Vale Local Plan uses, as its basis for employment and housing requirements, the output of the SHMA.

The SHMA predicts a huge increase (23,000) in the number of jobs in the Vale by 2031 and the Council, with Government agreement, is promoting the benefits of the Science Vale as a place where employers

and employees will be welcomed. Consequently a great deal of the housing to accommodate the increase in employees is to be constructed around the Science Vale. It appears that Wantage and Grove are to have an additional 5,500 homes (25% of the Vale total) during the plan period.

I attended the Scrutiny Meeting on the SHMA held by the Vale District Council. At this meeting, concerned residents, from a number of areas in the Vale, voiced their concerns regarding the impact of the additional housing on their community and roads. These speakers questioned the methodology and conclusions of the SHMA. Some of the speakers are employed in planning roles where they were responsible for the long term plans of their organisations. All of them felt that the conclusions of the SHMA could not be supported by their experience of evidence based future predictions. In particular they, like most residents, find it hard to understand how there is no consideration given to the impact of changes in the World economy which, given the last 5-8 years is surely a possibility. Indeed one could argue that the current reduction in the price of oil will have some impact on the World economy and in some way affect the expansion plans of many companies, some of which will be based, or hope to be based in the Science Vale.

At the Scrutiny Meeting several District Councillors, including the Chairman, were not comfortable with the conclusions of the SHMA. They did not consider that the methodology produced results which could be supported. They requested that an independent company be utilised to assess the methodology and validate the outcomes. There was also a suggestion that the Vale should reduce the totals and submit the revised figures as part of its Local Plan. Such questioning was knocked back/brushed aside by the Councillor responsible for Planning (M. Murray). He stated that evidence from other Councils had been that the only company that could be used to carry out the SHMA analysis and produce the conclusions was the one used. Councils that had overruled the results as they believed them too high were informed, by the Inspector, that they must repeat the exercise and utilise the results produced, at a significant cost to the Council. This situation does not support the Government claim that local people have more say/influence in planning matters. I am disappointed that the Government has apparently dictated that only one consultancy firm can be used to create the SHMA and that their output cannot be challenged.

To support the SHMA employment numbers the Local Plan states that there will be a need to build 1500+ housing units per annum through to 2031. However, the detail regarding the phasing of job creation is not provided in the SHMA. As a result it appears the housing build target has been

derived by dividing the total allocation by the number of years in the plan. This cannot be a sensible or reasonable basis for planning such a massive change in the populations of towns such as Wantage, Grove and Didcot. What happens if the jobs fail to materialise and developers, as a consequence slow or stop their construction? To say that the annual build targets are ambitious would be polite. As far as I am aware no more than 570 homes have been built in a single year in the Vale since 1994. To build the Plan around a number that is almost three times this maximum seems somewhat ridiculous. A previous version of the Vale Council's forward plan contained predictions that there would be an increase of several thousand jobs at the Harwell and Milton sites between 2011 and 2016. These have not materialised and I, along with many others, have no confidence in the predictions now being quoted for the period up to 2031.