

Vale of White Horse Local Plan

Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies

Withdrawal of Objection by Stagecoach in Oxfordshire to

Draft Policy CP3 Settlement hierarchy

Draft Policy CP 15 Spatial Strategy for SE Vale Sub-Area

Land at Milton Heights

Stagecoach in Oxfordshire has previously raised an objection to the allocation of 300 dwellings at Milton Heights, proposed by Vale of White Horse District Council (VoWHDC) as part of the Plan strategy to meet the objectively-assessed housing need (OAN) of the District.

Our objection was made on two successive rounds of consultation with regard to the difficulty we perceived in ensuring that appropriate mode choice could be made available from the site to local facilities and major employment, thus risking the development being essentially car dependent. Stagecoach was concerned that the quantum of development proposed was insufficient of itself to create the critical mass for provision of local services.

Since that objection, Stagecoach has been approached by the promoters of the scheme, and consulted upon the transport strategy for the emerging proposals to bring this development forward in some detail.

Stagecoach also notes that since our objections have been made, there have been material changes to the emerging proposals, and to the local planning context. Specifically:

- The draft allocation has increased to 400 dwellings from 300
- Emerging proposals have been put forward for a scheme of 460 dwellings, on behalf of Taylor Wimpey. This larger quantum is in line with our view that a greater rather than lesser scale of development would be important in anchoring any new or diverted bus route to serve the development. We remain of the view that a still higher quantum would be advantageous, but the draft allocation does not preclude this
- A housebuilder is now promoting the site making deliverability appear more certain, with a strengthened client team working up detailed proposals.
- Land immediately to the north is subject to a current application for 80 dwellings (P14/V2320/FUL), which if consented would further consolidate the settlement.
- Land at Milton Hill is subject to a current consent for redevelopment and intensification of employment uses, within walking and cycling distance of the site.
- The improvements to the A34 Milton interchange currently under construction will permit safe pedestrian, and more importantly cycle access, across the A34 towards local destinations and Milton Park in particular.
- The Council cannot today securely demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing land against the annualised OAN requirement.

Stagecoach has been made aware of the key transport and access features of the proposals being prepared by Taylor Wimpey in support of an application for planning permission in the short term. These include as follows:

- 1) Creation of a logical bus route diversion from A4130 using Midwinter Avenue, with changed priority in favour of Milton Hill
- 2) Convenient bus stops directly serving the existing settlement and the proposed site on this route
- 3) A dedicated direct pedestrian and cycle link seamlessly tying in to the crossing facilities at Milton Interchange
- 4) An emerging site master plan that rationally lays out internal pedestrian circulation such that providing intuitively obvious, legible links to the bus stops will be provided.

The applicant is proposing, within the funding envelope presented by the established Science Vale public transport support sum, to explore with OCC and bus operators, the provision of pump-priming a bus service strategy directly serving the site. Stagecoach is now sufficiently confident that such a strategy is credibly achievable, within wider aspirations that OCC has submitted for the improved bus network within Science Vale, to allow it to withdraw its objection.

It is Stagecoach's view that, taken in the round, these proposals, if delivered, fully take up the opportunities presented for sustainable transport, in line with the emerging policies in the Plan, and NPPF paragraphs 17, and 29-35.

In the longer term, Stagecoach also recognises the logic of allocating additional land west of Milton Hill to consolidate a sustainable new settlement along the public transport route that is provided for this scheme, providing critical mass for local service provision, within close proximity of major new employment, accessible by sustainable modes. This is in line with our previous comments on this proposed allocation.

Nick Small MA PhD

Strategic Development Manager (Midlands, Oxfordshire and West)
Stagecoach in Oxfordshire