

**Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1**

**Examination**

**Statement by Vale of White Horse  
District Council**

**Alterations to Green Belt Boundaries and  
Proposed Housing Development in the North  
Wessex Downs AONB**

**August 2015**

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**Inspectors Question:**

5. It would be helpful if the Council would prepare a paper setting out in detail what the Council considers the exceptional circumstances are to justify:
- 1) alterations to the Green Belt, and
  - 2) housing development in the AONB, such that proposed sites to be allocated by the plan in this area, are soundly based.

**Green Belt**

- 5.1.1. The Council fully recognises the importance of the Oxford Green Belt to the Vale of White Horse District and its significance in national policy. Nonetheless, the Council considers that exceptional circumstances exist to justify alterations to the Green Belt through the preparation of the Local Plan, in accordance with national policy, which are set out in detail in this statement.
- 5.1.2. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that local planning authorities ‘should establish Green Belt boundaries’ in their local plans and ‘once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan’<sup>1</sup>.
- 5.1.3. The NPPF goes onto state that ‘when drawing up Green Belt boundaries’, local planning authorities ‘should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development’<sup>2</sup> and when defining boundaries.
- 5.1.4. The Vale of White Horse District Council has undertaken a Local Green Belt Review to inform the preparation of the Local Plan<sup>3</sup> This review, in combination with other evidence, has informed the Council’s decision to release sites from the Green Belt that are no longer meeting the purposes of

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<sup>1</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 83 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.

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<sup>2</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 84 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.

Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> **EIP Library Ref: NAT02** – Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd / Terra Firma Consultancy (2014) Vale of White Horse District Council Green Belt Review Final Phase 2 Report.

Available at:

[http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454436332&CODE=D04D4DBE217D9780AB2EC3A1C27D334A](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454436332&CODE=D04D4DBE217D9780AB2EC3A1C27D334A)

**EIP Library Ref: NAT03** – Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd / Terra Firma Consultancy (2014) Vale of White Horse District Council Green Belt Review Phase 3 Report.

Available at:

[http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454436432&CODE=D482A1D945EC4DCFBA22044482C528A1](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454436432&CODE=D482A1D945EC4DCFBA22044482C528A1)

the Green Belt, as defined by the NPPF. The proposed alteration equates to an approximate change of 0.1 % to the Oxford Green Belt within the district that currently accounts for an area of approximately 8300 ha or 14 % of its land area.

5.1.5. The Council considers that the exceptional circumstances to justify the alteration to the Green Belt boundary are:

- the need to meet the objectively assessed housing need in full within the District,
- the ability to release land presently designated as Green Belt with no harm to the purposes of the Green Belt, and
- The need to deliver sustainable development, through sustainable patterns of growth supported by the necessary infrastructure.

### **Meeting Objectively Assessed Need**

5.1.6 The Local Plan has been prepared through an iterative process, involving the preparation of a suite of technical evidence, a number of stages of formal consultation and stakeholder engagement.

5.1.7 The early stages of plan preparation were informed by the South East Plan, which set the housing target for the district of 13,294 homes. However, the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was published in April 2014, which identified an Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) for the district of 20,560 homes to be delivered in the plan period up to 2031.

5.1.8 The OAN for the district, identified in the Oxfordshire SHMA, represented a challenging 35 % increase in the housing requirement for the district, and , based on the average annual housing delivery in the Vale during the last five years (480 dwellings), a 53 % increase in the annual requirement; equivalent to 1028 dwellings per year as identified by the SHMA.

5.1.9 Despite the challenging nature of this increase in housing target, the Council was also aware of the importance of meeting national policy requirements, for example to:

- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development – ensuring that sufficient land of the ‘right type is available in the right places and at the right time’ to support growth and innovation<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> EIP Library Ref: LNP02 – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 6 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.

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- be genuinely plan led – proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver homes<sup>5</sup>
- boost significantly the supply of housing – should meet in full the identified objectively assessed need<sup>6</sup>
- identify a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of housing against the housing requirement (and make appropriate consideration for buffers)<sup>7</sup>, and
- ensure that their 'strategies for housing, employment and other uses are integrated and that take full account of relevant market factors and economic signals'.<sup>8</sup>

5.1.10 The Council was also aware of the importance of supporting wider strategies for Oxfordshire and Government Policy, for example to:

- accord with the Oxford City Deal and Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, in particular to support the 'accelerated' growth of housing that is 'fundamental' to the delivery of innovation led growth<sup>9</sup>, and to 'provide quality homes' that are needed to 'support growth'<sup>10</sup>, and
- accord with Government Policy, for example the recent House of Commons Written Statement that made it clear how Government intends to 'accelerate house building over the next five years, provide certainty for local residents and enterprises, and contribute to the Government's long-term economic plan'<sup>11</sup>.

5.1.11 A letter from the former Secretary of State for DCLG, Nick Boles to Sir Michael Pitt, Chief Executive of PINS, provides a clear indication that local

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<sup>5</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 17 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.  
Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/60777/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/60777/2116950.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 47 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.  
Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/60777/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/60777/2116950.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 47 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.  
Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/60777/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/60777/2116950.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 158 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.  
Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/60777/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/60777/2116950.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> **EIP Library Ref: TRA04** – Deputy Prime Minister's Office of State for the Cabinet (Cities and Constitution) The Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP Cabinet Office (2014) Oxford and Oxfordshire City Deal. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/276205/Oxford-Oxfordshire-City-Deal.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/276205/Oxford-Oxfordshire-City-Deal.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> **EIP Library Ref: ECO10** – Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) (2014) Strategic Economic Plan. Available at: [http://www.oxfordshirelep.com/sites/default/files/Oxford%20SEP\\_FINAL\\_March14\\_0.pdf](http://www.oxfordshirelep.com/sites/default/files/Oxford%20SEP_FINAL_March14_0.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles) (2015) House of Commons Written Statement (HCWS509) Housing and Planning Delivery.  
Available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-vote-office/March%202015/26%20March/5-DCLG-Housing.pdf>

Authorities are encouraged to review and tailor the extent of Green Belt in their local area to reflect local circumstances<sup>12</sup>.

- 5.1.12 For these reasons, the Council considered that the significant increase in identified housing need, the need to meet the identified OAN 'in full', and the need to support accelerated housing delivery, justified the preparation of a Local Green Belt Review for the district. This would ensure the preparation of the Local Plan was informed by appropriate and up-to-date evidence, and that all reasonable and realistic options were considered to maximise the opportunities for the Council to deliver housing in accordance with the requirements set out above.
- 5.1.13 The preparation of the Local Plan is therefore the correct time to review the Green Belt, and to identify any necessary revisions to the boundaries, which are justified by exceptional circumstances, with the aim of ensuring that these boundaries will be defensible and have permanence in the long term, both within the plan period and beyond.
- 5.1.14 The Council's approach is consistent with a recent Inspector's Decision relating to the Rushcliffe Core Strategy, where the Inspector concluded that 'the need for significant uplift in new housing provision and for positive action to support economic growth in Greater Nottingham, including Rushcliffe, provided the exceptional circumstances for a change to the Green Belt boundaries in this locality'<sup>13</sup>.
- 5.1.15 The Council is mindful that unmet housing requirements from neighbouring authorities must also be considered and this is addressed in the Local Plan through Core Policy 2. On this basis, the Council has sought to address housing need identified in the Oxfordshire SHMA only at a district level, which is consistent with other districts within Oxfordshire. For example, the approach taken by Cherwell District Council, which has recently been found to be 'sound' by an Independent Planning Inspector, is common with the approach taken by the Vale<sup>14</sup>.
- 5.1.16 The Council has also made a firm commitment to a Joint Strategic Green Belt Review with neighbouring authorities within the Oxfordshire Housing Market

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<sup>12</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP18** – Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Brandon Lewis) (2015) House of Commons Written Statement (HLWS163) Local Plans.  
Available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-vote-office/July%202015/21%20July/8-Communities-and-Local-Government-Local-Plans.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> PINS – para 43 (2014) Rushcliffe Borough Council Local Plan Part 1, Rushcliffe Core Strategy, Inspector's Report.  
Available at: <http://www.rushcliffe.gov.uk/media/rushcliffe/media/documents/pdf/councilanddemocracy/2014/december/11decembercouncil/Apendix%201%20Inspectors%20Report.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP13** – PINS (2015) Cherwell District Council Local Plan, Inspector's Report.  
Available at: [http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/media/pdf/d/9/Cherwell\\_Local\\_Plan\\_Inspector's\\_Report\\_with\\_Main\\_Modifications\\_2015.pdf](http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/media/pdf/d/9/Cherwell_Local_Plan_Inspector's_Report_with_Main_Modifications_2015.pdf)

Area (HMA) through Core Policy 2. This will ensure that a positive and collaborate approach is taken to fully addressing the overall needs of the county.

### **Release of Sites from the Green Belt**

5.1.17 The designation of the Oxford Green Belt has had a long standing history from 1955 onwards. The inner boundaries were reviewed through the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016, adopted in October 2005 (LNP07) and recommended for consideration through the Local Plan process.

5.1.18 The NPPF states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to ‘prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence’<sup>15</sup>. The NPPF states that Green Belt serves five purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns, and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land<sup>16</sup>.

A Green Belt Review was undertaken between October 2013 and February 2014 in accordance with national policy and the Council considers that the Green Belt Review has been undertaken in compliance with the most recent government guidance<sup>17</sup>.

5.1.19 The Green Belt Review was carried out in three phases:

- Phase 1 – assessment of the land around the main settlements (inset to the Green Belt) against the five purposes of the Green Belt as set out in para 80 of the NPPF

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<sup>15</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 76 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.

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<sup>16</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 80 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.

Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> **EIP Library Ref: NAT03** – Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd / Terra Firma Consultancy (2014) Vale of White Horse District Council Green Belt Review Phase 3 Report.

Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454436432&CODE=D482A1D945EC4DCFBA22044482C528A1](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454436432&CODE=D482A1D945EC4DCFBA22044482C528A1)

- Phase 2 – assessment of the remainder of the land in the Green Belt examining the other settlements, and whether they contribute to the openness and open character of the Green Belt, and
- Phase 3 – more detailed examination of the areas suggested for release in Phase 1, setting out the boundaries for the sites to be released.

5.1.20 The Review started with an analysis of the history of the designation of the Oxford Green Belt and those attributes that were identified during the process from 1955 to most recent Inspector’s appeal decisions. It is clear that attributes included, in addition to the openness of the land at the time, views to historic Oxford and the historic settlement pattern, the surrounding hills, and the River Thames Valley.

5.1.21 In accordance with the NPPF, paras 83 and 85, the Review sought to establish defensible Green Belt boundaries as part of the Local Plan process. The Green Belt boundaries proposed in the Local Plan are based on this guidance.<sup>18</sup>

5.1.22 The Council considers that the methodology and approach to the alteration to the Green Belt boundaries through the Local Plan is soundly based and justified.

### **Delivering Sustainable Development**

5.1.23 The presumption is favour of sustainable development lies at the heart of the NPPF and should be seen as a ‘golden thread’ running through both plan-making and decision-taking. The Core planning principles set out within the NPPF, include for example that they should:

- make every effort to ‘identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth
- promote mixed use developments, and encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban areas, and
- actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable<sup>19</sup>.

5.1.24 In relation to drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the NPPF states that local planning authorities ‘should take account of the need to promote

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<sup>18</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 85 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.  
Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 17 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.  
Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

sustainable patterns of development' and when defining boundaries, local planning authorities should 'ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development'<sup>20</sup>.

- 5.1.25 The Council have undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the reasonable and realistic development opportunities across the district, as evidenced by the Strategic Site Selection Topic Paper<sup>21</sup> and Sustainability Appraisal Report<sup>22</sup>.
- 5.1.26 On this basis, the findings from the Green Belt Review, a robust site selection methodology, and informed by other technical evidence and policy constraints, have enabled the Council to select the most sustainable mix of strategic sites for allocation in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1.
- 5.1.27 The Council is only proposing four strategic allocations that are located on land currently designated as Green Belt. These are all located within the Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe Sub-Area, which has strong links with the city of Oxford and is considered by the Council to be a highly sustainable location for development.
- 5.1.28 The areas identified are appropriate for release from the Green Belt, they adjoin some of the most sustainable settlements within the Vale; the Market Town of Abingdon-on-Thames and the Larger Villages of Kennington and Radley. These sites all relate well to Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford City and benefit from good public transport connectivity to higher order services, facilities and a range of employment opportunities. Furthermore, the sites selected are not only highly consistent with the Council's Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Strategy there is also a lack of alternatives of comparable sustainability.
- 5.1.29 Recent Census data has indicated that compared to the neighbouring districts within Oxfordshire, the Vale of White Horse has the highest car dependency. In terms of travelling to work, cars are used for over 80% for inbound journeys, 65% of movements within the District and 72% for outbound journeys as at 2011<sup>23</sup>. In order to minimise car dependency in accordance

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<sup>20</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 84 and 85 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.

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<sup>21</sup> **EIP Library Ref: TOP09** – Vale of White Horse District Council (2014) Topic Paper 9: The Natural Environment.

Available at:

[http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454436564&CODE=AB46179604A09A0F73F5DCAD64639281](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454436564&CODE=AB46179604A09A0F73F5DCAD64639281)

<sup>22</sup> **EIP Library Ref: DLP04** – URS Infrastructure & Environment UK Ltd (2015). Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Vale of White Horse District Local Plan 2031 Part One. Available at:

[http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=447617212&CODE=3A803AFD84F14E5815E22389971ABEDB](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=447617212&CODE=3A803AFD84F14E5815E22389971ABEDB)

<sup>23</sup> Oxfordshire County Council Research and Intelligence Team, the District Data Analysis Service and Oxford City Council (2014) Commuting by mode of travel, 2011

with national policy, specifically paragraph 17 of the NPPF, the Council is proposing development in sustainable locations close to where the need arises, where it is accessible to employment and to sustainable forms of transport.

- 5.1.30 An important component of supporting sustainable development is the delivery of infrastructure<sup>24</sup>. It is therefore important the strategic allocations make appropriate contributions towards infrastructure delivery as part of the overall Spatial Strategy for the district and in accordance with national policy. All four strategic sites located on land currently designated within the Green Belt are proposed to make contributions towards a range of essential infrastructure including for education and highways. Of particular note is the contribution these sites will make (c. £4 Millions) towards the delivery of south facing slips at the Lodge Hill A 34 interchange in accordance with the Councils Infrastructure Delivery Plan and the County Councils Local Transport Plan 4. An upgrade to the Lodge Hill Interchange has been identified as a strategic priority within the Oxford Transport Strategy.<sup>25, 26</sup>
- 5.1.31 On this basis, the sites selected, in addition to the points already made above, will make a significant contribution to the delivery of significant infrastructure, identified as critical within the wider Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan 4 and thus further strengthening the delivery of sustainable development.

## Conclusion

- 5.1.32 The Council considers that there are exceptional circumstances which in combination justify the alteration of the Oxford Green Belt. There is a clear requirement for the authority to meet objectively assessed need and promote sustainable development. The Council considers that the approach towards the review of the Oxford Green Belt is robust and in compliance with the NPPF.
- 5.1.33 The Council considers that the alterations to the Green Belt boundaries through the Local Plan Review, are soundly based and justified in accordance with national policy.

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Available at: [http://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/system/files/documents/TTWmode\\_Oct14\\_FINAL.pdf](http://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/system/files/documents/TTWmode_Oct14_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** – Department for Communities and Local Government – para 17 (2012) The National Planning Policy Framework.

Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> **EIP Library Ref: DLP07** – Vale of White Horse District Council (2015) Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

Available at:

[http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454436231&CODE=03369568B89589563F211C327DED F621](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454436231&CODE=03369568B89589563F211C327DED F621)

<sup>26</sup> **EIP Library Ref: TRA10** – Oxfordshire County Council (2015) Connecting Oxfordshire: Local Transport Plan 2015-2031.

Available at: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/local-transport-plan-ltp4>

## 5.2. AONB

- 5.2.1 The Council considers that there are very strong exceptional circumstances to justify its proposals for development within the North Wessex Downs AONB and that these proposals are soundly based.
- 5.2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) makes it clear that ‘great weight’ should be given to conserving Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), ‘which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty’<sup>27</sup>.
- 5.2.3 The Council fully supports the principle of protecting the AONB and recognises the significant benefit the North Wessex Downs brings to the Vale; indeed, it is one of the reasons the Vale is such an attractive and popular place for people to live and work. Furthermore, the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 includes *Core Policy 44: Landscape*, which seeks to protect key landscape features, including the AONB<sup>28</sup>. The Council has also adopted the AONB Management Plan, which seeks to maintain and enhance the distinctive landscape character of the North Wessex Downs AONB<sup>29</sup>.
- 5.2.4 However, the NPPF also makes provision for development within the AONB in ‘exceptional circumstances’ where the proposals can be demonstrated to be in the ‘public interest’<sup>30</sup>. The NPPF states that considerations for applications for development within the AONB should include an assessment of:
- “The need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy”
  - “The cost of, and scope for, development elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way”, and
  - “Any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities and the extent to which that could be moderated”<sup>31</sup>.
- 5.2.5 The Council is proposing two strategic development allocations within the AONB at Harwell Campus. These are for 550 homes at North-West Harwell Campus and for 850 homes at East of Harwell Campus. This Statement sets

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<sup>27</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** - Department for Communities and Local Government (2012). National Planning Framework Policy – Paragraph 115. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454435957&CODE=D783542CC637214444B18CC070629BE5](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454435957&CODE=D783542CC637214444B18CC070629BE5)

<sup>28</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02**. Department for Communities and Local Government (2012). National Planning Framework Policy – pg 124 Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454435957&CODE=D783542CC637214444B18CC070629BE5](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454435957&CODE=D783542CC637214444B18CC070629BE5)

<sup>29</sup> North Wessex Downs (2014). North Wessex Downs Management Plan 2014-19. Available at: <http://democratic.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/documents/s24554/North%20Wessex%20Downs%20AONB%20Management%20Plan%202014-19%20f.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** - Department for Communities and Local Government (2012). National Planning Framework Policy – Paragraph 116. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454435957&CODE=D783542CC637214444B18CC070629BE5](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454435957&CODE=D783542CC637214444B18CC070629BE5)

<sup>31</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** - Department for Communities and Local Government (2012). National Planning Framework Policy – Paragraph 116. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454435957&CODE=D783542CC637214444B18CC070629BE5](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454435957&CODE=D783542CC637214444B18CC070629BE5)

out the exceptional circumstances, which justify this development within the AONB and is structured around the criteria set out in the NPPF (outlined above).

### **A. The need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy**

- 5.2.6 Harwell Campus was designated as an Enterprise Zone in 2011<sup>32</sup>. It is an internationally significant centre for scientific research and innovation, is already one of the most successful science hotspots in the UK, and houses 13 % of research and employment development in the South East<sup>33</sup>. The Campus is one of the main sites within Science Vale, the southern part of the 'Oxfordshire Knowledge Spine'; it forms a key focus for the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan<sup>34</sup>. Around 5,000 individuals are already employed on site and this is set to double during the plan period up to 2031<sup>35</sup>. The site consists of around 290 ha, having evolved from a wartime airfield and has benefited from approximately £1 billion of investment.
- 5.2.7 The science and innovation that takes place here is nationally significant and is at the core of the UK's strategy for growth and a pillar of strength for the UK economy. This is demonstrated by the internationally important organisations and facilities that are located on site, which include; the European Space Agency, the Science and Facilities Council's Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, the Diamond Light Source (the national synchrotron that can project light as much as 100 billion times brighter than the sun) and ISIS, the world's most powerful pulsed neutron source. Harwell Campus has also been identified as the focal point for the UK space sector acting as the 'UK Space Gateway'. The UK Space Agency have clear targets to 'maximise the value of the Space Gateway as a focal point to support growth across the UK'<sup>36</sup> George Osborne MP, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer has said:

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<sup>32</sup> **EIP Library Ref DLPO1** - Vale of White Horse District Council (2014) Draft Local Plan 2031 Part1. Available at: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-10-27%2001%20VOWHDC%20Local%20Plan%202031%20Contents-Chapters%201.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> **EIP Library Ref: ECO10** - Oxfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan (2014) Oxfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan Driving Economic Growth Through Innovation. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=447617072&CODE=AAC65B5B887900C828455DC421E EA552](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=447617072&CODE=AAC65B5B887900C828455DC421E EA552)

<sup>34</sup> **EIP Library Ref: ECO10** - Oxfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan (2014) Oxfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan Driving Economic Growth Through Innovation. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=447617072&CODE=AAC65B5B887900C828455DC421E EA552](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=447617072&CODE=AAC65B5B887900C828455DC421E EA552)

<sup>35</sup> **EIP Library Ref: ECO10** - Oxfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan (2014) Oxfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan Driving Economic Growth Through Innovation. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=447617072&CODE=AAC65B5B887900C828455DC421E EA552](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=447617072&CODE=AAC65B5B887900C828455DC421E EA552)

<sup>36</sup> UK Space Agency (2015) UK Space Agency Corporate Plan 2015-16. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/419980/Final\\_Corporate\\_Plan\\_format\\_2015-16\\_pages.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419980/Final_Corporate_Plan_format_2015-16_pages.pdf)

“The Science Vale Enterprise Zone will harness the region’s unparalleled research and development base to create a wealth of innovative and high growth business. The region is home to some of the newest and fastest growing businesses in high performance engineering biotechnology and medical instruments, and the Science Vale Enterprise Zone provides the opportunity to unlock the region’s full potential”.<sup>37</sup>

5.2.8 It has been demonstrated in the Council’s Statement 3<sup>38</sup> how sound and robust the proposed distribution of housing is overall. The focus on the Science Vale locality is strongly consistent with the Oxford and Oxfordshire City Deal, the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, the Local Transport Plan 4 and the Government’s own Economic Strategy. These all rely on accelerated housing delivery, which is ‘fundamental’ to support innovation led growth<sup>39</sup> and Science Vale is the focus of over £300 million of investment into significant infrastructure<sup>40</sup>.

5.2.9 On this basis, it can be seen that there is an exceptional case for focusing housing growth within Science Vale. However, there are also numerous reasons for proposing to locate development specifically at Harwell Campus. These are:

### **1) Innovation Village**

5.2.10 Locating new housing specifically at Harwell Campus provides an opportunity to create an innovative form of development; where high quality research and employment uses come together with a mix of services and facilities and housing to support an attractive and highly sustainable lifestyle. This approach is referred to as an ‘innovation village’ and has already seen success in the US, for example at the Rayleigh Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, where a conventional business park has been transformed into a mixed-use walkable hub.

### **2) Unique housing requirement at Harwell Campus**

5.2.11 Harwell Campus is an internationally significant centre for research and innovation. It therefore has a high proportion of both international and academic staff, who will work on site for fixed periods of time, and who have a need for accommodation that can be easily accessed and that is affordable. Scientific research is often funded on a fixed-term basis and will be carried out

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<sup>37</sup> [www.sciencevale.com](http://www.sciencevale.com)

<sup>38</sup> EIP Library Ref: Vale of White Horse District Council (2015). Stage 1 – Main Strategic Issues. Matter 3 – Spatial Strategy and Housing Supply Ring Fence. Available at:

<sup>39</sup> **EIP Library Ref: ECO10** - Oxfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan (2014) Oxfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan Driving Economic Growth Through Innovation. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=447617072&CODE=AAC65B5B887900C828455DC421EEA552](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=447617072&CODE=AAC65B5B887900C828455DC421EEA552)

<sup>40</sup> **EIP Library Ref: DLP07** - Vale of White Horse District Council. (2014) Vale of White Horse District Council Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454436231&CODE=03369568B89589563F211C327DEDF621](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454436231&CODE=03369568B89589563F211C327DEDF621)

by post-graduate or post-doctoral researchers. This combination leads to a transient workforce who do not have unlimited funding for accommodation.

- 5.2.12 It can therefore be seen that the type of accommodation needed at Harwell Campus is different to a standard housing estate. The mix of accommodation at this site needs to include a higher proportion of smaller and also private rental dwellings.

### 3) Sustainability

- 5.2.13 Over 5,000 new jobs are projected at Harwell Campus during the plan period<sup>41</sup>. If there are greater opportunities for people to live and work in close proximity, especially if an attractive mixed-use community is developed (as described above), then clearly this will help to reduce the need to travel and provide for a more sustainable pattern of living overall.
- 5.2.14 It is worth stating that Harwell Campus exists in a semi-rural location, it has evolved over several decades from a wartime airfield, through a world leading location for research and development of nuclear energy; to its current position as an internationally significant centre for research and innovation. The campus has benefited from significant investment and it is simply impractical to suggest that it could, or should, be re-located. It has been clearly stated above the significance of its current role at a strategic Oxfordshire and national level.
- 5.2.15 It is therefore essential the Council not only fully recognises the role of Harwell Campus within its strategic planning, but also seeks to maximise the opportunities for the site to be and to be made sustainable in accordance with the NPPF.<sup>42</sup>

### 4) Market factors

- 5.2.16 It has been demonstrated within the Councils Statement 3, that the identified housing need within Science Vale is being 'fully' met by the proposed distribution of housing set out in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (10,320 houses up to 2031)<sup>43</sup>. This is a challenging housing target, however the council have worked hard to ensure the proposed distribution of housing is deliverable. The 'Meeting the Objectively Assessed Need for Housing Report (October 2014) makes it clear that the councils approach to housing delivery, principally the

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<sup>41</sup> **EIP Library Ref: HOU2** - GL Hearn Ltd. (2014) Science Vale Housing and Employment Study. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454436530&CODE=18AD275F4CA886532CA39D55D2EE17C9](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454436530&CODE=18AD275F4CA886532CA39D55D2EE17C9)

<sup>42</sup> **EIP Library Ref: LNP02** - Department for Communities and Local Government (2012). National Planning Framework Policy – Paragraph 17. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454435957&CODE=D783542CC637214444B18CC070629BE5](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454435957&CODE=D783542CC637214444B18CC070629BE5)

<sup>43</sup> **EIP Library Ref: HOU2** - GL Hearn Ltd. (2014) Science Vale Housing and Employment Study. Available at: [http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=454436530&CODE=18AD275F4CA886532CA39D55D2EE17C9](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=454436530&CODE=18AD275F4CA886532CA39D55D2EE17C9)

'wide range of sites in a range of locations', that 'the council will be maximising the likelihood of delivery'<sup>44</sup>.

- 5.2.17 Given the size of the housing target for the Science Vale locality and the limited number of alternative site options available, and because there are some market capacity issues, particularly at Didcot, there are no more appropriate, sustainable and deliverable options for locating the housing proposed at Harwell Campus. . Therefore seeking to relocate the housing would significantly jeopardise the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan and the wider Government Economic Plan to deliver innovation-led growth at such an important site.
- 5.2.18 The Council is aware that a proposal has been made to locate housing within the existing Harwell Campus site on Enterprise Zone designated land. The Council do not consider this proposal to be either a reasonable or realistic alternative; the Enterprise Zone has been designated for a specific purpose, to support innovation led growth, and forms part of the Government's Economic Strategy (discussed further above). The use of Enterprise Zone land for housing would lead to significant harm to the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, the Government's Economic Strategy and the ability of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to generate EZ Business Rate income, which is essential for delivering critical infrastructure.

## **B. The cost of, and scope for, development elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other wa**

### **1) Innovation Village**

- 5.2.19 It would clearly be impossible to develop a mixed-use community at the Harwell Campus site, if the housing was provided elsewhere. Providing new and additional services and facilities on site without housing would not deliver a sustainable community and may attract more visitors to the site who would need to commute from elsewhere.

### **2) Unique housing requirement at Harwell Campus**

- 5.2.20 Whilst the unique housing requirement for Harwell Campus could be provided offsite, there are clear advantages for onsite provision. These are largely covered by the 'innovation village' and sustainability comments outlined in the rest of this section.

### **3) Sustainability**

- 5.2.21 If the new housing was provided offsite, then clearly this would force the new workforce of over 5,000 to commute from elsewhere. The Council are

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<sup>44</sup> EIP Library Ref: HOU09 - Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Including Contingency Sites. Available at: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/Main.jsp?MODULE=FolderView&ID=447616683&CODE=EC06F74F1E609C82DC820516FCFD8850&NAME=07+HOU+-+Housing&REF=LOCAL%20PLAN%202031%20PART%201%20EXAMINATION%20LIBRARY>

supporting a significant package of transport infrastructure including improvements to cycle routes and to public transport, but it is still appropriate to seek to minimise the need to travel, in accordance with the NPPF.

#### 4) Market factors

- 5.2.22 Not meeting the housing need within Science Vale would jeopardise the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan as housing delivery is critical to the delivery of innovation-led growth. This matter is discussed further with the Councils Statement 3.

#### **Any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities and the extent to which that could be moderated**

- 5.2.23 The Council fully understands the importance of the North Wessex Downs AONB and the need to protect it. The selection of sites for inclusion within the Local Plan has been informed by detailed evidence including a Landscape Capacity Study and a Landscape and Visual Impact Study (LVIA) for Harwell Campus.
- 5.2.24 The Housing Delivery Update consultation, published in February 2014 proposed a development to the East of Harwell Campus for 1,400 dwellings up to 2031 with the potential for a further 2,000 dwellings beyond 2031<sup>45</sup>. Although this proposal had been informed by a Landscape Capacity Study, the Council took the view at this time that the exceptional circumstances for developing at Harwell Campus, outweighed landscape impact on this site.
- 5.2.25 However, since the Housing Delivery Update consultation, the Council commissioned a detailed LVIA for Harwell Campus, which has since been updated<sup>46</sup>. This work looked in detail at individual parcels of land surrounding the campus and also considered what mitigation may be appropriate if development were to go forward.
- 5.2.26 As a result of the LVIA work, the Council reduced the scale of proposed development at Harwell Campus and reconfigured the allocation. This was to maximise the use of land that had the least landscape sensitivity, to avoid any development on land that had greatest landscape sensitivity and to maximise the benefit of the proposed mitigation. The revised proposal was set out within the Submission Local Plan, published in November 2014<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> EIP Library Ref: PLP01.1 - Vale of White Horse District Council (2014) Housing Delivery Update. Available at: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/Main.jsp?MODULE=FolderView&ID=447616804&CODE=9D678083F76D9248381CEB55B9CB7C4C&NAME=PLP01.1+Local+Plan+2031+Housing+Delivery+Update+Supporting+Paper&REF=LOCAL%20PLAN%202031%20PART%201%20EXAMINATION%20LIBRARY>

<sup>46</sup> EIP Library Ref: NAT04 – Vale of White Horse District Council. Landscape Study: Phase 1 Landscape Assessment of Eight Additional Contingency Housing Sites at East Hanney, Kingston Bagpuize, Harwell Oxford Campus, Proposed Oxford Garden City Site, South Shrivenham and South Radley. Available at: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/Main.jsp?MODULE=FolderView&ID=447617302&CODE=F00FD723B30B30D1B1170868C946573F&NAME=NAT04+Landscape+Study&REF=LOCAL%20PLAN%202031%20PART%201%20EXAMINATION%20LIBRARY>

<sup>47</sup> EIP Library Ref DLP01 - Vale of White Horse District Council (2014) Draft Local Plan 2031 Part1. Available at: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-10-27%2001%20VOWHDC%20Local%20>

5.2.27 The LVIA concluded, for example, that in relation to the Councils final proposal, that:

- “The most sensitive areas would be retained as agricultural land”
- “The separation between Harwell Campus and Didcot when viewed from the Ridgeway would be maintained in part”
- the significance of the impacts caused by inclusion of areas with landscape sensitivity (to the east of the area proposed for residential development) ‘would be significantly reduced if these areas were used as the location for such uses as a school and/or informal public open space’
- “The mitigation strategy would reduce the visibility of the development at maturity (20 years)”, and
- by allocating land to the east of that proposed for residential development for open space, education or recreation, these alternative land uses would ‘have lower impacts on the surrounding landscape than housing development within these areas and would form a transitional landscape between the agricultural fields’ and the housing<sup>48</sup>.

5.2.28 Overall, it was considered that whilst the character of the AONB would change, the changes, subject to an appropriate landscape mitigation strategy, would be compatible with the AONB management plan and would not constitute substantial harm to the wider AONB landscape. Furthermore, the AONB Management Plan sets the following objective, under its ‘development’ heading which the proposals align with:

“To encourage appropriate sustainable development to jointly achieve economic, social and environmental benefits through the planning system in the context of a nationally protected landscape”.<sup>49</sup>

5.2.29 It can therefore be seen that the Council have worked hard, through an iterative plan making process, to continue to refine and improve the Local Plan and ensure its strategy is the most effective overall.

5.2.30 There is no question of the importance of the Harwell Campus site and the justification for development within the Science Vale locality is very strong. The Council believe that there are a number of very important exceptional circumstances to justify development at Harwell Campus, but despite this, that the proposed development would not lead to significant harm to the AONB landscape.

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<sup>48</sup> **EIP Library Ref: NAT04** – Vale of White Horse District Council. Landscape Study: Phase 1 Landscape Assessment of Eight Additional Contingency Housing Sites at East Hanney, Kingston Bagpuize, Harwell Oxford Campus, Proposed Oxford Garden City Site, South Shrivenham and South Radley. Available at: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/Main.jsp?MODULE=FolderView&ID=447617302&CODE=F00FD723B30B30D1B1170868C946573F&NAME=NAT04+Landscape+Study&REF=LOCAL%20PLAN%202031%20PART%201%20EXAMINATION%20LIBRARY>

<sup>49</sup> North Wessex Downs (2014). North Wessex Downs Management Plan 2014-19. Available at: <http://democratic.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/documents/s24554/North%20Wessex%20Downs%20AONB%20Management%20Plan%202014-19%20f.pdf>