

# ***THE ECONOMY OF THE VALE***

## **INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING CONTEXT**

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- 11.1 The Local Plan will provide the land use planning framework for business and other employment-generating development in the Vale over the period to 2011. The Plan will help to shape the local economy and will become a key element in the maintenance of the district's economic well-being. Chapter 2 of the Local Plan, *The Future Of The Vale to 2011*, contains seven aims for the Plan, the fifth being 'to encourage a strong and sustainable economy which is beneficial to all who live in, work in, or visit the Vale'. This is also one of the Council's objectives. The planning system can help to create the right conditions in which businesses can thrive and prosper, consistent with the principles of sustainable development, outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 of the Local Plan. In this respect one of the main challenges for the Plan is to achieve the right balance between ensuring that opportunities continue to exist for business and employment growth sufficient to meet local needs, whilst safeguarding the Vale's environment against potentially damaging development.
- 11.2 The Vale of White Horse is an attractive location for business by virtue of its location, lying between major centres of population and being on, or close to, important communication links. Swindon is located just to the south-west, Oxford to the north-east and Reading close to the south-east. The line of the A34 trunk road runs north-south through the Vale, linking the Solent ports with the midlands, and the M4 motorway runs just to the south of the district. There are excellent links with London by road via the M4 (north of Newbury) and M40 (east of Oxford), and by rail at Didcot. The district benefits particularly from its location close to Oxford in terms of the influence of education and research facilities at Oxford University and also from the city's industrial base, which includes car manufacturing at Cowley and clusters of high tech and research based companies. The Vale is also attractive as a location for business in its own right due to the quality of the natural and built environment, which includes part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and numerous historic market towns and villages.
- 11.3 Journey to work patterns have become increasingly complex over the last 20 years reflecting changes in working practices and increased job mobility, as well as a greater acceptance of travelling longer distances for employment. The 1991 Census suggested that although the majority of residents (62%) worked within the Vale, a significant proportion of local residents travelled outside the district boundary to their place of work (including 19% travelling to Oxford, 9% to other Oxfordshire districts, 2.5% to Berkshire and 2.4% to London). This position may

alter over time and new trends may emerge such as increased working at home. Such trends will be important in considering future planning and economic policies for the district.

- 11.4 Since 1991 the Vale's economy has continued to perform well, showing consistently low levels of unemployment, averaging under 1.5%. Between March 2000 and February 2001 the working-age employment rate in the Vale was 83% compared with 80% in the South East and 74% in the UK. Furthermore, the Vale has a relatively highly skilled workforce, as indicated by figures for the same period, which showed that the proportion of the working-age population who had attained National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 or above was 55% compared with 45% in the South East and 41% in the UK (National Statistics). This corresponds with a change in the employment structure resulting in an increased importance of four key areas: knowledge based industries (including science and research based operations), the service sector (including growth in banking, finance and insurance), specialist manufacturing (including the production of medical instruments and laser technology) and leisure industries (including recreation and tourism).
- 11.5 Business and industry have been accommodated on a wide variety of sites throughout the district, ranging from the prestigious 77 hectare Milton Park development west of Didcot to small rural sites. Specific provision has been made for research and technology enterprises on the Abingdon Science Park and the Council has encouraged the re-use and redevelopment of older industrial sites for new purposes, for example the former MG car site in Abingdon, which is now thriving as the Abingdon Business Park, and the Minns industrial estate at Botley, which is being transformed into a development of high quality office and other business floorspace under a new name, 'Oxford West'. The district is also home to a number of major national and international companies and organisations, some of which (for example, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory at the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus and the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham and the Joint Service Command & Staff College at Watchfield) occupy extensive campus sites set in the heart of the Vale's countryside. In addition there are colleges elsewhere in the Vale including Abingdon and Witney College, Westminster Institute of Education (part of Oxford Brookes University) Templeton College (part of Oxford University) and Cranfield, together with many schools (both publicly funded and private) all of which make a significant contribution to the local economy.
- 11.6 Overall, therefore, opportunities for business development and enterprise in the Vale have been maintained and the economy of the district has remained in good health. In preparing and publishing the Local Plan the Council has been conscious of the need to ensure that this situation will continue. The policies in this chapter will need to take account of changing guidance from central government in the form of planning policy statements (PPSs), together with

Regional Guidance for South East England and the strategy of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. In addition, the Vale's own Economic Development Strategy will be an important consideration, together with background work undertaken on employment issues, and also views expressed in response to the Local Plan Issues Report and the questionnaire published in the Council's *Vale Views* newsletter.

### **Planning Guidance from Central Government**

- 11.7 The government's advice to planning authorities on matters relating to employment and business development is contained largely in three planning policy guidance notes: PPG4: *Industrial and Commercial Development and Small Firms* published by the Department of the Environment in November 1992; PPS7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*, published in 2004; and PPG12: *Development Plans*, published in December 1999. Having regard to local circumstances, the following elements of the government's advice appear to be of particular relevance to the Vale:
- i) economic growth and a high quality environment have to be pursued together. The government's environment white paper *This Common Inheritance* emphasises that 'Economic growth is not an end in itself. It provides us with the means to lead better fuller lives. There is no contradiction in arguing both for economic growth and for environmental good sense. The challenge is to integrate the two'. Development plans provide the policy framework through which this integration can be attempted;
  - ii) local and other development plans should give industrial and commercial developers and local communities greater certainty about the types of development that will or will not be allowed in a given location;
  - iii) in allocating land for industry and commerce planning authorities should be realistic in their assessment of the needs of business. They should aim to ensure that sufficient land is available, readily capable of development, well served by infrastructure and on a variety of sites suited to differing needs;
  - iv) local and other development plans offer the opportunity to encourage new development where it will minimise the need to travel by motor vehicle; where it can be served by more energy-efficient modes of transport; and where it would not add unacceptably to congestion; and
  - v) bringing under-used or vacant land back into beneficial use is important to the regeneration of towns. Optimum use should be made of such land and local planning authorities should identify appropriate areas and indicate alternative uses, including industry and commerce.

## Regional Guidance

11.8 The approved *Regional Planning Guidance for the South East* (RPG9) was published in March 2001. The main policies of relevance to the roll forward of the Local Plan require the Council to:

- i) take full account of emerging local economic strategies, which will need to reflect total capacity in terms of labour, land availability and transport infrastructure, build upon local strengths, including skills, local research strengths and strong business clusters, and should reflect changing work and living patterns;
- ii) reduce business-related travel, for example, ensuring that businesses are located in areas well served or capable of being well served by sustainable modes of transport and requiring travel plans for all substantial new travel generating development;
- iii) encourage forms of development which maximise environmental and social benefits, for example mixed-use development which links housing and employment;
- iv) allocate employment land within an overall strategy for urban renaissance (the revival and rejuvenation of cities and towns) and rural development, providing a range of premises and sites to meet the varied needs of business; and
- v) include policies and proposals which result from a review of existing and potential sites considering various factors including current use and scope for intensification, and scope for optimising the use of previously developed land.

11.9 Part of the Vale adjoins what in RPG9 is defined as the Thames Valley sub-region of the Western Policy Area. In this sub-region, policy RE8 of the guidance states that 'positive strategies should be developed for areas where congestion or labour or land shortages are constraining economic growth. "Hotspots" should be identified and specific policies developed to tackle problems'. This policy may have implications for the Local Plan, particularly in respect of policies for employment sites in the A34 corridor, for example Milton Park and the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus (the Harwell International Business Centre, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory and the Radiation Protection Division of the Health Protection Agency).

## **The Oxfordshire Structure Plan**

- 11.10 The general strategy of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan in its policy G1 includes restraining the overall level of development in the county to protect its environment, character and resources. Structure Plan policy E3 states that outside the main towns of Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney, the provision of land for employment-generating development will be restrained and limited to activities which do not give rise to excessive or inappropriate traffic.
- 11.11 The Structure Plan does not provide a figure for the amount of employment land to be provided in the Vale over the Plan period. For Abingdon, Faringdon, Wantage and Grove the Plan states that a limited amount of land for employment intensive development will be made available. For the rest of the district only small-scale employment proposals are to be allowed and then only in appropriate locations. The Plan requires the Council to take account of the need for employment provision in the Didcot area because the town is identified as a location for significant housing and employment growth. Although Didcot itself lies in South Oxfordshire, there are two major employment sites within the Vale close to Didcot, at Milton Park and the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, which provide jobs for some of the people living in the town.
- 11.12 In respect of rural areas the Structure Plan states that proposals for small-scale employment-generating development which support the diversification of the rural economy will normally be permitted in appropriate locations, taking particular account of the general need to reduce the need to travel by car. The conversion of existing rural buildings for employment-generating use will normally be permitted subject to criteria.

## **Regional and County Economic Development Strategies**

- 11.13 The Local Plan needs to take account of the regional economic strategy document produced by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) entitled *Building a World Class Region: Towards an Economic Strategy for the South-East of England*, which is aimed at enabling the South East to become competitive and improve economic prosperity while combating deprivation and enhancing environmental quality. Also relevant is *The Economic Development Strategy for Oxfordshire*, produced by the County Council which aims 'to encourage the development of a high wage, high skill, high value added economy which enhances and protects the quality of life of residents of Oxfordshire and enables them to fulfil their potential'.

## **The Vale's Economic Development Strategy**

- 11.14 The Council's *Economic Development Strategy* for 2001/2002 sets out a series of objectives to guide the Council's work on economic development, including the following requirements and actions which relate specifically to the Local Plan:

Requirement -	Ensure a good range of sites and premises are available for businesses.
Actions -	Monitor the amount, locations and marketability of sites identified for development and assess whether additional land should be made available through the Local Plan review.

- 11.15 This strategy has influenced the Local Plan in terms of the need for a range of policies to allow new sites to come forward and to retain existing key business sites. The strategy, in its area based programme, includes a requirement to promote the Wantage/Grove area as an economic sub-centre and in this respect the Local Plan includes policies aimed at strengthening the role of the Wantage/Grove area for business and employment opportunities.

### **Current Provision for Employment-generating Development in the Vale**

- 11.16 In considering whether additional land needs to be identified for business uses account needs to be taken of existing vacant sites identified in the Council's previously adopted Local Plan in all of the towns in the Vale, at Milton Park and on the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, as well as on a number of rural sites. In 2004 these vacant sites amounted to over 30 hectares.
- 11.17 There is also significant potential for the creation of jobs through the intensification, redevelopment and modernisation of existing employment sites in both the urban and rural areas of the Vale. For example, the respective landowners at Harwell and Milton Park have estimated that the redevelopment of existing land and buildings, plus the identified vacant land (see above), is likely to give an additional 2,500 jobs at each site by 2011. The major new synchrotron proposal at the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus is likely to bring an additional 200 jobs. There is further potential for the creation of jobs on non-business sites; for example the new Joint Services Command and Staff College at Watchfield will employ about 350 people. National trends also show that more people are working from home.
- 11.18 Didcot is the only 'country town' in the south of the county. Country towns are defined in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan to take significant housing and employment growth. Didcot is in South Oxfordshire adjoining the Vale and there are two major employment sites within the Vale close to Didcot at Milton Park and the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus which provide jobs for some of the town's residents. In making an overall assessment of the amount of employment land needed in the Vale, account should be taken of proposed development at Didcot. In this respect, South Oxfordshire District Council has estimated that there is potential for about 2,500 additional jobs in the Didcot area within its district which, added to the potential at the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus and Milton Park (see above), gives a forecast of 7,500 jobs.

This will meet the needs of the occupiers of the new housing at Didcot during the Plan period, without the requirement to release additional employment land.

- 11.19 The Council believes that across the district as a whole the amount of vacant business land currently available, the capacity of large employment areas to increase their workforce through regeneration and modernisation and the opportunities for employment provision on non-business sites (for example in town centres and at educational establishments) will be sufficient to meet the needs of the Vale up to 2011. It is also considered sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the Structure Plan in respect of the Vale as a whole and the Didcot area.

#### **Local Plan Issues Report**

- 11.20 The Local Plan 2011 Issues Report, published in August 2000, in considering the employment needs of the Vale to 2011, identified two key issues:
- i) whether additional land needs to be identified and further jobs provided;
  - ii) the policies and proposals which will be appropriate in securing a strong and sustainable economy.
- 11.21 The respondents to the Issues Report and the questionnaire published in the Council's *Vale Views* newsletter were generally supportive of the Council's approach as described in paragraphs 11.16–11.19 above. In particular, of the people who responded to the questionnaire, 92% did not think it was necessary to identify additional land for employment use.
- 11.22 The Issues Report considered whether the Council should seek to resist the further loss of employment sites in the towns and asked whether there are any existing sites in villages which should remain in employment/industrial use. Most of the respondents considered that the further loss of employment sites should be resisted, as a good range of employment land is needed to ensure that settlements are sustainable, vibrant and attractive to inward investors.
- 11.23 Policies for new employment development in the rural areas were also considered. In this respect the Issues Report asked whether the Council should continue to allow small-scale employment development within the larger villages but to resist new employment development in the smaller villages and countryside, apart from the conversion of existing buildings. The majority of respondents (86%) favoured allowing small-scale employment opportunities within the larger villages but the response was split almost 50/50 in terms of whether to continue with a restrictive approach in the smaller villages. Therefore the Council considers that it would be appropriate to restrict development in the smaller villages where they have infrequent or no public transport provision and there are few opportunities to live close to workplaces.

## POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

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### Sites for Business Development

- 11.24 This section of the Plan identifies specific sites in the Vale on which the District Council expects new industrial development to take place. Policies are set out to control the use of the sites in terms of the business use class or classes which are appropriate. Where appropriate the policies also control the form of the development likely to be permitted, including any site specific requirements, such as access arrangements or landscaping. The definition of business use for the purposes of the Local Plan is set out in the glossary.
- 11.25 An assessment has been undertaken which concludes that other than the sites identified in the following policies E1 to E8, there is no need to identify additional vacant sites in the district for business purposes (see paragraph 11.19 above). The Local Plan does, however, include a policy framework which seeks to retain existing key employment sites across the district. Under policies E10 to E12, proposals which would lead to the loss of existing business land and premises to other uses on these key sites will not be permitted other than ancillary uses under policy E13. Redevelopment for business purposes within these sites will be permitted subject to criteria set out in policies E1 to E8.

### The Main Settlements

#### Abingdon

- 11.26 There are currently vacant sites in three locations in the town which were identified for business purposes in the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan to 2001. These are: land at Abingdon Business Park and land at Abingdon Science Park. The Council considers that these areas should continue to be identified for business purposes and policies to control their future use are set out below. A further site at Thames View Industrial Estate has also been identified for partial redevelopment for business purposes.
- 11.27 **Abingdon Business Park** There are currently two vacant plots of land at Wyndyke Furlong in the north of Abingdon Business Park, a site of approximately 0.7 hectares to the north of Foxcombe Court, and an area of about 0.5 hectares in the north-western corner of the Park close to the junction between Wyndyke Furlong and Colwell Drive. These sites would both be suitable for B1, B2 or B8 uses. There is the possibility of land contamination at the Business Park as a result of previous activities and therefore site investigations prior to development will be necessary. The site in the north-western corner is immediately adjacent to a new building constructed for Swets Blackwell, a modern building of a



particularly high design standard. As part of the planning permission for Swets Blackwell there is a proposal for a new building on this site of a similar high standard of design.

- 11.28 **Abingdon Science Park** The 1983 Abingdon Local Plan allocated 8.1 hectares of land on the eastern edge of the town at Barton Lane for employment use. This site, now known as the Abingdon Science Park, has been developed progressively since that time, including about 2 hectares of the additional area allocated in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan to 2001. The current situation is that all of the remaining plots now have planning permission or are reserved for specific firms. Only one plot remains undeveloped and therefore continues to be identified in this Local Plan for business purposes.
- 11.29 The Science Park is geared strongly towards firms engaged in science and technology-related activities which require accommodation for research, design, production and administrative functions within one unit. The park has been designed as a low-density, high quality development in a parkland setting, and any new buildings will be required to be of a similar high standard of design with a strong emphasis on landscaping. In view of the above factors, the use of the site will be limited to 'light' business activities under class B1. As a former landfill site, site investigations prior to development will be necessary and development proposals will be required to include appropriate landfill gas control measures.
- 11.30 **Half of the Thames View Industrial Estate** Half of the Thames View Industrial Estate comprising the former Burgess premises and the smaller light industrial units abutting the Abbey Stream, is proposed for mixed housing and employment development. In the light of the current commercial market this is considered acceptable in the basis that 50% of the site is used for housing. It will be important that this development is designed comprehensively in order to make the most effective use of the site.

## **POLICY E1**

**NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN ABINGDON WILL BE PERMITTED AT THE FOLLOWING SITES SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP:**

- i) **ABINGDON BUSINESS PARK AT WYNDYKE FURLONG FOR B1, B2 AND B8 USES;**
- ii) **ABINGDON SCIENCE PARK AT BARTON LANE FOR B1 USES ONLY. WHERE APPROPRIATE PROPOSALS WILL NEED TO INCLUDE MEASURES FOR THE CONTROL OF LANDFILL GAS;**
- iii) **HALF OF THE THAMES VIEW INDUSTRIAL ESTATE SOUTH OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL CAR PARK FOR INDUSTRIAL USE, SUBJECT TO ANY B2 USES BEING**

**LOCATED SO AS NOT TO HARM THE AMENITY OF EXISTING OR PROSPECTIVE RESIDENTS, AS PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE SCHEME FOR A MIXED HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT.**

### **Botley Area**

- 11.31 **Cumnor Hill** A site of about 0.8 hectares in size was allocated in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2001 at Cumnor Hill for business development. Part of the site has now been developed as offices for the Timbmet Timber Yard immediately to the east of the site but there is a remaining area of vacant land which is suitable for new business units. The use of the site is limited to B1 purposes due to its location adjoining a residential area.
- 11.32 **North Hinksey** The Minns Business Park at West Way, Botley has planning permission for redevelopment for B1 office use. About two-thirds of this 1.5 hectare site has been developed or has detailed planning permission, leaving about one-third with outline permission. The use of the site has been restricted to Class B1 uses in view of its location close to residential properties.

### **POLICY E2**

**NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES IN THE BOTLEY AREA WILL BE PERMITTED AT THE FOLLOWING SITES SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP:**

- i) **CUMNOR HILL ON LAND TO THE WEST OF TIMBMET TIMBER YARD FOR B1 USE ONLY. PROPOSALS FOR OTHER USES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED;**
- ii) **MINNS BUSINESS PARK AT NORTH HINKSEY FOR B1 USE ONLY.**

### **Faringdon**

- 11.33 There are three sites which were originally identified for business purposes in the Faringdon Local Plan (1991) and were carried forward into the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan to 2001. These sites consist first of vacant land south of Willes Close and north of Pioneer Road and secondly vacant land north of Park Road. There is still land available at these sites, which is considered to be appropriate for business uses. The third site is a concrete processing and products plant in a quarry to the south of the town, where potential for redevelopment was recognised. However, this site is likely to remain in its current use for the lifetime of this plan and has not been carried forward into the second deposit plan. Two additional sites are identified for business use, the first on part of the former nursery between the town and the A420 and the second on land north of Park Road adjacent to the A420. These four sites will

provide the opportunity for additional employment development to meet the future needs of the Faringdon area, as set out below.

- 11.34 Land south of Willes Close and north of Pioneer Road** In the Vale of White Horse Local Plan to 2001, this site of about 1.3 hectares was described as land within the former Junior School Site. It has been re-named in this Plan as land south of Willes Close and north of Pioneer Road for ease of identification. The southern half of the site was granted planning permission in January 2002 for three class B1 industrial units with access from Pioneer Road and provision of a landscaped bund on the eastern boundary of the site to provide screening for the dwellings in Southampton Street and Berners Way. A requirement of policy E3 below is that a landscape buffer should also be provided between the site and the housing development to the north at Willes Close which will be protected as open space. Given its proximity to existing housing, development on this site will be restricted to small-scale business uses within class B1.
- 11.35 Land north of Park Road** A site of approximately 2.0 hectares in size, located on one of the most important approaches to the town, has now been partly developed for a B1 industrial unit and a new medical centre. There are two remaining strips of land which remain undeveloped on the site, an area to the east of existing industrial units on Pioneer Road and an area adjoining Park Road. It is appropriate that these remaining areas of land are identified in this Local Plan for business uses. However, in view of the proximity of the site to housing and the sensitivity of its location, the use of the site is restricted to B1 business uses and it is considered that businesses requiring significant provision of open storage are inappropriate in this area, especially on the southern part of the site along the frontage with Park Road. In this location development should be designed to enhance visually the approach to the town.
- 11.36 Land adjacent to Park Road and the A420.** This site is well located on the main approach road into Faringdon but is clearly visible from parts of the A420. It is essential that the development of this site is of a high standard of design, and that a landscape buffer is provided and maintained along the boundary of the site with the A420. This employment land does not fall within the area of comprehensive development applying to the proposed housing, employment (on part of the former nursery) and extension to Folly Park as also covered in the housing chapter proposed changes to policy H4(iv).
- 11.37 Land at the former nursery** This site is located on the edge of the town to the south of the Cricket Ground. B1 business uses will be permitted but only as part of a comprehensive scheme for housing, employment and open space in association with an extension to the Folly Park (see policies H4 and L13).

#### **POLICY E3**

**NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN FARINGDON WILL BE PERMITTED AT THE FOLLOWING SITES SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP:**

- i) SOUTH OF WILLES CLOSE AND NORTH OF PIONEER ROAD FOR B1 USE ONLY, WITH ACCESS FROM PIONEER ROAD. A LANDSCAPE BUFFER SHALL BE PROVIDED AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP AND DEVELOPERS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THAT ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE FOR ITS FUTURE MAINTENANCE;
- ii) NORTH OF PARK ROAD FOR B1 USE ONLY. OPEN STORAGE USE WILL NOT BE PERMITTED WHERE IT WOULD BE VISUALLY PROMINENT FROM PARK ROAD OR ADJOINING RESIDENTIAL AREAS;
- iii) PART OF THE FORMER NURSERY FOR B1 USE ONLY;
- iv) LAND ADJACENT TO PARK ROAD AND THE A420 BYPASS FOR B1 OR B2 EMPLOYMENT USE TO INCLUDE STRATEGIC LANDSCAPING AS GENERALLY SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP AND DEVELOPERS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THAT ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE FOR ITS FUTURE MAINTENANCE.

### **Wantage and Grove**

- 11.38 Wantage and Grove are the largest centres of population in the southern half of the Vale; however, in employment terms a significant proportion of the working residents from the two settlements travel elsewhere to their jobs, for example to the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, Milton Park near Didcot and to Abingdon and Oxford. Local employment is mainly focused on a small number of major companies operating from individual sites including Autotype, Crown Cork and Seal and Williams F1; and there are relatively few firms on business parks or industrial estate developments. The District Council has recognised that the employment base of Wantage and Grove should be protected and where possible widened as the local economy could be vulnerable to the loss of its few major employers. For this reason the Vale of White Horse Local Plan to 2001 identified land at Grove Technology Park for business purposes. The need to strengthen the economy of the Wantage and Grove area is still a priority, as identified in the District Council's Economic Development Strategy, and therefore this Local Plan continues to allocate all of the vacant land at Grove Technology Park for business uses. This site is considered in more detail below. In addition, this Local Plan introduces a new policy E10 which seeks to retain significant existing major business sites in the Wantage and Grove area to ensure that this current economic base is maintained into the future.
- 11.39 **Grove Technology Park** Policy E4 below confirms Grove Technology Park as the primary location for employment-generating development in the Wantage and Grove area, where accommodation can be provided for a variety of occupiers, including small firms and badly sited companies, who might wish to relocate from elsewhere in the locality.

- 11.40 Despite the improved connection between the site and the A338 associated with the construction of Mably Way, the A338 itself is a difficult road and provides a poor link to the trunk road network beyond. Traffic has either to be routed through the built-up area of Wantage to the south or negotiate the unsatisfactory section of the A338 to the north through Venn Mill and the A415 junction. The A417, which runs eastwards and westwards through Wantage, is also unsatisfactory in terms of linking Wantage and Grove to the trunk road network. In the absence of specific proposals in the County Council's highways programme to improve these roads, the District Council believes that goods vehicle movements on these routes should be kept to a minimum and therefore substantial development for warehousing and distribution (which would depend heavily on such movements) should not be encouraged on the Technology Park. For these reasons policy E4 limits B8 uses to a maximum of 1.6 hectares (this figure was agreed as part of the legal agreement for the development of the site), although business uses which incorporate an ancillary distribution function will generally not count towards the limit. Contributions may be sought to further improve the A338 and A417.
- 11.41 The Council is concerned that this large site is developed in a comprehensive manner. In this respect, being in an area of relatively flat and open countryside, the site would benefit from extensive landscaping and tree planting, particularly on its periphery.
- 11.42 Although policy H5 identifies the former airfield west of Grove as a strategic housing site where development will start after 1 April 2006, it is considered that land identified for business development at Grove Technology Park, as set out in policy E4 below, is sufficient to serve the Wantage and Grove area over the plan period to 2011. There is still at least 5 hectares of vacant land at the park which is available to accommodate the needs of firms, including local businesses wishing to expand. The park will provide jobs for local people as vacant sites within it are developed and employment opportunities will also continue to exist elsewhere, including other business sites in the area, and at shopping and commercial centres in Wantage and Grove. The local employment situation and availability of business land in the area will be monitored by the District Council and if necessary a future review of the Local Plan will identify additional land for business purposes.

#### **POLICY E4**

**NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN GROVE WILL BE PERMITTED AT GROVE TECHNOLOGY PARK AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP FOR B1 AND B2 USES. DEVELOPMENT FOR B8 USE (STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION) WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED ON UP TO 1.6 HA OF THE SITE IN TOTAL.**

## **The Didcot Area**

- 11.43 As explained earlier in this chapter the Local Plan needs to consider the requirement for business development in the Didcot area because the town is identified in the Structure Plan as a location for significant housing and employment growth. There are major business sites within the Vale close to Didcot, at Milton Park and the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, which provide jobs for some of the people living in the town. In assessing the town's future needs, the potential for employment growth on these sites must be borne in mind.
- 11.44 A review of the current provision of employment-generating development in the Didcot area has been undertaken, including vacant sites identified in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2001 which have not yet come forward for development. Taking into account these sites together with the likelihood of intensification of existing sites for business purposes and the potential for additional jobs in the Didcot area (in both the Vale and South Oxfordshire), the Council has concluded that there is no need to identify additional land in this new Local Plan. The Plan continues to identify vacant sites from the 2001 Plan at Milton Park, the Milton disused reservoir and the pumping station to the west of Didcot Power Station as locations suitable for business development.
- 11.45 There is a 64 hectare site immediately to the west of Didcot B Power Station which is owned by RWE Innogy (formerly National Power). Within this site there is an educational field centre, some existing business uses, including land in use for B8 (storage and distribution), B2 (general industrial) and open storage and also areas of vacant and underused land. Although RWE Innogy has indicated that these vacant and underused areas of land are surplus to their requirements, the Council is satisfied that proposals in this Local Plan and that of South Oxfordshire District Council already ensure that sufficient jobs should be generated in business and industry to meet the requirements of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan up to the year 2011 (see para 11.44 above). However, proposals for the redevelopment of buildings in existing business use on this site at Didcot Power Station would be acceptable subject to contributions towards necessary highway improvements which may be required, as specified by the County Council as highway authority, and other planning and environmental considerations.

### Milton Park

- 11.46 Situated to the south of Abingdon and north-west of Didcot, Milton Park is one of the largest employment sites in the Vale. It extends to about 77 hectares and is the largest concentration of business activities in Oxfordshire, managed and developed by a single owner. MEPC Ltd has now owned and operated Milton

Park for over 15 years under a number of different names, currently as MEPC Milton Park Ltd (MMPL). The site has been progressing as a business park for over thirty years and there remains scope for further redevelopment of areas currently occupied by older buildings, as well as new development on the vacant site to the south of the railway, for which planning permission for B1 business uses has been granted. There is the possibility of land contamination at Milton Park as a result of previous activities in the area, and therefore site investigations prior to development will be necessary.

- 11.47 The redevelopment of land at Milton Park has been generally in accordance with strategic and local planning policies, and also with MMPL's master plan which is well advanced. The character and appearance of the park has been transformed and substantially enhanced. A range of ancillary services and facilities has been provided to meet the needs of employees, including day-care facilities for young children, a gym and other health facilities, shops, banking facilities, and a café/restaurant. (Policy E13 will allow further ancillary facilities to be provided on the park, provided the proposals are small scale and designed to provide for employees on the site and not to attract users from a wider area.)
- 11.48 Both this Council and neighbouring South Oxfordshire District Council acknowledge the contribution Milton Park is making to the local economy and to Didcot's strategic role as a location for further employment-generating development. MMPL's annual census of companies revealed that in 2001 approximately 4,600 people were employed by about 140 businesses on the park. It is estimated that new development together with the redevelopment of sites could contribute a further 2,500 jobs by 2011. Policy E5 below recognises the on-going role of the park in providing accommodation for new and expanding businesses.
- 11.49 In recent years the pace of development has increased at the park, which has coincided with a greater awareness of the need for more sustainable forms of development. At the same time, significant increases in traffic on the local and strategic road networks have meant that transport issues and traffic impact of major development need to be considered and addressed with particular care.
- 11.50 In planning for future developments at Milton Park there is a clear need for opportunities to improve access to the site by all modes of transport to be assessed and exploited. Policy E5 therefore requires that development is in accordance with, and makes the necessary contributions to, a travel plan for the park (to be agreed with the District Council and Oxfordshire County Council as highway authority) with the aim of minimising car usage and increasing use of public transport, walking and cycling. The government, in Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: *Transport*, considers that travel plans should be submitted alongside planning applications which are likely to have significant transport implications, including those for major employment developments. Policy TR9 in Chapter 5 also refers to the requirement for travel plans.

- 11.51 The District Council and the highway authorities recognise that, having regard to developments already proposed and to the potential for further developments at Milton Park, improvements will be necessary to the strategic and local highway network, in particular the A34 at the Milton interchange and the A4130 to the south of the park. The requirements of Network Rail will also be relevant in respect of its involvement in improving road access to the Park which comes over the railway. The Council therefore intends to seek contributions from MMPL (or developers on the park) for such improvements in accordance with policy E5 below and also, in respect of the A34, policy TR3 in Chapter 5.
- 11.52 The landscape enhancement of the park began in the 1970s in a limited way but has been developed over time to become an integral and essential part of the park's development. There are now open areas of green space, segregated footways and a 'trim trail', networks of water channels and pools and plantations and rough grass areas, all of which provide the landscape framework of the site. In order to ensure that the park retains its character as a high quality environment for businesses, employees and visitors, policy E5 below seeks to retain, and increase where appropriate, areas of open space and landscaping including outdoor recreation areas. The policy seeks the retention of wildlife habitats and the creation of new habitats where appropriate.
- 11.53 An integrated transport strategy and travel management plan have been prepared for Milton Park, as well as a landscape strategy. DPDS Consulting on behalf of MMPL produced a draft development brief which proposed further guidance on these issues which the District Council and County Council (as highway authority) are considering.

#### **POLICY E5**

**WITHIN MILTON PARK, AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND THE REDEVELOPMENT OF LAND FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES WILL BE PERMITTED FOR B1, B2 AND B8 USES SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:**

- i) THE DEVELOPMENT IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH AND MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE TRAVEL PLAN FOR THE PARK TO MAKE THE NECESSARY CONTRIBUTIONS IN ORDER TO IMPLEMENT SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT INITIATIVES INCLUDING MINIMISING CAR USAGE AND INCREASING THE USE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT, WALKING AND CYCLING;**
- ii) APPROPRIATE CONTRIBUTIONS FUNDED BY THE LANDOWNER OR DEVELOPER BEING MADE TO IMPROVING/ UPGRADING ACCESS TO AND FROM THE PARK FROM THE A34 TRUNK ROAD AND THE A4130 TO THE SOUTH, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE RELEVANT HIGHWAY AUTHORITY;**



- iii) **NO DEVELOPMENT WILL BE PERMITTED ON EXISTING LANDSCAPED AREAS OR RECREATIONAL OPEN SPACES WITHIN THE PARK. IN CONSIDERING PROPOSALS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT, A HIGH QUALITY OF LANDSCAPING WILL BE REQUIRED AND EXISTING WILDLIFE HABITATS WILL BE RETAINED. OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CREATION OF NEW WILDLIFE HABITATS WILL BE TAKEN, WHERE POSSIBLE.**

#### Disused Milton Reservoir and Pumping Station

- 11.54 This site is located on the eastern side of Sutton Courtenay Lane to the west of Didcot Power Station and extends to around 1.2 hectares. It was first allocated as land suitable for redevelopment for industrial purposes in the adopted local plan for Didcot in 1984 and is owned by RWE Innogy. Policy E6 continues to allocate this site for B1, B2 or B8 purposes. Potential developers of the site should be aware that the road through Milton Park to the west of the site is not an adopted public highway and a routing agreement will be required ensuring the use of public roads including Manor Bridge. The County Council, as highway authority, has indicated that improvements will be needed to the Didcot/Milton Heights link road and to Manor Bridge and that any development which would result in an increase in traffic using the bridge and road should contribute to such improvements. The requirements of Network Rail will also be relevant in respect of its involvement in improving road access to the site which crosses over the railway.

#### **POLICY E6**

**NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TO THE WEST OF DIDCOT POWER STATION AT THE DISUSED MILTON RESERVOIR AND PUMPING STATION SITE IN SUTTON COURTENAY LANE, AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSAL MAP, WILL BE PERMITTED FOR B1, B2 AND B8 USES SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:**

- i) **THAT TRAFFIC SERVING THE SITE IS ROUTED AWAY FROM, AND NOT THROUGH, SUTTON COURTENAY VILLAGE, MILTON VILLAGE, OR MILTON PARK;**
- ii) **APPROPRIATE CONTRIBUTIONS FUNDED BY THE LANDOWNER OR DEVELOPER ARE MADE TO IMPROVING/UPGRADING ACCESS TO AND FROM THE SITE FROM THE A34 TRUNK ROAD AND THE A4130 TO THE SOUTH.**

#### Harwell Science and Innovation Campus

- 11.55 The Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, located between the villages of Harwell, Chilton and East Hendred, has been one of the most significant concentrations of research and scientific activity in the UK for over 50 years. It

is also one of the largest employment centres in the Vale with a site population of over 4,000 people working for more than 70 organisations. The Campus, developed on the site of a wartime airfield, covers about 300 hectares (740 acres) and comprises three freehold estates.

- Harwell International Business Centre (HIBC) – most of the site is owned by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) whose land ownership extends to 258 hectares (637 acres). As a consequence of a strategic review of the authority in the late 1980s, UKAEA has been engaged in a comprehensive programme to rationalise and restructure the site. This has involved an ongoing building clearance programme which by May 2002 had resulted in the demolition of some 78,000 square metres of redundant floorspace, the construction of over 15,000 square metres of class B1 and class B2 business development and planning permission for a hotel. In addition, UKAEA has been involved in a long-term site infrastructure renewal programme, including the rationalisation and improvement of the access to the site, re-organisation of the internal road network and substantial improvements to car parking provision.
  - The Rutherford Appleton Laboratory (RAL) – owned by the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CLRC). RAL was originally part of the research establishment founded at Harwell after the war. The site is owner occupied and its principal purpose is to support the core business of CLRC. In May 2002, CLRC and the UKAEA secured outline planning permission for Diamond, the new UK Synchrotron light source, a scientific tool for analysing a wide range of chemical, physical and biological problems at the atomic scale. Diamond is scheduled to become operational in 2006.
  - Health Protection Agency (HPA) – a small island in the middle of the campus was transferred to The National Radiological Protection Board in the early years of the development of the site. The Board is now the Radiation Protection Division of the Health Protection Agency. In common with RAL, its principal purpose is to support the core business of its owner.
- 11.56 The Medical Research Council (MRC) also has a major presence on the campus as the longest standing tenant on the Harwell International Business Centre. The MRC has plans to consolidate further through the development of the Mary Lyon Centre.
- 11.57 The UKAEA, CLRC, HPA and MRC have distinct and different purposes. However, they are all in the public sector and operate in the science and technology field. By virtue of the fact that they occupy a single campus and also share infrastructure (both on and off the campus) the Local Plan adopts a 'whole site approach' to cover the land owned by all of the above organisations. This will enable the Council to consider planning applications and issues in a

consistent and integrated way in relation to a range of requirements, referred to in policy E7 below.

- 11.58 The location of the campus, away from major centres of population, means there is a clear need for access by all modes of transport to be carefully managed, and for future development to be planned and executed with sustainable transport objectives in mind. In this respect policy E7 requires that development is in accordance with, and makes the necessary contributions to, a travel plan for the whole campus with the aim of minimising car usage and increasing use of public transport, walking and cycling. It will be essential to secure safe and convenient access to the campus by public transport, bicycle and in some cases on foot from nearby settlements, including Grove, Wantage and Didcot, as well as from surrounding villages. The government, in Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: *Transport*, considers that travel plans should be submitted alongside planning applications which are likely to have significant transport implications, including those for major employment developments. Policy TR9 in Chapter 5 also refers to the requirement for travel plans.
- 11.59 The District Council and the County Council as highway authority recognise that, having regard to developments already proposed and the likely future potential of the campus for research based proposals, further improvements will be necessary to the strategic and local highway network. In particular, access from the campus to the trunk road network at the Chilton interchange of the A34 is southbound only, and to the north involves use of the busy Rowstock junction and then the already congested Milton interchange. The Council intends to seek the necessary contributions from the landowners or developers towards improvements required by the County Council as highway authority in accordance with policy E7 below and also, in respect of the A34, policy TR3 in Chapter 5.
- 11.60 There are significant areas of open space, landscaping and tree planting within the campus, including playing fields and more informal areas, some of which have been identified by English Nature as having considerable nature conservation interest. In this respect sites of nature conservation importance, would be covered by policy NE4 in Chapter 7 – Natural Environment. This policy seeks to protect important nature conservation sites from development. Furthermore, policy NE1 states that before determining planning applications for development which may affect a known or potential site of nature conservation value, the Council may require applicants to carry out an ecological appraisal to establish the likely impact of development. Policy E7 seeks to maintain, and increase where appropriate, structural areas of open space and perimeter landscaping. This is in the interests of protecting wildlife habitats, securing a high quality working environment and reducing the visual impact of the campus in the wider landscape, which forms part of the designated North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

- 11.61 When considering planning applications for buildings and structures, including masts and other specialist equipment, the Council will consider the likely impact of such proposals on the appearance and character of surrounding areas, including the AONB, and the effect on local communities. Proposed buildings and structures over 12 metres in height will be subject to particular scrutiny.
- 11.62 There have been concerns in the past over the impact of external lighting schemes in locations within the AONB, for example floodlighting for outdoor sports or lighting for car parks. The Council is keen to ensure that future proposals have a minimal impact in terms of light pollution, which is reflected in policy E7 below and policy DC20 in Chapter 4.
- 11.63 A range of ancillary services and facilities has been provided to meet the needs of employees on and visitors to the campus, including day-care facilities for young children, a squash club and other health facilities, shops, banking facilities and a café. Policy E13 allows ancillary facilities on key employment sites, including the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, provided the proposals are small-scale and designed to provide for employees on the site and not to attract users from a wider area.
- 11.64 Further planning guidance will need to be prepared by, or on behalf of, the various landowners and agreed with the District Council and Oxfordshire County Council (where appropriate) to consider detailed matters including a travel plan, a comprehensive landscape plan and provision for ancillary facilities (including their joint use where possible).

## **POLICY E7**

**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS WILL BE CONSIDERED IN THE CONTEXT OF A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO THE WHOLE HARWELL SCIENCE AND INNOVATION CAMPUS. NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES WILL BE PERMITTED AT THE HARWELL SCIENCE AND INNOVATION CAMPUS AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP FOR B1 AND B2 PURPOSES SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:**

- i) THE DEVELOPMENT IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH AND MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE TRAVEL PLAN FOR THE WHOLE CAMPUS TO MAKE THE NECESSARY CONTRIBUTIONS IN ORDER TO IMPLEMENT SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT INITIATIVES INCLUDING MINIMISING CAR USAGE AND INCREASING THE USE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT, WALKING AND CYCLING;**
- ii) APPROPRIATE CONTRIBUTIONS FUNDED BY THE LANDOWNER OR DEVELOPER BEING MADE TO IMPROVING/UPGRADING ACCESS TO THE CAMPUS FROM THE A34 TRUNK ROAD, THE A4185 TO THE EAST, AND THE A417 TO THE NORTH;**

- iii) **THE DEVELOPMENT IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH AND MAKES THE NECESSARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO A COMPREHENSIVE LANDSCAPE PLAN FOR THE WHOLE CAMPUS. NO DEVELOPMENT WILL BE PERMITTED WITHIN STRUCTURAL AREAS OF OPEN SPACE AND PERIMETER LANDSCAPING. IN CONSIDERING PROPOSALS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT, A HIGH QUALITY OF LANDSCAPING WILL BE REQUIRED EXISTING IMPORTANT WILDLIFE HABITATS WILL BE RETAINED IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICY NE4 AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CREATION OF NEW WILDLIFE HABITATS WILL BE TAKEN, WHERE POSSIBLE;**
- iv) **THAT PROPOSALS FOR BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES (INCLUDING THEIR EXTENSIONS) WILL NOT UNACCEPTABLY HARM THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE SURROUNDING AREA, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THEIR LOCATION, SCALE, BULK AND HEIGHT;**
- v) **ANY EXTERNAL LIGHTING SCHEME MUST HAVE A MINIMAL IMPACT IN TERMS OF LIGHT POLLUTION; AND**
- vi) **DEVELOPMENT INVOLVING ANCILLARY FACILITIES WILL BE PERMITTED SUBJECT TO POLICY E13.**

#### **Local Rural Sites**

- 11.65 There are currently vacant sites available for business development on several local rural business sites in the district. These sites offer an alternative to vacant sites available on the larger business parks and industrial estates for firms wishing to locate in a rural area. They also have the potential to provide valuable local employment, in particular for the residents of villages nearby. The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2001 identified a number of sites in the rural parts of the district for business purposes. Many of these sites no longer have vacant premises, but there is vacant land available at four sites: Kingston Business Park at Kingston Bagpuize and Southmoor, White Horse Business Park at Stanford-in-the-Vale, Wootton Business Park at Wootton and Shrivenham Hundred Business Park at Watchfield. Accordingly, policy E8 identifies these sites for business purposes and they are also included in the sites listed in policy E11 which seeks to retain key local rural multi-user sites for business purposes. Uffington Station in Uffington parish is also identified under policy E8 where there is a small area of vacant land available for business purposes.
- 11.66 As in the previous Local Plan it is the Council's firm intention that new development on these sites should provide for small businesses in accordance with Structure Plan objectives. Premises suitable for occupation by relatively larger firms will continue to be available in Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon, Grove, Wantage, and at Milton Park and the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, which have the infrastructure and other services appropriate to the needs of such

firms. The Council will seek therefore to limit the size of individual buildings and will only permit larger buildings in exceptional circumstances where, for example, they are to be sub-divided for occupation by more than one firm, or the development is for the limited expansion of a local firm occupying a building already on the site.

- 11.67 The Council has prepared supplementary planning guidance for some of the sites listed in policy E8 and will take this into account when considering applications for new business development.

## **POLICY E8**

**NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ON VACANT LAND OR REDEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING PREMISES FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES WILL BE PERMITTED AT THE FOLLOWING LOCAL RURAL BUSINESS SITES AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP:**

- i) **KINGSTON BUSINESS PARK IN KINGSTON BAGPUIZE AND SOUTHMOOR PARISH FOR B1, B2 AND B8 USES;**
- ii) **WHITE HORSE BUSINESS PARK IN STANFORD-IN-THE-VALE FOR B1, B2 AND B8 USES;**
- iii) **UFFINGTON STATION IN UFFINGTON PARISH FOR B1, B2 AND B8 USES;**
- iv) **WOOTTON BUSINESS PARK AT WOOTTON FOR B1 USE ONLY; AND**
- v) **SHRIVENHAM HUNDRED BUSINESS PARK FOR B1 USE ONLY.**

**DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT AT ANY SITE IDENTIFIED UNDER THIS POLICY WILL BE LIMITED TO THE CREATION OF PREMISES OF UP TO 500 SQUARE METRES GROSS FLOOR AREA FOR OCCUPATION BY A SINGLE BUSINESS ENTERPRISE, EXCEPT WHERE THE PROPOSAL IS FOR THE EXPANSION OF A BUSINESS ALREADY ESTABLISHED ON THE SITE, OR FOR A FIRM THAT CANNOT REASONABLY BE EXPECTED TO RELOCATE TO ONE OF THE FIVE MAIN SETTLEMENTS, OR WHERE THERE IS A COMMITMENT WHICH PRE-DATES THE LOCAL PLAN.**

## **New Development on Sites not Identified in the Local Plan**

- 11.68 The District Council recognises that the vitality of the five main settlements of Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage is partly dependent upon the existence of mixed uses, and believes that the Local Plan should allow new business premises on suitable sites within their development boundaries, subject to appropriate safeguards. In this respect, the criteria of policy DC9 must be met

to ensure that such proposals can be accommodated without causing environmental or other planning problems, especially for neighbouring properties.

- 11.69 There are also a large number of sites for business use away from the towns in the more rural parts of the Vale. These occur both within villages and on land outside villages; for example many sites have been developed from former airfields or farm complexes. In such locations the Council is concerned to strike the right balance between encouraging the diversification of the local economy and the need to protect the character of the countryside and ensure that development is sustainable in travel terms. Within the rural areas there is already capacity for new business premises to be provided on some of the business parks and industrial estates and new or expanding rural businesses can also use existing commercial premises in the villages and countryside as they become available. Nevertheless, the importance of small businesses to the local economy is vital and, in this respect, the Council will look favourably on proposals for appropriate small new premises (for firms generally requiring no more than 500 square metres in area) where they are on sites within the built-up area of a village listed in policy H11.
- 11.70 In the Council's opinion it would not be sustainable to allow new premises for employment purposes in the smaller villages and countryside within the Vale unless there is a special justification, for example premises for an agriculture related business where it is essential that it be located in a rural area. The smaller villages have infrequent or no public transport provision and there are few opportunities to live close to workplaces. Furthermore, the Council's proposed strategy is to concentrate development including most new housebuilding in the larger settlements and to resist development in the smaller villages and countryside, other than conversions of existing buildings. Therefore, there should be little need to provide additional employment opportunities in these rural areas. A later section of this chapter on the countryside and its rural economy considers business uses which are directly related to the countryside, including agriculture, farm diversification and commercial equestrian establishments. Policy GS5 permits the change of use of existing buildings to other uses within all settlements in the district, subject to certain criteria. This could include business and employment uses.
- 11.71 There are numerous existing industrial and commercial enterprises throughout the Vale. Inevitably, some firms will wish to expand their present sites as their business grows. The success of the Vale's established firms is vital to the local economy, and in principle the Council believes that their growth and expansion is to be encouraged unless the business is unneighbourly (causing disturbance to communities, for example through noise or the generation of heavy traffic on unsuitable roads) or is badly sited (for example in an isolated and conspicuous position in the open countryside, or in an area where serious traffic hazards would be perpetuated). It would be inappropriate to allow the continued expansion of such firms where this would make existing problems worse. Where

it is possible to overcome potential difficulties by attaching conditions to any planning permission which may be required for the expansion, or by the use of a legal agreement, the Council will pursue this option, otherwise planning permission will not be granted.

- 11.72 The Council is anxious to ensure that further employment growth does not create pressures for housing above existing and planned levels. This is in accordance with the general strategy of the Structure Plan in its policy G1 which seeks to restrain the overall level of development, and with Structure Plan policy E5 (E6 in the plan to 2016) which seeks to maintain a balance between employment-generating development and the capacity of the local housing market to absorb any new employment growth generated.

## **POLICY E9**

**DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES ON SITES NOT IDENTIFIED UNDER SPECIFIC POLICIES OF THE LOCAL PLAN WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THE PROPOSAL:**

- i) **IS ON A SITE WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT BOUNDARIES OF THE FIVE MAIN SETTLEMENTS OF ABINGDON, BOTLEY, FARINGDON, GROVE AND WANTAGE; OR**
- ii) **IS FOR SMALL FIRMS REQUIRING NO MORE THAN 500 SQUARE METRES GROSS FLOORSPACE ON A SITE WITHIN THE BUILT-UP AREA OF A VILLAGE LISTED UNDER POLICY H11 OF THE LOCAL PLAN; OR**
- iii) **IN LOCATIONS OUTSIDE THE BUILT-UP AREAS OF THE FIVE MAIN SETTLEMENTS AND THE VILLAGES LISTED UNDER POLICY H11 IS FOR THE EXPANSION, ON ITS EXISTING SITE, OF AN EXISTING INDUSTRIAL OR COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE WHOSE SOURCES OF SUPPLY, COMMERCIAL LINKAGES, LABOUR SUPPLY AND MARKETS MAKE THE SPECIFIC LOCATION NECESSARY, UNLESS THE ENTERPRISE IS KNOWN TO BE UNNEIGHBOURLY OR BADLY SITED, IN WHICH CASE THE PROPOSED EXPANSION WILL NOT BE PERMITTED AND THE RELOCATION OF THE BUSINESS TO A MORE APPROPRIATE LOCATION WILL BE SOUGHT; AND**
- iv) **DOES NOT GENERATE A DEMAND FOR HOUSING WHICH CANNOT BE MET BY EXISTING OR PLANNED HOUSING PROVISION.**

## **Protecting Key Sites for Business Use**

- 11.73 There have been a number of cases in recent years involving pressure for changes of use from business uses to residential, particularly in the Vale's main



towns. For example, in Abingdon several large sites formerly in employment use have been or are being redeveloped for housing purposes, such as the former Pavlova Leather Works, The Maltings in the Vineyard and Morlands Brewery. The redevelopment of such sites for residential purposes is consistent with government guidance in PPG3 which seeks to maximise the use of brownfield land in urban areas for housing development.

- 11.74 The importance of employment land is also recognised in a variety of government planning policy guidance notes. PPG4: *Industrial and Commercial Development and Small Firms* states that Development Plans should ensure that there is a variety of sites to meet differing needs. PPS7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*, which contains government guidance on sustainable development in rural areas, has as one of its key themes the need to meet the economic and social needs of people who live and work in rural areas. The guidance states that local authorities may wish to express a preference for the retention of land currently in employment use in villages and country towns. PPG13: *Transport* states that a key planning objective in the interests of sustainability is to ensure that jobs are accessible by public transport, walking and cycling. In this respect, the loss of employment sites close to residential areas could result in increased travelling distances to workplaces, including out of town locations which puts more reliance on the use of the private car for journeys to work.
- 11.75 In the light of the above government advice, the Local Plan Issues Report (published in August 2000) asked questions on whether the Council should seek to resist the further loss of employment sites. The majority of respondents considered that the further loss of employment sites should be avoided as a good range of employment sites is needed to ensure that settlements are sustainable, vibrant and attractive to inward investors. However, the consensus seemed to be that a 'blanket' policy to protect all employment land in the Vale is unnecessary and in some cases undesirable. Such a policy could conflict with government and local objectives for maximising housing provision on brownfield urban land. Also, it would be difficult to sustain such an approach in the Vale considering the employment generating potential which exists, particularly on major sites such as Milton Park, the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus and Abingdon Business Park. In addition, there may be cases where changes of use will help to ameliorate problems associated with existing uses, for example where business activities on a site have become incompatible with adjoining residential uses.
- 11.76 Accordingly, this Local Plan introduces new policies (E10–E12) which seek to resist the loss of existing business land and premises to other uses on certain key employment sites. On such sites, apart from business development, only small-scale proposals for ancillary uses such as crèches, cafés/restaurants, shops and gyms provided for the benefit of the users of the site will be permitted. The Council considers it essential to safeguard key sites in both the urban and rural

areas of the district to help maintain the diversity and vitality of the local economy as a whole.

### **Key Business Sites**

- 11.77 These sites have a range of premises in terms of size and type and their retention for business use is essential to the economic health of the Vale. The sites in the five main settlements of Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage are particularly important in helping to maintain sustainable and balanced communities, being located within walking and cycling distance of existing residential areas. The list also includes the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus which is of international importance and Milton Park, which together with existing business premises at Didcot Power Station serve the town of Didcot, and southern Oxfordshire to some extent. Milton Park is one of the largest concentrations of business activities in the county and is of particular importance for businesses wishing to be in a strategic location relative to the south-east and other parts of the country.
- 11.78 There are several significant single user employment sites in the Grove and Wantage area which the Council considers should be included within its policies to retain employment sites in order to maintain and maximise local employment opportunities. These sites are at Autotype, Crown Cork and Seal and Williams F1.

### **POLICY E10**

**AT THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIC EMPLOYMENT SITES AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD LEAD TO THE LOSS OF EXISTING BUSINESS LAND AND PREMISES TO OTHER USES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED, OTHER THAN ANCILLARY USES REFERRED TO UNDER POLICY E13. PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES WILL BE PERMITTED SUBJECT TO POLICIES E1 TO E7.**

**ABINGDON:**

ASHVILLE TRADING ESTATE, ABINGDON BUSINESS PARK, NUFFIELD WAY, DRAYTON ROAD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, FITZHARRIS TRADING ESTATE, ABINGDON SCIENCE PARK, RADLEY ROAD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, BARTON MILL IN AUDLETT DRIVE, HALF OF THE THAMES VIEW INDUSTRIAL ESTATE INCLUDING THE BURGESS SITE );

**BOTLEY:**

CURTIS INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, HINKSEY BUSINESS CENTRE, MINNS BUSINESS PARK, SEACOURT TOWER;

**FARINGDON:**

PARK ROAD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE;

**GROVE:**

GROVE TECHNOLOGY PARK; GROVE ROAD, WANTAGE; DOWNSVIEW ROAD, GROVE AND STATION ROAD, GROVE

**DIDCOT POWER STATION:**

EXISTING BUSINESS PREMISES AT DIDCOT POWER STATION (NOT INCLUDING VACANT SURPLUS LAND);

**MILTON PARK:**

MILTON PARK SITE;

**HARWELL SCIENCE AND INNOVATION CAMPUS:**

HARWELL INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS CENTRE, RUTHERFORD APPLETON LABORATORY & HEALTH PROTECTION AGENCY.

**Rural Multi-User Sites**

- 11.79 The sites listed in policy E11 below are geographically spread across the rural areas of the Vale. They all have a range of business premises, and offer alternative accommodation to that which is available in the larger business parks and industrial estates in the district, in some cases at reasonably low cost. As well as contributing to the local economy, these sites provide employment opportunities in rural locations and they may provide services which benefit local communities. Also, they can contribute to community identity recognising the importance of villages as living and working environments. The identification in the Local Plan of local rural sites with a range of business premises which should be retained as such may also help to steer firms seeking rural premises away from unsustainable countryside locations.

**POLICY E11**

AT THE FOLLOWING RURAL SITES AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD LEAD TO THE LOSS OF EXISTING BUSINESS LAND AND PREMISES TO OTHER USES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED, OTHER THAN TO THOSE ANCILLARY USES REFERRED TO UNDER POLICY E13. PROPOSALS FOR BUSINESS

**DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES WITHIN THESE SITES WILL BE PERMITTED SUBJECT TO POLICY E8.**

**ARDINGTON:**

**HOME FARM, AND THE WORKS AND BAKERS YARD**

**CHALLOW:**

**W&G ESTATE;**

**RADLEY PARISH:**

**SANDFORD LANE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, KENNINGTON**

**KINGSTON BAGPUIZE AND SOUTHMOOR:**

**KINGSTON BUSINESS PARK;**

**STANFORD-IN-THE-VALE:**

**WHITE HORSE BUSINESS PARK;**

**STEVENTON:**

**STATION YARD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE;**

**WATCHFIELD:**

**SHRIVENHAM HUNDRED BUSINESS PARK;**

**WOOTTON:**

**WOOTTON BUSINESS PARK.**

**Large Campus Style Sites**

- 11.80 Within the Vale there are several large campus style business sites which have become established in rural locations, including the former Esso Research Centre at Milton Hill (now known as Milton Hill Business and Technology Centre), Amey at Sutton Courtenay and Oxford Instruments at Tubney Woods. These sites have developed and expanded over many years, typically to meet the needs of single organisations which require on-site facilities for research and development purposes. As a result of re-assessments of their operational needs, some of these organisations have concluded or may in future conclude that their sites are surplus to requirements, causing speculation and uncertainty concerning their future use.
- 11.81 In this context the Council considers that the introduction of a new policy in the Local Plan would be beneficial in order to ensure that future development proposals on these sites would not result in the overall use of the site being less sustainable than the existing use. The sites concerned may be ideal for other organisations which require a large campus-style facility, for example a business involved in research and development. There can also be advantages in development which helps to foster the growth of 'innovative cluster areas' of knowledge based industries, which have become a feature of the Vale's economy. However, the countryside locations of these sites makes them largely unsuitable for major redevelopment for housing purposes and their redevelopment for multi-user business parks may create problems, particularly in terms of increased traffic movements, visual intrusion in the wider landscape and

other environmental concerns. Policy E12 below sets the criteria against which alternative development proposals will be considered.

## **POLICY E12**

**ON THE FOLLOWING LARGE SITES AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP:**

**MILTON HILL – MILTON HILL BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGY CENTRE**

**SUTTON COURTENAY – AMEY**

**TUBNEY WOOD – OXFORD INSTRUMENTS**

**PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD LEAD TO THE LOSS OF EXISTING BUSINESS LAND AND PREMISES TO OTHER NON-BUSINESS USES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED APART FROM ANCILLARY USES REFERRED TO UNDER POLICY E13. PROPOSALS FOR NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THE RESULTANT OVERALL USE OF THE SITE AS A WHOLE CAN BE DEMONSTRATED TO BE AT LEAST AS SUSTAINABLE AS THE EXISTING USE, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT:**

- i) THE IMPACT OF VEHICLE MOVEMENTS TO AND FROM THE SITE ON THE LOCAL AND STRATEGIC ROAD NETWORK;**
- ii) THE EFFECT ON THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA, INCLUDING CONSERVATION AND LANDSCAPE CONSIDERATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR VISUAL OR OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENTS OF THE SITE;**
- iii) THE NUMBER OF JOBS PROVIDED AND THE IMPACT ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY;**
- iv) THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING ACCESS TO THE SITE BY MODES OF TRANSPORT OTHER THAN PRIVATE MOTOR VEHICLES, INCLUDING WALKING, CYCLING AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT;**
- v) IN RELATION TO THE OXFORD INSTRUMENTS SITE AT TUBNEY WOODS, THE NEED TO ENSURE THAT THE OPENNESS OF THE GREEN BELT IS MAINTAINED.**

### **Ancillary Uses on Key Employment Sites**

- 11.82 Some of the strategic business sites in the district are located outside of any settlement, for example Milton Park and Harwell, or are in suburban locations some distance from a town or commercial centre, for example Abingdon Business Park and Grove Technology Park. These sites are not within easy walking distance of shops and facilities which in some cases has led to a demand for on-site provision to serve employees of the business site and visitors. On the Harwell Campus and at Milton Park for example there is a range of ancillary

services now available, including cafés/restaurants, shops, recreation and sporting facilities.

- 11.83 The provision of facilities which are ancillary to business uses can help to make business sites more attractive to incoming firms and can improve the quality of the working environment for employees. They can also help to make business sites more sustainable by reducing traffic movements. However, in some cases allowing larger scale uses on such sites, for example food superstores, non-food retail warehouses, hotels or conference facilities, could adversely affect the vitality and viability of nearby commercial centres or the social and community vitality of a nearby village. They could also prejudice the availability of land for business uses. In this context the following policy allows for ancillary uses on business parks or industrial estates provided proposals are small-scale and would not cause significant harm in respect of the above factors.

### **POLICY E13**

**ON THE KEY EMPLOYMENT SITES LISTED UNDER POLICIES E10 TO E12, PROPOSALS FOR USES OTHER THAN BUSINESS USES, INCLUDING CRÈCHE FACILITIES, RESTAURANTS/CAFES, RECREATION AND SPORTS FACILITIES, MEDICAL FACILITIES AND SHOPS, WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA ARE SATISFIED:**

- i) THE PROPOSAL IS SMALL-SCALE AND CLEARLY DESIGNED TO PROVIDE FOR USERS OF THE EMPLOYMENT SITE;**
- ii) THE USE IS ANCILLARY AND INCIDENTAL TO THE OVERALL BUSINESS USE OF THE PARK OR ESTATE AND IS OF A SCALE WHICH WOULD NOT DOMINATE OR UNDERMINE ITS BUSINESS OR EMPLOYMENT FUNCTION;**
- iii) THE USE, EITHER ALONE OR COMBINED WITH OTHER EXISTING OR PROPOSED USES, WOULD NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE VITALITY AND VIABILITY OF ANY TOWN CENTRE OR SHOPPING CENTRE (INCLUDING LOCAL CENTRES) OR THE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY VITALITY OF A NEARBY VILLAGE.**

**IN CONNECTION WITH ANY PLANNING PERMISSION, CONDITIONS WILL BE IMPOSED OR A PLANNING OBLIGATION SOUGHT TO LIMIT THE SCALE OF THE OPERATION AND TO RESTRICT THE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES PROPOSED OR GOODS SOLD, WHERE NECESSARY, TO ENSURE THAT THE CRITERIA SET OUT ABOVE ARE MET.**

## **The Retention of Small-Scale Commercial Premises in Settlements**

- 11.84 Policies E10–E12 above seek to resist the loss of existing business land and premises to other uses on key employment sites within the district which are considered to be vital to the economy of the Vale as a whole. In addition to these key sites there are many smaller scale commercial premises scattered

throughout the Vale, including business premises for individual firms and commercial garages and filling stations. The cumulative loss of these smaller premises, sometimes as a result of redevelopment proposals, has given rise to concerns in recent years due to the reduction in local employment opportunities and also in some cases the loss of local community facilities (particularly where garages which serve to some degree as the village shop have closed). The loss of commercial premises may also lead to an increased need to travel by car, particularly in the rural areas, associated with residents needing to travel to larger centres for employment or other needs. This recent trend is of particular concern in the villages which the Council wishes to see retained as living and working communities. However, there may be instances where a particular enterprise is known to be un-neighbourly or badly sited in which case the Council may grant planning permission if the proposal would result in its relocation to a more appropriate location.

- 11.85 In this respect several of the aims for the Local Plan are relevant. Aim 3 is 'to reduce the need to travel and the harmful effects of traffic on people and the environment', aim 4 is 'to maintain and improve the quality of life of all members of the local community', and aim 7 is 'to ensure that the countryside and villages of the Vale are prosperous and have a diverse economy'. To ensure there are local employment opportunities within the rural areas, paragraph 2.21 of the Local Plan states that the Council will seek to enable the diversification and regeneration of the rural economy, particularly within the villages of the Vale. Policy E14 below considers planning applications which would result in the loss of commercial premises on sites within settlements other than key employment sites listed in policies E10–E12.
- 11.86 Proposals for the redevelopment of commercial premises outside settlements for other uses will be subject to policy GS6 in Chapter 3, which deals generally with previously developed land outside settlements.

#### **POLICY E14**

**PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD LEAD TO THE LOSS OF APPROPRIATELY LOCATED SMALL-SCALE COMMERCIAL PREMISES WITHIN SETTLEMENTS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED WHERE THEY WOULD:**

- i) REDUCE EMPLOYMENT IN LOCATIONS WHERE OTHER LOCAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES ARE LIMITED;**
- ii) HARM THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE AREA, INCLUDING THE DIVERSITY OF USES AND LOCAL COMMUNITY NEEDS;**
- iii) RESULT IN INAPPROPRIATE LEVELS OF TRAFFIC WHERE TRAVEL BY MODES OTHER THAN THE PRIVATE CAR CANNOT BE PROVIDED.**

**PROPOSALS WILL BE PERMITTED WHERE THE PREMISES ARE OCCUPIED BY AN ENTERPRISE KNOWN TO BE UN-NEIGHBOURLY OR BADLY SITED AND THE PROPOSAL WOULD RESULT IN ITS RELOCATION TO A MORE APPROPRIATE LOCATION.**

## **Steventon Storage Facility (former Home Office Stores site), Steventon**

- 11.87 This site, formerly owned by the government's Home Office as a storage and distribution centre, is situated to the south of the Steventon to East Hanney Road and is about 30 hectares in size. There is a Certificate of Lawfulness relating to the site which confirms the use of the buildings as B8 (which includes warehouses and distribution centres). There are many buildings on the site including 91 large Nissen huts, warehouses and Dutch barns providing a total of 44,540 sq metres (479,440 sq feet) of floorspace. It is currently owned by MEPC, the owners of Milton Park, who have marketed the site as Steventon Storage Facility and have granted a number of short-term leases for low key storage uses.
- 11.88 Notwithstanding the relatively low traffic generation which takes place at the present time, the Council is very concerned that if the site were to be intensively used or redeveloped for storage and distribution purposes significant traffic generation could result on the local road network, including large numbers of heavy goods vehicle movements. This would be wholly unsatisfactory. Currently there is inadequate access from the A34 Milton interchange to the site, via Steventon Hill, Steventon village and the Steventon to Hanney Road. Furthermore, access from the west would involve vehicles travelling through the village of East Hanney.
- 11.89 The use or redevelopment of the site for other business purposes including B1 (such as light industry or office) or B2 (general industrial) would also be inappropriate due to the potential for significant traffic generation as a result of likely increases in the number of people employed on the site. In accordance with policies in Chapter 8, residential uses will not be permitted on the site in view of its countryside location outside of existing settlements where use of the private car for most journeys would be inevitable.
- 11.90 In view of the size and nature of the site and the potentially harmful impact of its future use on the local road network, and on local villages including Steventon and East Hanney, the Council is prepared to negotiate with MEPC for them to achieve the complete cessation of business uses and clearance and restoration of the site. This will involve aiming to identify an alternative, more sustainable replacement site (or sites) for business development in recognition of the Steventon Storage Facility's lawful status as a site for B8 uses. Negotiations will continue with MEPC, and other landowners as appropriate, to seek to bring forward a suitable alternative site or sites. In this respect, the Council recognises



that although there is vacant land identified for business purposes on sites throughout the district, as allocated in policies E1 to E8 of the Plan, these sites are unlikely to be suitable for B8 uses other than on a small scale.

#### **POLICY E15**

**AT STEVENTON STORAGE FACILITY, STEVENTON (AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSAL MAP), PROPOSALS FOR NEW BUILDINGS, INCREASES IN OVERALL FLOORSPACE OR CHANGES OF USE WILL NOT BE PERMITTED. THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK THE COMPLETE CESSATION OF BUSINESS USES AND CLEARANCE AND RESTORATION OF THE SITE.**

## **The Countryside and its Economy**

- 11.91 This section considers activities which support the rural economy in the countryside outside of the towns and villages in the Vale and outside of any business sites identified earlier in this chapter. It deals exclusively with business activities which are directly related to the countryside in particular: farming and forestry (including new farm buildings and farm diversification) and the keeping, rearing, training and livery of horses on a commercial basis. A general policy controlling new development in the countryside and policies for the re-use of buildings outside settlements, including barn conversions, is considered in Chapter 3. Also contributing to sustaining the rural economy are farm shops, which are considered in this chapter, and tourist developments, which are considered in Chapter 13. The protection of high grade agricultural land for farming purposes is considered in Chapter 4.
- 11.92 The government's policy as expressed in PPS7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* and the White Paper *Rural England: A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside* emphasises the importance of the pursuit of sustainable development and economic and social diversity in the countryside, consistent with the need to retain its distinctiveness and character and with the protection of the landscape, wildlife and historic features. The guidance acknowledges that there have been considerable changes in the countryside over recent decades associated with a steep fall in employment in agriculture; however, it recognises that farming uses still occupy around three-quarters of the land surface of England. Food production and a competitive agricultural industry continue to be highly important and provide a basis for many other economic activities in rural areas. In this respect, a booklet has been published by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister entitled "A Farmer's Guide to the Planning System", which is designed to assist farm businesses considering development changes.

#### **New Buildings Required for Agricultural Purposes**

- 11.93 Much agriculture and forestry development does not require planning permission, and some agricultural development is permitted under the General Permitted Development Order. In some cases, prospective developers are required to submit a written description and site plan of proposed farm buildings and accesses to the District Council's planning service which has 28 days to determine whether prior approval will be required for certain details. This enables the Council to determine the landscape impact of the development, as well as the desirability of preserving sites of historic or nature conservation value. If no determination is made, the works may be carried out in accordance with the original information submitted.
- 11.94 Applicants wishing to construct agricultural buildings are advised to approach the Council for advice on whether or not planning permission is needed. The following policy will be applied to proposals requiring full planning applications and will be relevant to cases where the planning authority has power to determine whether prior approval is required. Where the proposed buildings are in the Oxford Green Belt, policy GS3 will also apply.

#### **POLICY E16**

**PROPOSALS FOR NEW BUILDINGS AND DEVELOPMENT NECESSARY FOR THE OPERATION OF AGRICULTURE OR FORESTRY WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THEY DO NOT CAUSE DEMONSTRABLE HARM TO:**

- i) THE VISUAL AMENITY OF THE LANDSCAPE; OR
- ii) ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES; OR
- iii) LISTED BUILDINGS AND THEIR SETTING; OR
- iv) SITES OF NATURE CONSERVATION VALUE.

**NEW BUILDINGS SHOULD, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, BE LOCATED WITHIN OR ADJACENT TO AN EXISTING GROUP OF FARM OR FORESTRY BUILDINGS. WHERE THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE THEY SHOULD BE IN AN EXISTING WELL-SCREENED SETTING OR BE ACCOMPANIED BY LANDSCAPE PROPOSALS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE SUCH SCREENING. BUILDINGS SHOULD BE SITED SO AS TO MINIMISE THE RISK OF NUISANCE TO THE OCCUPIERS OF NEARBY RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES.**

#### **Farm Diversification**

- 11.95 Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is bringing farmers closer to the market place through farm-based enterprises supplying niche markets such as regional and speciality foods and larger scale group collaborations such as central fruit and vegetable packing operations and grain stores. These ventures can add value to local produce. Farmers are increasingly looking to diversify to supplement their incomes. The Rural White Paper encourages farm diversification as a source of extra income to farmers and as a means of sustaining farms, and

in this respect, it is recognised that for farming to evolve and thrive, it needs to diversify. Some producers could benefit from getting closer to the market, for example by establishing farm shops to sell their produce direct to the public (see policy E18 below). In other cases it may be beneficial for producers to provide other farm and land related services, for example farmers providing agricultural equipment hire and maintenance facilities can have advantages in terms of economies in the purchase of larger and more specialised machinery. It can also enable the retention of jobs on farms and the continued use of vernacular farm buildings considered worthy of preservation (see policy E17) (see also policy GS7 which permits the re-use and adaptation of vernacular buildings). PPS7 considers development related to farm diversification in paragraphs 30 to 31.

- 11.96 For the purposes of this Local Plan the Council will define 'farm diversification' as a business activity on a farm which is both related and ancillary to the use of the farm for agriculture. For example, packing of locally grown fruit and vegetable produce on the farm would be classed as farm diversification, whereas a proposal for business or commercial development which is *not* related to agriculture, such as a printing company or IT consultancy, would *not* be classed as farm diversification. The term 'ancillary' in relation to farm diversification will be interpreted as a use which is not the dominant enterprise on the farm. In this respect, agriculture should remain the dominant use on the farm holding. Therefore, a proposal which used at least half of a farm holding for non-agricultural purposes would *not* be regarded as ancillary.
- 11.97 A variety of farm diversification activities may be appropriate in the Vale's countryside provided that proposals are consistent with the need to conserve the landscape and protect high grade agricultural land and with other planning matters such as highway and parking considerations and the effect on neighbouring properties, including potential noise and disturbance. The advice in PPS7 is that local planning authorities should consider the nature and scale of activity which would be appropriate and should seek to limit them where there is concern about the impact of future expansion. In this respect, the District Council would support small-scale farm diversification proposals which create employment opportunities particularly where they use existing buildings in accordance with Local Plan policies GS7 and GS8 for the re-use of buildings outside settlements.

## **POLICY E17**

**PROPOSALS FOR FARM DIVERSIFICATION WHICH ARE SMALL-SCALE WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THEY ARE ANCILLARY AND RELATED TO THE CONTINUED FARMING USE OF THE HOLDING. WHERE A NEW BUILDING IS PROPOSED TO ACCOMMODATE THE ACTIVITY, THE APPLICANT WILL BE EXPECTED TO DEMONSTRATE THAT IT IS NOT POSSIBLE OR APPROPRIATE TO USE AN EXISTING BUILDING ON THE FARM OR NEARBY. IN ADDITION PROPOSALS SHOULD COMPLY**

**WITH POLICY E16 TO ENSURE THAT THEY DO NOT CAUSE DEMONSTRABLE HARM TO LANDSCAPE, COUNTRYSIDE OR CONSERVATION INTERESTS.**

**Farm Shops**

- 11.98 Increased car ownership among town dwellers has allowed more people to have easy access to the countryside. Many businesses in the rural areas have therefore been encouraged to sell produce directly to the public. A number of farms now have widely-advertised pick-your-own-produce schemes, and farm shops and plant nurseries increasingly concentrate on sales to private consumers or gardeners. Farm shops can bring significant benefits in terms of improving farm viability and providing local employment opportunities. They can also provide greater choice and availability of local produce for consumers and can fulfil an educational role in terms of engendering a greater appreciation by the public (particularly children) of the link between food, farming and the countryside. They bring benefits to the local economy including contributing towards a more diverse countryside which can also provide interest for tourists visiting the Vale. Craft industries in the villages also attract a growing number of visitors who are interested to see the craft processes as well as to buy the products.
- 11.99 Government guidance on farm shops is contained in PPS6 *Planning for Town Centres* and PPS7. The guidance states that farm shops help meet demand from consumers who want fresh produce at the point of production and can provide new sources of jobs and services in rural areas and outlets for producers of regional speciality foods. When planning applications are needed, local planning authorities should take account of:
- i) the desirability for the farmer to provide a service throughout the year, which may require bringing in non-local produce to overcome the problems of seasonality and provide continuity of employment and to ensure that a sufficiently wide selection of produce can be offered;
  - ii) the potential impact on village shops; and
  - iii) the transport effects in terms of traffic likely to be generated and the highways, access and parking arrangements.
- 11.100 If the size of the operation remains small, it is unlikely to disturb local amenities and indeed may be exempt from planning control, particularly where only the sale of the farm's own produce is concerned. Where the scale of activity is limited by the variety and amount of merchandise produced on the site, it is unlikely also that the general pattern of shopping in the area will be affected.

- 11.101 However, large-scale proposals for farm shops can cause problems arising from the attraction of large volumes of traffic, the display of unsightly advertisements, proposals to erect new buildings or construct car parks and the erection of stalls on busy main roads. Such problems tend to emerge where the business seeks to expand its range of goods by bringing in merchandise which is not produced on site. Therefore, the Council is concerned to ensure that such operations should sell mainly goods grown or made on site, that any associated development should be small in scale, that any proposed retail outlet is subordinate to the particular rural enterprise concerned and does not undermine the viability of nearby shops. Taking account of the range and nature of goods which any rural retail outlet proposes to sell the Council will seek by planning condition or planning obligation with the retailers to specify that not less than 60% of the grown or produced merchandise sold will be grown or produced within an agreed local area. The needs of the operator of the shop to overcome the problems of seasonality and provide continuity of employment will also be taken into account where relevant.
- 11.102 The Council may seek to limit the size of such shops in the first instance, to help ensure those sales are of locally grown or locally produced merchandise and to enable the viability of the enterprise and its effect on the surrounding rural area to be assessed. Applications to expand an existing shop may be refused if the operation of that shop is considered to have given rise to planning or environmental problems. Even where an extension to a farm shop is permitted the Council will seek to ensure that not less than 60% of the merchandise sold will be grown or produced within an agreed local area.

## **POLICY E18**

**PROPOSALS FOR FARM SHOPS OR FOR THE DIRECT SALE OF CRAFTS AND OTHER LOCALLY PRODUCED GOODS WHICH REQUIRE PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THEY ARE SMALL SCALE AND SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:**

- i) THE PROPOSED RETAIL OUTLET IS SUBORDINATE TO THE PARTICULAR RURAL ENTERPRISE CONCERNED;**
- ii) THE PREMISES ARE ACCESSIBLE BY A VARIETY OF MEANS OF TRANSPORT;**
- iii) AT LEAST 60% OF THE PROPOSED MERCHANDISE SOLD WILL BE GROWN OR PRODUCED WITHIN AN AGREED LOCAL AREA;**
- iv) NO DEMONSTRABLE HARM WILL BE CAUSED TO THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF A NEARBY VILLAGE SHOP WHICH PROVIDES EASILY ACCESSIBLE CONVENIENCE SHOPPING AVAILABLE TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY;**

DEVELOPMENT OF AN UNRESTRICTED RETAIL USE LIKELY TO RESULT IN A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON NEARBY SHOPS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED. THEREFORE, CONTROL OVER THE BROAD TYPES OF PRODUCE SOLD FROM THE PROPOSED USE MAY BE SOUGHT, BY PLANNING CONDITION OR PLANNING OBLIGATION, SO AS TO ENABLE PERMISSION TO BE GIVEN.

WHEREVER POSSIBLE, PROPOSED RETAIL OUTLETS SHOULD USE EXISTING BUILDINGS IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICY GS7 OR GS8 OF THE LOCAL PLAN. NEW BUILDINGS WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE THEY WILL NOT HAVE A DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON THE VISUAL AMENITY OF THE LANDSCAPE, ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES, LISTED BUILDINGS AND THEIR SETTING OR SITES OF NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE. NEW BUILDINGS WILL BE EXPECTED TO BE SITED WITHIN OR ADJACENT TO AN EXISTING GROUP OF BUILDINGS OR IN AN EXISTING WELL-SCREENED LANDSCAPE SETTING AND BE SYMPATHETICALLY DESIGNED TO REFLECT THEIR RURAL SURROUNDINGS.

## **POLICY E19**

PROPOSALS FOR THE MODEST EXPANSION OR EXTENSION OF FARM AND CRAFT SHOPS WILL BE PERMITTED SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

- i) THE RETAIL OUTLET, AFTER THE PROPOSED EXPANSION OR EXTENSION, REMAINS SUBORDINATE TO THE PARTICULAR RURAL ENTERPRISE CONCERNED;
- ii) AT LEAST 60% OF THE PROPOSED MERCHANDISE SOLD WILL BE GROWN OR PRODUCED WITHIN AN AGREED LOCAL AREA;
- iii) NO DEMONSTRABLE HARM WILL BE CAUSED TO THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF A NEARBY VILLAGE SHOP WHICH PROVIDES EASILY ACCESSIBLE CONVENIENCE SHOPPING AVAILABLE TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY; AND
- iv) THE OPERATION OF THE EXISTING RETAIL OUTLET CAUSES NO DEMONSTRABLE HARM IN HIGHWAY, ENVIRONMENTAL OR AMENITY TERMS.

### **The Keeping, Rearing and Training of Horses**

- 11.103 Parts of the Vale of White Horse are strongly associated with stables and racing yards, particularly in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where there is a long tradition of both recreational horse riding and the rearing and training of horses for the racehorse industry, for example at Letcombe Bassett, Letcombe Regis, Woolstone and Blewbury. Commercial equestrian enterprises are crucial to the Vale's rural economy and frequently give rise to pressures for new development in sensitive countryside locations. The

Council's attitude towards such development therefore needs to be made clear. This is set out below and in policy E20.

- 11.104 In dealing with applications for horse-related development the Council will take into consideration the advice in Planning Policy Statement 7, which states that policies should ensure the maintenance of environmental quality and countryside character in relation to equine enterprises. Applicants should take particular care to minimise the effect their proposals will have on the appearance of the countryside. Buildings should be sited and designed to blend in with their surroundings and applicants may be required to assess the effects of their proposed development on soil erosion, the vegetation of the land to be used and the rights of way network. In addition, applicants will be expected to comply with recommended standards for safety and comfort of horses (further advice is given in the Countryside Agency booklet *Horses in the Countryside*).
- 11.105 As horse-related developments can occur in countryside locations where development is not normally permitted for other uses, or at a scale larger than allowable for other uses, the Council wishes to be sure, prior to the grant of planning permission for commercial equestrian facilities, that the horse-related use will be a long-term operation with a genuine likelihood of viability and permanence and that the use and occupation of buildings will be strictly controlled.
- 11.106 It is the Council's intention to protect suitably located large-scale commercial stables with an appropriate range of facilities from redevelopment for other uses, in recognition of their contribution to the local rural economy. In addition, the loss of such facilities could lead to pressure for more commercial establishments in the open countryside which may not be so well located in relation to access to equestrian or other facilities or in terms of the impact of proposals on the landscape. In this respect, policy E21 will apply.

## **POLICY E20**

**PROPOSALS FOR THE KEEPING, REARING, TRAINING AND LIVERY OF HORSES ON A COMMERCIAL BASIS WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE:**

- i) **THE PROPOSED PREMISES WILL HAVE SAFE ACCESS FROM THE SITE TO PUBLIC BRIDLEWAYS, GALLOPS OR OTHER EXERCISE AREAS IN ORDER TO AVOID CONFLICT BETWEEN HORSES AND OTHER PUBLIC HIGHWAY USERS; AND**
- ii) **THE PROPOSAL DOES NOT RESULT IN EROSION OF SOIL OR VEGETATION THROUGH OVERGRAZING OR OVERUSE; AND**
- iii) **THE PROPOSAL DOES NOT HARM THE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE OR ITS LANDSCAPE SETTING.**

ANY REQUIREMENT FOR BUILDINGS SHOULD BE MET THROUGH THE RE-USE OR REPLACEMENT OF EXISTING RURAL BUILDINGS OR THROUGH THE REDEVELOPMENT OF AN EXISTING DEVELOPED SITE. WHERE THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE OR APPROPRIATE, PROPOSALS REQUIRING THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW BUILDINGS WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF, IN ADDITION TO (i), (ii) AND (iii), THE EXTENT AND SCALE OF BUILDINGS PROPOSED IS THE MINIMUM NECESSARY TO OPERATE THE USE.

PROPOSALS WHICH INCLUDE ADDITIONAL RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS THE APPLICANT DEMONSTRATES THAT THERE IS A PROVEN NEED FOR THE ACCOMMODATION WHICH CANNOT BE MET WITHIN A NEARBY SETTLEMENT OR THROUGH THE RE-USE OR ADAPTATION OF AN EXISTING RURAL BUILDING. IF THERE IS A PROVEN NEED FOR THE ACCOMMODATION WHICH CANNOT BE MET OTHER THAN BY CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW BUILDING, THEN THE AMOUNT AND TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION ON SITE WILL BE RESTRICTED TO THE MINIMUM JUSTIFIED BY THE EQUESTRIAN SCHEME CONCERNED.

#### **POLICY E21**

PROPOSALS FOR THE CHANGE OF USE OR RE-DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING AND SUITABLY LOCATED LARGE-SCALE ESTABLISHMENTS FOR THE KEEPING, TRAINING AND BREEDING OF HORSES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.

## **Minimising the Need to Travel by Car**

- 11.107 There is widespread concern that increased numbers of cars and goods vehicles has led to congestion, noise and air pollution. Accordingly, aim 3 for this Local Plan as identified in Chapter 2 is 'to reduce the need to travel and the harmful effects of traffic on people and the environment'. Policy GS10 in Chapter 3 also proposes that 'new development should be guided to locations where the need to travel, particularly by car, can be minimised'. In the interests of encouraging sustainable development and reducing the need to travel, the Local Plan includes a range of policies aimed at achieving this objective. There are policies in this chapter to provide new business sites in locations which are accessible by means of transport other than the private car (policies E1–E8). Also, the protection of key sites for business use (policies E10–E12) and policy E13 (which allows ancillary uses such as crèche facilities and cafes on such sites) can help to minimise the need to travel by car. With the same objective in mind the following section considers and seeks to encourage working from home.



## **Working from Home**

- 11.108 The District Council recognises that many successful businesses begin with people working from home and that this process can bring significant economic benefits to the local area in the longer term if such businesses are able to flourish and grow. However, there is a need to ensure that activities which take place in connection with the business do not adversely affect neighbouring properties. Increasingly advances in technology are enabling people to work at home, which can benefit the environment by reducing the need to travel and hence reducing vehicle emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants.
- 11.109 Planning permission is not usually required where only a small part of the home is used for business purposes and the overall character of the property as a dwellinghouse is not changed (a good example would be use by a householder of a single room as an office). When the business use is no longer ancillary to the use of the property as a dwelling, however, a material change in the use of the property is almost certain to have taken place, for which planning permission would be required. Any permission granted may be subject to conditions in order to ensure that there is no adverse effect on neighbouring properties. Such conditions may include restricting the number of employees, the hours during which the business can operate and the type of activities which can be carried out.
- 11.110 Inevitably, there are certain business activities which cannot be satisfactorily accommodated in a residential area, for example where the business is likely to generate (or is already generating) significant traffic, noise or other disturbance. In such cases, the District Council will refuse planning permission or, if the business already exists, it will take enforcement action where appropriate to cease the use.
- 11.111 Policy GS10 in Chapter 3 of the Local Plan states that new development will be guided to locations where the need to travel, particularly by car, can be minimised. If the proposed business use in connection with working from home is in an unsustainable location which would result in a material increase in the amount of traffic movements to and from the site, then planning permission will not be granted.

### **POLICY E22**

#### **WHERE PLANNING PERMISSION FOR WORKING AT HOME IS REQUIRED PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED PROVIDED:**

- i) **THERE IS NO DEMONSTRABLE HARM TO THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT OR TO RESIDENTIAL AMENITY IN TERMS OF NOISE, DUST, SMELL, TRAFFIC, PARKING, LOSS OF PRIVACY OR CHANGES TO THE VISUAL APPEARANCE OF THE PROPERTY;**

- ii) THE SCALE AND TYPE OF BUSINESS WOULD RESPECT THE PREVAILING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOCALITY; AND
- iii) THE BUSINESS USE DUE TO ITS PROPOSED LOCATION DOES NOT GENERATE A LEVEL OF TRAFFIC MOVEMENT BY PRIVATE CAR OR SERVICE VEHICLES WHICH WOULD OUTWEIGH THE BENEFITS OF WORKING FROM HOME, HAVING REGARD TO THE LIKELY NEED FOR ACCESS TO THE BUSINESS BY SUPPLIERS AND/OR CUSTOMERS.