

## **OBJECTIONS TO THE VALE OF WHITE HORSE DC LOCAL PLAN 2031 PART 1 CORE POLICY 13**

### **Background**

I am concerned with the proposal to build houses within the Oxford Green Belt and North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Four development sites in the Green Belt have been identified to accommodate over 1,500 houses and two sites in the AONB for 1,400 houses. I believe these proposals are a threat to the rural character of the Vale of White Horse.

I am also concerned that further sites are proposed for removal from the Green Belt. Once land is removed from the Green Belt it will become vulnerable to inappropriate development.

### **Green Belt**

The Plan is inconsistent with planning guidance and government policies on the protection of Green Belts. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) makes it very clear that a Green Belt boundary may be altered only in 'exceptional circumstances'.

Recent guidance (6 March 2014) states that: 'Unmet housing need (including traveller sites) is unlikely to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harm to constitute the "very special circumstances" justifying inappropriate development on a site within the Green Belt.'

The Government's position on Green Belt policy is very clear. The fundamental aim remains to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Boundaries of Green Belts should only be changed in "exceptional circumstances", and unmet housing need is not an exceptional circumstance to justify taking land out of the Green Belt.

### **North Wessex Downs AONB**

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 the Council has a statutory duty to have regard for the purposes for which the North Wessex Downs were designated an AONB, which is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape.

The NPPF places AONBs in the highest category of landscape protection and affords them "great weight" in the decision-making process. Further to this the NPPF confirms that AONBs are one location where restrictions apply to development and accordingly that: 'Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest.'

### **Summary**

It is important that the current boundaries of the Oxford Green Belt and the North Wessex Downs AONB remain unchanged. It is also important that proposals for inappropriate development on these areas are not approved which includes the construction of new houses. It is worth remembering that the purposes of the Oxford Green Belt are to prevent urban sprawl around Oxford by keeping the land open permanently open, and to preserve the rural setting and special character of the city of Oxford. Future Vale policies should accord these purposes a very high priority.

Christopher Brand  
Yew Tree Cottage  
Besselsleigh  
Abingdon  
OX13 5PX

13 December 2014