

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031
Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies
Examination
Stage 2 – Matters and Questions

Written Statements from Mr and Mrs Robert Garrett

Matter 8 – Strategy for Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe Area (CP8 – CP11 and CP14)

- 7.1 Other than in connection with the Green Belt issues (matter 5) are the Strategic Housing Allocations listed in policy 8 soundly based and deliverable?*
(a) North of Abingdon-on-Thames (site 2)

The following is written to only relate to North of Abingdon.

Abingdon is described as having “excellent transport links to Oxford and beyond” despite having no railway station and no access southwards onto the A34 from the north of the town towards the proposed new employments sites. The A34 itself is congested and frequently block by accidents caused by and generating further congestion. To quote our own MP in 2015 “the A34 is at capacity” and while junction improvements may help, its very nature as a two lane trunk road is the limiting factor.

The document refers to the “historic character of the town centre” yet this is choked with traffic from all directions even beyond the rush hour despite (or perhaps because of) recent changes to the traffic system.

The Abingdon peripheral road takes some pressure off the town centre as commuters try to get from one side of the town to the other. However, at one end it joins the old road system (with drivers queuing along Radley Road and then the Vineyard, or driving through the Waitrose car park) to enter the town centre; and at the other end it terminates into the congested A415. In 2014 the Council Leader correctly referred to Abingdon town centre traffic as “horrendous”.

Recent changes to the Dunmore Road part of the peripheral road to satisfy safety concerns have narrowed the entrance and width of a roundabout resulting in long rush hour queues. As recently as 2009 increasing use of this road to route traffic away from the town centre was seen as key to reduce pollution in the town. If the Council's proposals for another 1000 houses outside of the peripheral road are adopted then this road will change from being a peripheral road relieving the town centre to a congested suburban road with numerous cross-roads or T junctions plus pedestrian crossings needed for the safety of residents. The town centre and the whole of Abingdon will suffer.

Changes to the A34 junction have been suggested for decades but have still not taken place, as has the need for an additional bridge over the Thames. Even with an improved junction to the A34 in place at Lodge Hill Abingdon will still suffer worse congestion.

The Council fails to recognise that preserving the historic character of the town (reputedly England's oldest town) is not served by placing yet more housing on its outskirts whether these new residents choose to shop and work within the town or elsewhere in the wider area.

The statement in CP8 “ensure growth is managed to minimise pressure on the highway network whilst protecting the Oxford Green Belt” contradicts what the Council are proposing. An extra 1000 houses (just the strategic allocation) in the Green Belt on the north side of Abingdon may be aided by an enhanced junction to the A34 but the A34 is already a serious bottleneck – and surely the Council are trying to minimise commuting so North Abingdon should not be seen as expanding as a dormitory town for Oxford or elsewhere.

The Strategic employment sites listed within Abingdon are already substantially occupied or full. Most employment expansion envisaged in the Council proposals is to the South of Abingdon (via the

A34 or via the congested town centre and Thames bridge) so why build on the northern side of Abingdon?

7.2 Are there other sites which would more appropriately meet the identified need for new housing?

Immediately to the west of Abingdon is a large undeveloped area.

This is closer to the current and proposed business and industrial areas to the south. This has direct access to the A34 both north and south via a full junction. This is close to the retail areas of large stores. This is close to the land set aside in the proposal for A415 improvements and a new Thames crossing.

Part of this area is currently green belt serving to separate Shippon from Abingdon but this gap is almost filled by the A34 trunk road.

Part of this area is the large former RAF base which is now an army base so the airfield on the site is hardly used.

Part of this area is open countryside between Abingdon and Marcham.

The Council plan seems to have overlooked this area entirely. When questioned, Councillors have suggested the MOD have plans for the airfield but no written statements or documents appear to support this.

7.3 Are the identified and safeguarded Employment sites listed in policy CP8 soundly based and deliverable? Are there other sites which would more appropriately meet the identified need for employment land?

With reference to Abingdon, the sites identified are not new and the expansion proposed is minor.

*7.4 Are the policies relating to the following matters soundly based:
Abingdon Shopping Centre and the Charter (CP10)*

Yes, though the Council needs to continue to bear in mind that retailers will be attracted by footfall, and access to the town centre is restricted by congestion. It is also the case that dedicated cycle-ways fail to reach the town centre.