Protecting the environment and responding to climate change

6.82 Protecting the environment and responding to climate change are important themes that form a key part of our vision and objectives as set out in **Chapter 3** and have informed our spatial strategy as set out in **Chapter 4**. Our approach ensures that protecting the environment and responding to climate change have also influenced the location of strategic growth (**Core Policy 4**).

6.83 This section of the plan includes strategic policies that help to maintain and achieve a high quality environment across the district. The policies set out how we will seek to respond to climate change and protect the Vale's historic, built, and natural environment.

6.84 Any site or area specific policies are set out in our sub-area strategies (**Chapter 5**). This section sets out policies that apply across the district, these are:

- **Core Policy 37: Design and Local Distinctiveness**- which seeks to ensure that all development achieves high quality design standards
- **Core Policy 38: Design Strategies for Strategic and Major Development Sites**– which sets out the requirement for Masterplans and Design and Access Statements to accompany strategic and major development proposals
- **Core Policy 39: The Historic Environment** – which sets out the councils approach to conserving historic assets across the district
- **Core Policy 40: Sustainable Design and Construction** – which sets out the requirement for new development to incorporate climate change adaptation measures to ensure resilience to climate change
- **Core Policy 41: Renewable Energy** – which sets out the councils approach to supporting proposals for renewable energy
- **Core Policy 42: Flood Risk** – which defines how flood risk should be addressed to support new development proposals
- **Core Policy 43: Natural Resources** – which sets out the councils approach to minimising environmental impacts associated with development proposals
- **Core Policy 44: Landscape** – which sets out the councils approach to protecting the important landscape setting of the Vale
- **Core Policy 45: Green Infrastructure** – which seeks to ensure the appropriate provision of Green Infrastructure through new development
- **Core Policy 46: Conservation and Improvement of Biodiversity** – which seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity across the district

Design

6.85 The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment[1]. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making better places to live and work. New development should create a sense of place and distinct character where people will feel safe and be proud to live and work. Design quality and the historic environment are linked because the historic environment often includes characteristics we associate with high standards of design quality.

6.86 The council is preparing a comprehensive design guide to support the design policies set out in the Local Plan 2031 (**Core Policies 37 and 38**). The design guide will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to ensure new development is provided to the high quality standards that are appropriate for the Vale. **Core Policy 37** and the SPD will apply to all development in the district, although not all of the requirements will apply in every case.

6.87 The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 makes provision for significant strategic growth, including a number of major urban extensions to our existing towns and villages. It is important the new developments are places where people will want to live in, and that new buildings also make a positive contribution to established settlements and the local environment.

6.88 The demonstration of good urban design principles through a masterplan approach for strategic and major applications[2] is required by **Core Policy 38**. The masterplan should set out the strategy for new development to help clarify site expectations and improve collaboration between stakeholders and should be prepared in accordance with the Development Site Templates (**Appendix A**). This approach should also optimise the potential of the site to:

- create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including open and other public spaces as part of developments),
- support existing services and amenities and facilitate delivery of housing, and
- tie the design process into the planning process by setting an overarching framework to achieve a cohesive development that integrates with the existing settlement.

6.89 The masterplans should be produced in consultation between the Vale of White Horse District Council, the community and other stakeholders where appropriate (for example Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council) and may be subject to design review. The information provided should be proportionate to the scale, complexity and location of the application[3]. Applicants are recommended to contact the Local Planning Authority at an early stage to determine the extent of information required.

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[1] NPPF, para 56
[2] as defined by the Development Management Procedure Order 2010
[3] Additional design policies may be set out within the Science Vale Area Action Plan for sites within this area.

Core Policy 37: Design and Local Distinctiveness

All proposals for new development will be ~~expected~~ **REQUIRED** to be of high quality design that:

<div style="float:right; border:1px solid black; padding:4px;">MM28</div>

i. responds positively to the site and its surroundings, cultural diversity and history**,** **CONSERVES AND ENHANCES HISTORIC CHARACTER** and reinforces local identity or establishes a distinct identity whilst not preventing innovative responses to context

ii. creates a distinctive sense of place through high quality townscape and landscaping that physically and visually integrates with its surroundings

iii. provides a clear and permeable structure of streets, routes and spaces that are legible and easy to navigate through because of the use of street typology, views, landmarks, public art and focal points

iv. is well connected to provide safe and convenient ease of movement by all users, ensuring that the needs of vehicular traffic does not dominate at the expense of other modes of transport including pedestrians and cyclists, or undermine the resulting quality of places

v. incorporates and/or links to high quality Green Infrastructure and landscaping to enhance biodiversity and meet recreational needs including Public Rights of Way

vi. is built to last, functions well and is flexible to changing requirements of occupants and other circumstances

vii. addresses the needs of all in society by incorporating mixed uses and facilities as appropriate with good access to public transport and a wide range of house types and tenures

viii. is visually attractive and the scale, height, density, grain, massing, type, details and materials are appropriate for the site and surrounding area

ix. creates safe communities and reduces the likelihood and fear of crime

x. secures a high quality public realm with well managed and maintained public areas that are overlooked to promote greater community safety, with clearly defined private spaces

xi. ensures a sufficient level of well-integrated car and bicycle parking and external storage, and

xii. is sustainable and resilient to climate change by taking into account landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption and mitigate water run-off and flood risks.

Core Policy 38: Design Strategies for Strategic and Major Development Sites

Proposals for housing allocations and major development* sites must be accompanied by a site-wide design strategy that includes the following:

1. a Masterplan which should:
    i. identify the Vision for the development setting out a clear description of the type of place that could be created whilst building on the overall aims for the district
    ii. demonstrate a coherent and robust framework for development that clearly sets out: land uses proposed including amount, scale and density, movement and access arrangements and Green Infrastructure provision
    iii. show how the design requirements of the scheme work within the Vision and demonstrate how the Vision will be achieved
    iv. integrate with the surrounding built, historic and natural environments, in particular maximising existing and potential movement connections and accessibility to encourage walking, cycling and use of public transport
    v. provide community facilities and other amenities to meet the needs of all the community, including access to education and training facilities, health care, community leisure and recreation facilities as appropriate
    vi. define a hierarchy of routes and the integration of suitable infrastructure, including for example SUDS within the public realm
    vii. contain a Green Infrastructure framework to ensure that public and private open space standards are met, relate well to each other and to existing areas and that the new spaces are safe, convenient, **ACCESSIBLE** and functional, and

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    viii. contain an indicative layout which illustrates a legible urban structure based on strategic urban design principles and identifies key elements of townscape such as main frontages, edges, landmark buildings and key building groups and character areas.

2. an accompanying Design and Access Statement, which should explain:
    i. the steps taken to appraise the context of the proposed development, and how the design of the development takes that context into account to create or reinforce local distinctiveness to achieve a positive sense of place and identity
    ii. the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the proposed development and how these principles will be used to inform subsequent phases or development parcels within the overall site
    iii. the mechanism for delivering the Vision at more detailed stages, for example through design coding
    iv. how sustainability and environmental matters will be addressed including the efficient use of resources both during construction and when the development is complete
    v. the delivery phasing and implementation strategies to be in place to ensure the timely delivery of infrastructure and services to the development when they are needed by new residents, and that new developments are built out in a logical manner
    vi. how the mix of housing types and tenures is integrated and supports a range of household sizes, ages and incomes to meet identified housing need, and
    vii. how consultation with the existing community has been incorporated.

* As defined by Development Management Procedure Order 2010

The Historic Environment

6.90 One of the greatest assets of the Vale is its rich and varied built heritage, which contributes greatly to the distinctive character and cherished identity of its towns, villages and countryside. The district displays a subtle range of building types and materials reflecting the underlying geology of the area. The historic landscape also plays an important role in shaping the varied character of the district as a heritage asset in itself. This is further explored through Oxfordshire County Council's Historic Landscape Characterisation (funded by English Heritage), which is due to be completed in 2015. Some of this work has already been undertaken for the Vale district to inform the selection of the strategic sites. The importance of the heritage across the district s recognised by the designation of 52 Conservation Areas, over 2000 Listed Buildings, 8 Registered Parks and Gardens and 68 Scheduled Monuments.

6.91 The numerous features of architectural or historic interest mean that heritage is a key reason that draws people to want to live in the district's towns and villages and so it is important their character and heritage assets are retained, particularly in areas that face pressure from development. New development can often be informed by principles of good urban design through studying historic towns and villages and it is important these heritage assets are not lost.

6.92 The most effective protection for historic buildings is to maintain them in active use. In many cases the most appropriate use for a historic building is that for which it was originally constructed and this should, where possible, be retained. However, in many cases this use will no longer be practical or viable and a new use will have to be found. In such circumstances, the council will consider appropriate alternative uses for historic buildings and structures or, if necessary, enabling development to ensure that buildings and structures are conserved for the future. In particular, this will apply for buildings and structures on the Heritage at Risk Register[4], maintained by English Heritage. However, the heritage asset most at risk of being lost has often been archaeology, through neglect, decay, or inappropriate development.

6.93 Proposals for new uses of historic assets should avoid the need to remove architectural or historic features, respect the integrity of the built form and quality of spaces within the buildings and avoid or minimise the introduction of new structural features. Any enabling development will be assessed in accordance with English Heritage guidance[5], which recognises that such proposals should secure the future conservation of a heritage asset and that the benefits of such schemes should outweigh the disbenefits of departing from the national and local policies.

6.94 The Council will improve its understanding of the historic environment in the

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[4] English Heritage, *Heritage at Risk Register,* available at: http://risk.english-heritage.org.uk/register.aspx .
[5] http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/enabling-development-and-the-conservation-of-significant-places/

district by continuing to produce Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans. **THE COUNCIL WILL ALSO IDENTIFY** ~~and through producing a list of~~ non-designated heritage assets~~.~~ **THROUGH THE PREPARATION OF CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISALS AND MANAGEMENT PLANS**. All of these will be produced with the help of the local community, who often have a deep knowledge of, and passion for, their local heritage. The council will support communities who would like to gather evidence about their Conservation Area to help them produce Character Appraisals and Management Plans.

6.95 The Historic Environment Record (HER), which is currently maintained by Oxfordshire County Council, shows where there are known archaeological sites and monuments within the county. The HER will be used to guide the application of national policy in relation to heritage assets of archaeological interest.

6.96 Applications relating to heritage assets should describe the significance of the asset, including any contribution made by their setting, with a proportionate level of detail relating to the likely impact the proposal could have on the asset's cultural, historic, architectural and archaeological interest.

6.97 Development proposals that would harm the significance of designated assets, such as Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Registered Park & Gardens and Scheduled Monuments, and their settings will be strongly resisted in accordance with national guidance and **Core Policy 39**. Non-designated heritage assets, such as important archaeology, will be conserved taking into account the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the asset.

6.98 New development in Conservation Areas should make a positive contribution to, or better reveal, the significance of the setting within the Conservation Area, using an up-to-date Conservation Area Character Appraisal, where one is available.

Core Policy 39: The Historic Environment

The Council will work with landowners, developers, the community, English Heritage and other stakeholders to:

i.   ensure that new development conserves, and where possible enhances, **DESIGNATED** heritage assets **AND NON-DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS** and their setting in accordance with national guidance **AND LEGISLATION**[1]

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ii.   ensure that vacant historic buildings are appropriately re-used as soon as possible to prevent deterioration of condition
iii. seek to reduce the number of buildings on the "Heritage at Risk" Register
iv.   encourage better understanding of the significance of scheduled monuments on the "Heritage at Risk" Register and to aid in their protection

v. better understand the significance of Conservation Areas in the district through producing Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans

vi. identify criteria for assessing non designated heritage assets and maintaining a list of such assets as Locally Listed Buildings, and

vii. encourage Heritage Partnership Agreements, particularly for Listed Buildings on any 'at risk' register.

[1] **PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS) ACT 1990**

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Responding to climate change

6.99 Responding to climate change is one of our strategic objectives and has informed our spatial strategy, the location of our strategic site allocations and many of the local plan policies. Through the planning process the council is seeking to achieve a low carbon Vale by:

- locating housing development close to jobs and services to minimise the need to travel
- providing good access by public transport, cycling and walking to reduce the need to travel by car
- improving the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings
- promoting the development and use of decentralised renewable and low carbon energy, and
- promoting superfast broadband coverage to reduce the need to travel (**Core Policy 36**).

6.100 As well as seeking to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, the council also recognises that climate change is already happening and so it is important that new development is designed to be resilient to its effects. It is anticipated that the UK will experience warmer, wetter winters, hotter, drier summers and see an increased incidence of extreme weather[6].

6.101 The Housing Standards Review[7] has indicated that the Government will put less emphasis on the Code for Sustainable Homes and will instead set equivalent standards through Building Regulations. Therefore, the council does not set policy standards for the Code for Sustainable Homes. However, Government policy does still allow councils to choose to apply a local standard for water efficiency in advance of national standards. As the Vale is in an area of water stress[8], the Council **ARE APPLYING A HIGHER STANDARD FOR WATER EFFICIENCY, AS RECOMMENDED WITHIN THE WATER CYCLE STUDY.**will apply a higher standard for this matter in the Local Plan 2031 Part 2.

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[6] http://ukclimateprojections.defra.gov.uk/
[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/housing-standards-review-consultation
[8] Thames Water (2014): Water resources Management Plan 2015-2040 (July 2014)

Core Policy 40: Sustainable Design and Construction

~~All new development, including building conversions, refurbishments and extensions, should seek~~ **THE COUNCIL ENCOURAGES DEVELOPERS** to incorporate climate change adaptation and design measures to combat the effects of changing weather patterns~~.~~ **IN ALL NEW DEVELOPMENT, WHICH COULD INCLUDE:** ~~wherever practicable, measures to provide resilience against higher temperature and intense rainfall should be used and their application to the development outlined in the design and access statement.~~

This could include measures such as:

i.   planting, shading and advanced glazing systems to reduce solar heat gain during the summer
ii.   using materials to prevent penetration of heat, including use of cool building materials and green roofs and walls and using flood resilient materials
iii.   increasing natural ventilation and removing heat by using fresh air
iv.   orientating windows of habitable rooms within 30 degrees of south and utilising southern slopes
v.   locating windows at heights that maximise heating from lower sub angles during the winter, and
vi.   incorporating flood resilient measures such as raising floor levels, electrical fittings and rain-proofing and overhangs to prevent infiltration of heavy rain around doors and windows,

~~The Council will expect the policy requirements to be met unless it can be demonstrated that it would not be viable* or appropriate to do so or where historic assets would be affected.~~ A sensitive approach will need to be taken to safeguard the special character of the heritage assets e.g. in a Conservation Area **OR WHERE HISTORIC ASSETS WOULD BE AFFECTED.**

~~*Viability should be set out in an independent viability assessment on terms agreed by the relevant parties including the Council and funded by the developer. This will involve an open book approach.~~

THE VALE OF WHITE HORSE IS LOCATED WITHIN AN AREA OF WATER STRESS AND IS APPLYING A HIGHER STANDARD FOR WATER EFFICIENCY*

NEW DEVELOPMENTS ARE REQUIRED TO BE DESIGNED TO A WATER EFFICIENCY STANDARD OF 110 LITRES/HEAD/DAY (L/H/D) FOR NEW HOMES.

* VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL WATER CYCLE STUDY: UPDATED PHASE 1 STUDY SEPTEMBER 2015

Renewable energy

6.102 The Government has set a target of 15 per cent of the UK's energy to come from renewable sources by 2020[9]. To enable the Vale to contribute towards the government's target, the council will support schemes for renewable energy where they are suitable in all other respects.

Core Policy 41: Renewable Energy <mark>(EXCLUDING WIND ENERGY)</mark>

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The council encourages schemes for renewable and low carbon energy generation. Planning applications for renewable and low carbon energy generation <mark>(EXCLUDING WIND ENERGY)</mark> will be supported provided that they do not cause a significantly adverse Effect to:

  i.   landscape, both designated AONB and locally valued
  ii. biodiversity, including protected habitats and species and Conservation Target Areas
  iii. the historic environment, both designated and non-designated assets, including by development within their settings
  iv. the visual amenity and openness of the Green Belt
  v.   local residential amenity, and
  vi. the safe movement of traffic and pedestrians.

Flood Risk

6.103 **Core Policy 42** seeks to ensure that development provides appropriate measures for the management of surface water as an essential element of reducing future flood risk to both the site and its surroundings. Sustainable drainage methods, such as green roofs, ponds and permeable surfaces, will be encouraged, where technically possible. The drainage elements of new development must be designed to the principles set out in the Flood and Water Management Act 2010[10] and associated relevant design standards. Further information on sustainable drainage systems can be found in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)[11] and from Oxfordshire County Council, who are the lead flood authority for Oxfordshire. Sustainable drainage systems should seek to enhance water quality and biodiversity in line with Water Framework Directive (WFD)[12].

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[9] Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources, available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009L0028&from=EN
[10] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/29/contents
[11] www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/evidence
[12] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2003/3242/contents/made

Core Policy 42: Flood Risk

The risk and impact of flooding will be minimised through:

i. directing new development to areas with the lowest probability of flooding
ii. ensuring that all new development addresses the effective management of all sources of flood risk
iii. ensuring that development does not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere, and
iv. ensuring wider environmental benefits of development in relation to flood risk.

The suitability of development proposed in flood zones will be strictly assessed using the Sequential Test, and, where necessary, the Exceptions Test. A sequential approach should be used at site level.

A site specific flood risk assessment will be required for all developments of 1 hectare and greater in Flood Zone 1 and for all proposals for new development, including minor development and change of use in Flood Zone 2 and 3 and in Critical Drainage Areas, and also where proposed development or a change of use to a more vulnerable class that may be subject to other forms of flooding. Appropriate mitigation and management measures will be required to be implemented.

All development proposals must be assessed against the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and the Oxfordshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy to address locally significant flooding. Appropriate mitigation and management measures must be implemented.

All development will be required to provide a drainage strategy. Developments will be expected to incorporate sustainable drainage systems and ensure that run-off rates are attenuated to greenfield run-off rates. Higher rates would need to be justified and the risks quantified. Developers should strive to reduce run-off rates for existing developed sites.

Sustainable drainage systems should seek to enhance water quality and biodiversity in line with the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

Efficient Use of Natural Resources

6.104 National planning policy underlines the importance of prudent use of natural

resources from using land effectively to encouraging the use of renewable resources. **Core Policy 43** incorporates all elements of natural resources including land, water and air quality to ensure they are protected from decline.

6.105 **NATIONAL POLICY STATES THAT POLICIES SHOULD TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE PRESENCE OF AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREAS AND THE CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ON AIR QUALITY FROM INDIVIDUAL SITES IN LOCAL AREAS**. There are ~~two~~ **THREE** Air Quality Management Areas designated in the Vale. These are:

- those parts of Botley closest to the A34 have been declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) due to the pollution generated by the heavy volume of traffic. The council will continue to monitor levels of nitrogen dioxide in this area, and
- central Abingdon-on-Thames was designated as an AQMA for nitrogen dioxide in 2006 and an action plan was approved in 2009. Abingdon's Integrated Transport Strategy (AbITS) was subsequently put in place to alter the flow of traffic within the town centre. Pollution levels in the town will continue to be monitored.
- **AN AQMA WAS DESIGNATED IN MARCHAM IN 2005 DUE TO A HIGHLY CONSTRAINED ROAD LAYOUT AND RESULTANT TRAFFIC CONGESTION AND NITROGEN DIOXIDE POLLUTION. THE COUNCIL WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR POLLUTION LEVELS AND WORK WITH STAKEHOLDERS TO IDENTIFY A LONG-TERM SOLUTION.**

6.106 The Water Framework Directive[13] requires that there is no deterioration in the

status of water bodies and that they all achieve good ecological status by 2027. The Thames River Basin Management Plan[14] sets out actions to help meet this obligation. Policies on Green Infrastructure, biodiversity and sustainable construction will also assist in achieving this objective by ensuring that surface water run-off is appropriately controlled.

6.107 Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for determining planning applications for minerals and waste development and producing the ~~Waste and Minerals Core Strategy[15]~~ **MINERALS AND WASTE LOCAL PLAN**, which will safeguard mineral resources, ~~aggregates,~~ **AGGREGATE** rail **depots,** ~~and~~ sites for **RECYCLED AND**

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[13] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2003/3242/contents/made

[14] http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/125035.aspx

[15] http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/minerals-and-waste-core-strategy

SECONDARY AGGREGRATE SUPPLY, OTHER MINERALS INFRASTRUCTURE SITES and sites for waste management. These areas will be marked on ~~the~~ **THIS PLAN'S** Adopted Policies Map for reference **IN FUTURE FOLLOWING ADOPTION BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL**. Should the district receive a planning application in any of these areas, the County Council will be consulted on the development. Applicants are advised to review the ~~Waste and Minerals Core Strategy~~ **MINERALS AND WASTE LOCAL PLAN** prior to making a planning application.

Core Policy 43: Natural Resources

~~All development proposals will be required~~ **THE COUNCIL ENCOURAGES DEVELOPERS** to make provision for the effective use of natural resources where applicable, including:

i.	minimising waste and making adequate provision for the recycling of waste on site
ii.	using recycled and energy efficient materials
iii.	maximising passive solar heating, lighting, natural ventilation, energy and water efficiency and re-use of materials
iv.	making efficient use of water, for example through rainwater harvesting and grey water
v.	causing no deterioration in, and where possible, achieving improvements in water quality
vi.	**TAKES ACCOUNT OF, AND IF LOCATED WITHIN AN AQMA, IS CONSISTENT WITH, THE COUNCIL'S AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN**. ~~having regard to air quality and any Air Quality Management Areas~~
vii.	ensuring that the land is of a suitable quality for development and that remediation of contaminated land is undertaken where necessary
viii.	avoiding the development of the best and most versatile agricultural land, unless it is demonstrated to be the most sustainable choice from reasonable alternatives, by first using areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality, and
ix.	re-using previously developed land provided it is not of high environmental value.

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Landscape

6.108 The Vale of White Horse occupies an attractive part of the Upper Thames Valley. From south to north the landscape features range from the rolling sweep of the chalk downs (designated as part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)), across the wide vistas of the lowland clay vale, then rising to the limestone Corallian ridge, before dropping to the floodplain of the River Thames.

6.109 The distinctive landscapes within the district have been classified by Natural
England as falling within three distinct National Character Areas:

- NCA 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales
- NCA 109 Midvale Ridge
- NCA Berkshire and Marlborough Downs

6.110 Within these national areas there are a number of smaller and more detailed
landscapes that add to and enhance the local landscape character of the district.

6.111 The conservation of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside is a
core planning principle of the NPPF stating that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.

6.112 Landscape encompasses all outdoor space. There are pressures on these landscapes as a result of changes in agricultural practice and the impact of new development for housing and employment. The distinctive landscape of the Vale needs to be enhanced and protected for the future. There will be opportunities to enhance the landscape particularly in growth areas around Science Vale and elsewhere in the district and the Green Infrastructure Strategy will identify further opportunities for landscape enhancement within the district.

6.113 **Core Policy 44** will be applied using the most up-to-date **LEGISLATION**[16] landscape studies available from Natural England, the District and County Council, and from the North Wessex Downs AONB Board. These include: National Character Areas, Vale of White Horse Landscape Strategy 2006; the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study; Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation**; OXFORD VIEW CONES STUDY 2015 PRODUCED BY OXFORD CITY COUNCIL IN ASSOCIATION WITH OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST AND HISTORIC ENGLAND** and; documents produced by the North Wessex Downs AONB Board such as the AONB Landscape Character Assessment. Reference should also be made to the council's Design Guide SPD.

6.114 Other studies may be forthcoming to support more detailed landscape policies
in the Local Plan 2031 Part 2, such as a Views Study produced by Oxford City Council along with Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxford Preservation Trust. The council will also examine the necessity for an

[16] AONB Management Plan and CROW Act 2000

update to the district wide Landscape Character Assessment to support the Local Plan 2031 Part 2.

Core Policy 44: Landscape

The key features that contribute to the nature and quality of the Vale of White Horse District's landscape will be protected from harmful development and where possible enhanced, in particular:

   i.   features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and water bodies
   ii.   important landscape settings of settlements
   iii.   topographical features
   iv.   areas or features of cultural and historic value
   v.   important views and visually sensitive skylines, and
   vi.   tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.

Where development is acceptable in principle, measures will be sought to integrate it into the landscape character and/or the townscape of the area. Proposals will need to demonstrate how they have responded to the above aspects of landscape character and will be expected to:

   vii.   incorporate appropriate landscape proposals that reflect the character of the area through appropriate design and management;
   viii.   preserve and promote local distinctiveness and diversity and, where practical, enhance damaged landscape areas.

High priority will be given to conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs AONB and planning decisions will have regard to its setting. Proposals that support the economy and social well being of communities located in the AONB, including affordable housing schemes, will be encouraged provided they do not conflict with the aims of conservation and enhancement.

Green Infrastructure

6.115 Green Infrastructure relates to the active planning and management of substantial networks of multi-functional open space. Such networks need to be planned and managed to deliver the widest range of linked environmental and social benefits including conserving and enhancing biodiversity as well as landscape, recreation, water management, and social and cultural benefits to underpin community health and well being.

6.116 The council has produced a Green Infrastructure Audit that identifies the main

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Green Infrastructure assets within the Vale and assesses the provision of Green Infrastructure against an adapted version of nationally accepted standards. The Green Infrastructure Audit recommends that everyone, wherever they live, should have an accessible natural greenspace:

- at least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilometres of home
- one accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home, and
- one accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilometres of home.

6.117 The Council has commissioned a joint Green Infrastructure Strategy with South Oxfordshire District Council. This strategy will set out the main priorities, policies and standards for the delivery of new Green Infrastructure to meet the identified needs. THE STRATEGY WILL NEED TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF PLANS ALREADY IN PLACE TO MAINTAIN AND DELIVER NEW GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION, SUCH AS THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN AND WILL ALSO CONSIDER WHETHER THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND RECREATION IN THE OXFORD GREEN BELT.

6.118 When assessing planning applications, the council will take into account the
findings of the Green Infrastructure Audit, Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) to define what new Green Infrastructure will be required and how it should be delivered. Where

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 – Strikethrough Plan
July 2016
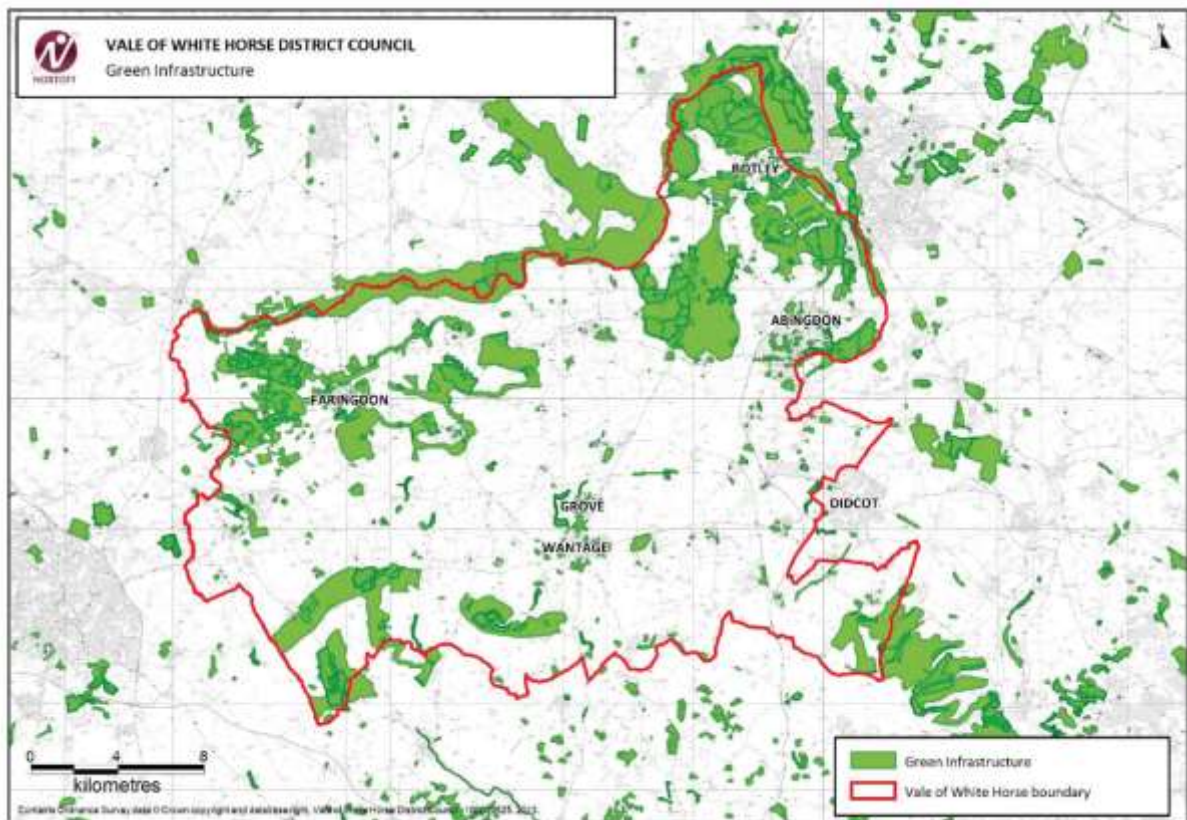
there are justifiable reasons why Green Infrastructure cannot be delivered on site the council will seek a financial contribution, which will focus on improvements in Conservation Target Areas[17] and areas of deficit as outlined in the Green Infrastructure Audit. Where new Green Infrastructure is identified as a mitigation requirement within the Habitats Regulations Assessment this will have to be delivered by the developer to meet the requirements of the HRA.

Figure 6.2: Vale of White Horse Green Infrastructure network

Core Policy 45: Green Infrastructure

A net gain in Green Infrastructure, including biodiversity, will be sought either through on site provision or off-site contributions and the targeted use of other funding sources. A net loss of Green Infrastructure, including biodiversity, through development proposals will be resisted.

Proposals for new development must provide adequate Green Infrastructure in line ~~the~~ with **THE** Green Infrastructure Strategy. All major applications must be accompanied by a statement demonstrating that they have taken into account the relationship of the proposed development to existing green infrastructure and how this will be retained and enhanced. Proposals will be required to contribute to the delivery of new Green Infrastructure and/or the improvement of existing assets including Conservation Target Areas in accordance with the standards in the Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Habitats Regulations Assessment.

Biodiversity

6.119 The district contains a rich variety of semi-natural habitats including woodlands, hedgerows, rivers, streams, and meadows. Together they help secure the survival of many species. There are a number of important nature conservation sites, which are protected at international, national and local level. These include:

- International:
    - 2 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

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[17] Conservation Target Areas are ecological networks that promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats and the protection and recovery of populations of priority species. They represent the main components of the ecological networks across Oxfordshire..

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- National:
  - National Nature Reserve
  - 23 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

- Local:
  - 84 Local Wildlife Sites*
  - 5 Local Nature Reserves
  - 9 Geologically Important Sites

* A current list of Local Wildlife Sites is available on the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre website[18]. The list is updated periodically so should be referred to for the most up to date list of conservation sites.

6.120 In addition to these sites there are numerous important natural habitats, including ancient woodlands and habitats of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity (under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act)[19]. Waterways and River corridors are also an important feature in the district, making a significant contribution to the character, biodiversity and landscape quality. There are also a wide variety of legally protected and priority species resident throughout the Vale.

6.121 Distinctions will be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.

6.122 Opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments will beencouraged. The Vale was the first council in the UK to use biodiversity offsetting to provide compensation for the impacts of development. Biodiversity offsetting is a mechanism used to secure compensation for the impacts of development for the creation or restoration of important habitats elsewhere. Offsetting is used to ensure that development schemes do not result in a net loss in biodiversity, particularly where it is not possible to avoid or mitigate the impacts of a development proposal on-site. Biodiversity offsetting will be considered as a means of compensating for loss of biodiversity through **Core Policy 46**, but only where avoidance and on-site mitigation have been discounted as options.

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[18] http://www.tverc.org/cms/
[19] Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents
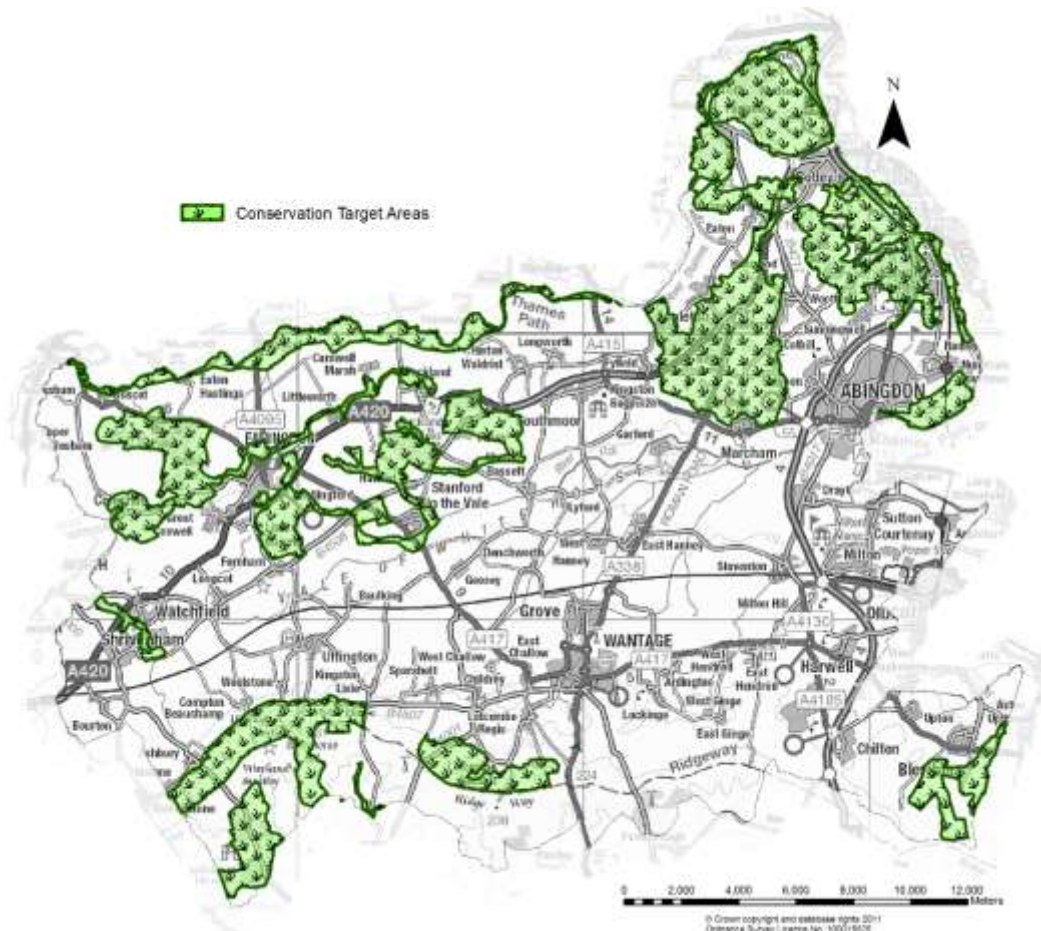
Figure 6.3: Vale of White Horse Conservation Target Areas

Core Policy 46: Conservation and Improvement of Biodiversity

Development that will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity in the district will be permitted. Opportunities for biodiversity gain, including the connection of sites, large-scale habitat restoration, enhancement and habitat re-creation will be actively sought, with a primary focus on delivery in the Conservation Target Areas. A net loss of biodiversity will be avoided.

The highest level of protection will be given to sites and species of international nature conservation importance (Special Areas of Conservation and European Protected Species). Development that is likely to result in a significant effect, either alone or in combination, on such sites and species will need to satisfy the requirements of the Habitat Regulations*.

Development likely to result in the loss, deterioration or harm to habitats or species of importance to biodiversity or of importance for geological conservation interests, either directly or indirectly, will not be permitted unless:
i) the need for, and benefits of, the development in the proposed location outweighs the adverse effect on the relevant biodiversity interest;

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ii) it can be demonstrated that it could not reasonably be located on an alternative site that would result in less or no harm to the biodiversity interests; and
iii) measures can be provided (and **ARE** secured through planning conditions or legal agreements), that would avoid, mitigate against or, as a last resort, compensate for the adverse effects likely to result from development.

The habitats and species of importance to biodiversity and sites of geological interest considered in relation to points i) to iii) comprise:
- Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Local Wildlife Sites
- Local Nature Reserves
- Priority Habitats and species listed in the national and local Biodiversity Action Plan
- Ancient Woodland and veteran trees
- Legally Protected Species
- Locally Important Geological Sites

The level of protection and mitigation should be proportionate to the status of the habitat or species and its importance individually and as part of a wider network.

It is recognised that habitats/areas not considered above *(i.e. Nationally or Locally designated and not priority habitats)* can still have a significant biodiversity value within their local context, particularly where they are situated within a Conservation Target Area and/or they have good potential to be restored to priority habitat status or form/have good potential to form links between priority habitats or act as corridors for priority species. These habitats will be given due weight in the consideration of planning applications. If significant harm to these sites cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts) it will be expected that mitigation will be provided to avoid a net loss in biodiversity or, as a last resort, compensation will be required to offset the impacts and achieve a net gain in biodiversity.
* Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992.

Wilts and Berks Canal

6.123 The Wilts & Berks canal route extends from Melksham in Wiltshire, through Swindon and on towards Abingdon-on-Thames where it meets with the River Thames. There is a branch (the North Wiltshire Canal) from Swindon to the Thames & Severn Canal near Cricklade. The canal was formally abandoned by Act of Parliament in 1914. Unlike many other canals in the country where the towpath and canal itself remained in public ownership, the Act of Parliament returned the Wilts and Berks Canal to the adjacent landowners and Local Authorities. Much of the route of the canal is in private ownership so the Wilts and Berks Canal Partnership will have to work closely with landowners if plans for its restoration are to go ahead.

6.124 The restoration of the Wilts and Berks Canal is currently focused on the sections in Wiltshire and Swindon, with only a few projects in the Vale. Further evidence is needed to understand the work required to restore the

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canal in the Vale before the council can safeguard the route. Saved Local Plan 2011 policies L14 and L15 will continue to be saved and will apply to any planning applications relating to the canal. The Local Plan 2031 Part 2 will provide the opportunity to update the policy relating to the Wilts and Berks Canal, should be informed by the work that the Partnership and the Trust undertake in the meantime. This work should include:

- o an overall viability study of the scheme to show that it is deliverable, including taking into account all infrastructure implications for the existing road and rail network;
- o investigating issues relating to the existing ecology**, HISTORIC** and natural environment, and identifying steps to mitigate these accordingly, and
- o ensuring that all landowners affected by the proposals are consulted as part of the process.

Leisure

6.125 In planning for development, regard must be had to the council's Leisure and Sports Facilities Strategy[20] and the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Future Provision SPD[21]. In doing so, development will be expected to make appropriate provision for open space and recreational facilities as outlined in these documents in accordance with **Core Policy 7** and in line with the councils up-to-date Infrastructure Delivery Plan. This will ensure that communities have access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation, which makes an important contribution to their health and well-being. These documents will be reviewed and updated when appropriate.

6.126 Existing leisure facilities will be protected in line with saved policies in the Local Plan 2011, until such time as they are replaced by Local Plan 2031 Part 2. Existing leisure facilities includes Public Rights of Way, as shown on the Oxfordshire County Council definitive map[22], and long-distance recreational paths such as The Ridgeway, the Thames Path and the d'Arcy Dalton Way.

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[20] www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/evidence
[21] Vale of White Horse District Council (2008) *Supplementary Planning Document: Open Space, Sport and Recreation, adopted July 2008,* available at: http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-development-framework/supplementary-
[22] http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/definitive-map-and-statement-online