



VWHDC Local Plan 2013 Part 1 – Examination Stage 2

Hearing Statement: Matter 9 (STRATEGY FOR SOUTH EAST VALE SUB-AREA; CP15 AND CP16)

This document comprises RPS's Hearing Statement for Matter 9 on behalf of the Valley Park Development Consortium, comprising of Hallam Land Management Limited, Taylor Wimpey PLC and Persimmon Homes PLC.

The proposed Valley Park allocation covers around 181 hectares of green field land between Didcot and the A34. The developer consortium has submitted an outline planning application for 4,254 homes on this site. That application is following the normal development control process. The scale of the development is representative of the full potential of Valley Park rather than the level of development that can be provided within the plan period.

9.1 Other than in connection with AONB issues (considered in Matter 6) are the Strategic Housing Allocations listed in policy CP15 soundly based and deliverable?

(d) Valley Park (Site 11)

The inclusion of the Strategic Housing Allocation of Valley Park, as listed under Policy CP15, is both soundly based and deliverable, albeit that the soundness of the policy could be improved by referring to **“at least 2,550”** dwellings at Valley Park to reflect the fact that the site has capacity for significantly more than 2,550 dwellings.

Some clarification or explanation of how the 2,550 figure was arrived at by the Council would be helpful. We understand that this is the amount of development that the Council anticipates taking place within the Plan period, as opposed to the capacity of the site. The Plan could be much clearer on this point.

The site provides a suitable and sustainable location for development, and is in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy set out under Core Policy 3 (albeit that it is located on the edge of the town of Didcot, which is located within the administrative boundary of South Oxfordshire District Council so is not specifically listed in the Policy). The distribution of housing at this site will serve to enhance and protect the services and facilities provided by Didcot and other nearby Larger Villages, in keeping with the presumption of in favour of sustainable development set out in Core Policy 1 and Paragraph 14 of the NPPF.

The provision of housing at this site within the Science Vale area will help to improve the self-containment of the area, a key growth area set out within the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan that is a focus for significant investment

Didcot is at the heart of Science Vale UK. Valley Park in particular is close to the key employment sites in Science Vale UK, namely Milton Park, Harwell Campus and Culham Science Centre, which accommodate a significant level of jobs and will have enhanced roles as the Council's aspirations for Science Vale UK in the Local Plan are taken forward through the Plan period. Valley Park is accessible to these locations by cycle and public transport, as well as having good road access, minimising the distance travelled and the need to travel by private car. Valley Park is also accessible by foot, cycle and public transport to Didcot Parkway railway station, which provides frequent services to Oxford and London, the former of which is a significant employment centre for residents of the Vale of White Horse. It makes good planning sense to allocate the largest housing site in close proximity to these jobs and excellent rail services.

The distribution of housing at Valley Park will support the vitality and viability of the area and help to facilitate the delivery of a package of new or enhanced infrastructure, services and facilities, which will again support the wider aspirations of the Local Plan. It will be in balance with the forecast new jobs thus helping to support sustainable growth.

To further improve the soundness of Core Policy 15, in terms of being 'justified' against Paragraph 182 of the NPPF, the housing supply table incorporated within the policy should state the following number of dwellings for Valley Park, within the South East Vale Sub-Area: **"At least 2,550"** (i.e. words **"at least"** should be added to this number of dwellings). It would also be more positive if a reference could be made to the fact that the site has significantly more capacity than 2,550, albeit much or all of this may fall outside the plan period. This will allow for a more comprehensive proposal for the site, which is essential to ensure adequate and coordinated infrastructure provision. This alteration would bring the policy in line with the Council's evidence base, as well as in line with the Development Template to which the policy refers. Appendix B of Topic Paper 3 - Strategic Sites Selection – applicable to Valley Park (Site Ref. TPS 056) states under the heading 'Site Selection Methodology (2014)':-

"Assessment concluded that evidence work has tested a figure of 2,550. The local plan should provide for the delivery of 'at least' 2,550 homes to allow for an element of flexibility with the potential for additional development beyond 2031."

Extensive capacity-testing through the current planning application, including the design review with CABE, has demonstrated that the site has capacity for significantly more than 2,550.

In terms of deliverability, the Environmental Statement submitted with the current planning application assumes delivery of between 250 to 300 dwellings per year, working to the 4,254 units coming forward by 2031 as a worst-case scenario. From our experience elsewhere, the average delivery rate across the Plan period is likely to be lower than this based on the availability of contractors and other factors such as infrastructure delivery. For the purposes of the Local Plan, the applicants suggest working to an assumption of 200 dwellings per annum during the plan period.

There are no significant barriers to development and as far as the parties are aware there are no technical, ownership or planning impediments to development that cannot be satisfactorily and viably resolved.

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

There are no other such suitable strategic sites available within the South East Vale Sub-Area that have not been listed under Policy CP15.

The Science Vale area comprises a self-contained area of employment growth in specific defined sectors with supporting housing development. Any alternative development or expansion in other locations in the Vale outside of Didcot, including the other towns and larger villages, would be constrained by lack of infrastructure, limited public transport links and/or environmental constraints, in particular the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This would lead to a significantly less sustainable distribution of housing.

9.4 Is the policy relating to Didcot A Power Station (CP16) soundly based?

The supporting text (Paragraph 5.74) refers to Figure 5.5. This shows a (presumably indicative) alignment for the Science Bridge. Policy 16 states in its final paragraph that the proposed route of the new Science Bridge and A4130 re-routing is safeguarded, where planning permission will not be granted for development that would prejudice the construction or effective operation of this highway infrastructure.

There is no evidence that this alignment is the one that will ultimately be pursued by the County Council, as we understand that detailed proposals have not been published. For this reason, and given that the southern extremity of the Bridge alignment falls within the Valley Park allocation, it should be made clear that this is an indicative alignment and could be subject to change. Otherwise it could unnecessarily constrain the developers of Valley Park in agreeing a comprehensive masterplan as part of the current planning application. As this is not a final alignment, it would be more appropriate to encourage cooperation between the developer and County Council to agree on a preferred alignment for the bridge.

We note that Appendix E to the Local Plan, which shows land safeguarded for future transport schemes, already annotates this Science Bridge route as ***“Indicative route of new road – exact alignment to be confirmed through masterplanning”***.

We consider that this policy is unsound until this matter is appropriately addressed.

RPS Planning & Development
6 January 2016