

# **West Hanney Neighbourhood Development Plan 2016-2031**

**A report to Vale of White Horse District Council on  
the West Hanney Neighbourhood Development Plan**

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## **Executive Summary**

- 1 I was appointed by Vale of White Horse District Council in May 2021 to carry out the independent examination of the West Hanney Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2 The examination was undertaken by written representations. I visited the neighbourhood area on 12 May 2021.
- 3 The Plan includes a range of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. There is a very clear focus on safeguarding its local character and maintaining the distinction between West Hanney and East Hanney. The Plan is very-well written and presented. It is also distinctive to the neighbourhood area.
- 4 The Plan has been significantly underpinned by community support and engagement. It is clear that all sections of the community have been actively engaged in its preparation.
- 5 Subject to a series of recommended modifications set out in this report I have concluded that the West Hanney Neighbourhood Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.
- 6 I recommend that the referendum should be held within the neighbourhood area.

**Andrew Ashcroft**  
**Independent Examiner**  
**23 June 2021**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the West Hanney Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2031 ('the Plan').
- 1.2 The Plan has been submitted to Vale of White Horse District Council (VWHDC) by West Hanney Parish Council in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012 and its subsequent updates.
- 1.4 The role of an independent examiner is clearly defined in the legislation. I have been appointed to examine whether or not the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions and Convention Rights and other statutory requirements. It is not within my remit to examine or to propose an alternative plan, or a potentially more sustainable plan except where this arises as a result of my recommended modifications to ensure that the plan meets the basic conditions and the other relevant requirements.
- 1.5 A neighbourhood plan can be narrow or broad in scope. Any plan can include whatever range of policies it sees as appropriate to its designated neighbourhood area. The submitted plan has been designed to be distinctive in general terms, and to be complementary to the development plan in particular. It has a specific focus on maintaining the gap between West Hanney and East Hanney.
- 1.6 Within the context set out above this report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the basic conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.
- 1.7 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case and that referendum results in a positive outcome the Plan would then be used to determine planning applications within the plan area and will sit as part of the wider development plan.

## **2 The Role of the Independent Examiner**

- 2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.
- 2.2 I was appointed by VWHDC, with the consent of the Parish Council, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of both VWHDC and the Parish Council. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.
- 2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. In previous roles, I have over 35 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level. I am a chartered town planner and have significant experience of undertaking other neighbourhood plan examinations and health checks. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service.

### *Examination Outcomes*

- 2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:
- (a) that the Plan as submitted should proceed to a referendum; or
  - (b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
  - (c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.
- 2.5 The outcome of the examination is set out in Sections 7 and 8 of this report.

### *Other examination matters*

- 2.6 In examining the Plan I am required to check whether:
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
  - the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and
  - the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.
- 2.7 I have addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.6 of this report. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan complies with the three requirements.

### 3 Procedural Matters

3.1 In undertaking this examination I have considered the following documents:

- the submitted Plan.
- the Basic Conditions Statement.
- the Consultation Statement.
- the Screening Statement.
- the Character Assessment.
- the other supporting documents.
- the representations made to the Plan.
- the Parish Council's responses to the Clarification Note.
- the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (2016).
- the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2 (2019).
- the National Planning Policy Framework (2019).
- Planning Practice Guidance (March 2014 and subsequent updates).
- relevant Ministerial Statements.

3.2 I visited the neighbourhood area on 12 May 2021. I followed the national guidance in place at that time. In particular I was keen to ensure that I did not have contact with any other person (or vice versa) during the visit. I looked at the overall character and appearance of the neighbourhood area in general and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan in particular. The visit is covered in more detail in paragraphs 5.9 to 5.16 of this report.

3.3 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations made to the submitted plan, I was satisfied that the Plan could be examined without the need for a public hearing. I advised VWHDC of this decision once I had seen the Parish Council's response to the clarification note.

## 4 Consultation

### *Consultation Process*

- 4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such the regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 the Parish Council has prepared a Consultation Statement. This Statement is very thorough and proportionate to the Plan. It includes a detailed assessment of the consultation undertaken as part of the various stages of the production of the Plan. The aims of the consultation exercises and a summary of the processes followed are set out in Sections 2 and 3 respectively. The Statement also provides specific details on the consultation processes that took place on the pre-submission version of the Plan (November to December 2019) and how the community was encouraged to participate in that exercise.
- 4.3 The Statement sets out details of the range of consultation events that were carried on the initial stages of the plan-making process. It provides details about:
- the on-going use of a website;
  - the circulation of a community questionnaire;
  - an initial launch of the Plan in April 2016;
  - a village meeting in March 2017 to report on the survey results on the village boundary;
  - a village meeting in May 2017 to report on the remainder of the community survey results;
  - a village meeting in May 2017 on emerging Plan options; and
  - a village meeting in November 2019 to present and request feedback on the pre-submission plan consultation documents.
- 4.4 The Statement also comments in significant detail on how its key policies were influenced by a variety of private and public bodies.
- 4.5 Appendix G of the Statement sets out how the submitted Plan took account of consultation feedback on the pre-submission Plan. It includes details about the comments received and the Parish Council's responses. They do so in a very thorough and effective way. They help to describe the evolution of the Plan. Other appendices provide details of the various events.
- 4.6 It is clear that consultation has been an important element of the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation.
- 4.7 From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I can see that the Plan has promoted an inclusive approach to seeking the opinions of all concerned

throughout the process. In proceeding with the examination VWHDC has carried out its own assessment that the consultation process has complied with the requirements of the Regulations.

#### *Representations Received*

4.8 Consultation on the submitted plan was undertaken by the District Council. It ended on 15 April 2021. This exercise generated comments from a range of organisations as follows:

- Vale of White Horse District Council;
- NHS Oxfordshire;
- S&SE Networks;
- Natural England;
- National Grid;
- Oxfordshire County Council; and
- Thames Water

4.9 The Plan also received representations from two local residents. I have taken all the representations into account in preparing this report. Where it is appropriate to do so I make specific reference to certain representations in this report.

## 5 The Neighbourhood Area and the Development Plan Context

### *The Neighbourhood Area*

- 5.1 The neighbourhood area is the parish of West Hanney. Its population in 2011 was 490 persons living in 222 dwellings. It was designated as a neighbourhood area on 19 June 2015.
- 5.2 The neighbourhood area has an irregular shape. It lies approximately three miles to the north of Wantage and to the immediate west of East Hanney in attractive countryside
- 5.3 West Hanney itself occupies a central location within the parish. It is an attractive village which includes an extensive conservation area. As the Plan describes the village is centred around the St James the Great Church and West Hanney House, and has a nucleated east–west axis. The roads surround a central area of higher ground. The village also has a definite focus around its main green. It also has a smaller western green, the site of an old pond.

### *Development Plan Context*

- 5.4 The Vale of White Horse Local Plan (Part 1): Strategic Sites and Policies was adopted in December 2016. It sets out the basis for future development in the District up to 2031. All of the policies in this part of the Local Plan are strategic policies of the development plan. The Vale of White Horse Local Plan (Part 2): Detailed Policies and Additional Sites was adopted in October 2019. It is this broader development plan context against which I am required to examine the submitted Neighbourhood Plan.
- 5.5 The following policies in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 are particularly relevant to the submitted Plan:

Core Policy 3	Settlement Hierarchy
Core Policy 4	Meeting our Housing Needs
Core Policy 7	Providing Supporting Infrastructure and Services
Core Policy 37	Design and Local Distinctiveness
Core Policy 39	The Historic Environment
Core Policy 40	Sustainable Design and Construction
Cote Policy 44	Landscape
Core Policy 45	Green Infrastructure

In addition the following policies in the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 are particularly relevant to the submitted Plan:

Development Policy 23	Impact of development on amenity
Development Policy 29	Settlement Character and Gaps
Development Policy 37	Conservation Areas

- 5.6 West Hanney is identified as a Smaller Village within the Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe sub-area in the adopted Local Plan Part 1 (Core Policy 3). Smaller Villages have a low level of services and facilities, where any development should be modest and proportionate in scale and primarily be to meet local needs.
- 5.7 The Basic Conditions Statement usefully highlights the key policies in the development plan and how they relate to policies in the submitted Plan. It provides confidence to all concerned that the submitted Plan sits within its local planning policy context.
- 5.8 The submitted Plan has been prepared within its wider development plan context. In doing so it has relied on up-to-date information and research that has underpinned existing planning policy documents. This is good practice and reflects key elements in Planning Practice Guidance on this matter.

#### *Unaccompanied Visit*

- 5.9 I visited the neighbourhood area on 12 May 2021. I followed the national Covid guidance in place at that time and had no social contact with other persons or vice versa.
- 5.10 I drove into the neighbourhood area from Wantage and East Hanney. This provided a helpful context to the wider setting of the parish and the relationship between East Hanney and West Hanney in particular.
- 5.11 I parked in the centre of the village. I looked initially at its historic core, including St James the Great Church and West Hanney House. I saw the attractive arrangement of buildings around Church Street including The Dower House, The Old Rectory, Church Farmhouse and Priory Court. I walked to the western end of Church Street past the Plough Inn. And saw the attractive triangular grassed area where Church Street turns to the north to join Main Street.
- 5.12 I walked along Main Street back to the village green. I saw that the buildings became older as I walked back towards the historic core of the village. I saw the new houses off St James' Way and the way in which they had been sensitively incorporated into the historic context of the village.
- 5.13 Thereafter I walked towards East Hanney along School Road. In doing so the scale and significance of the proposed Hanney Gap became immediately obvious. I took the opportunity to walk along the footpath to the south of School Road to look at the eastern boundary of the St James Way development.
- 5.14 I walked along to the School. I then walked along the footpath/bridleway to the south up to the point at which the open grassland in the proposed Gap gave way to the community woodland. I retraced my steps back to School Road and then walked along the footpath/bridleway to the north and then followed the pathway which cut across the agricultural landscape to the west to Winter Lane. This allowed me to have extensive views across the northern part of the proposed Gap in every direction.

- 5.15 I then drove to Denchworth. I saw its attractive character and layout based on the Church and The Fox PH.
- 5.16 I finished my visit by driving to the north along the A338. This allowed me to understand the way in which the neighbourhood area related to the surrounding countryside and the wider topography. It also highlighted the relationship between the parish and Oxford and Abingdon.

## 6 The Neighbourhood Plan as a whole

6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted neighbourhood plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped considerably in the preparation of this section of the report. It is a well-presented and informative document. It is also proportionate to the Plan itself.

6.2 As part of this process I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the Basic Conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:

- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan in the area;
- be compatible with European Union (EU) and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) obligations; and
- not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (7).

6.3 I assess the Plan against the basic conditions under the following headings.

### *National Planning Policies and Guidance*

6.4 The key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued in February 2019.

6.5 The NPPF sets out a range of core land-use planning principles to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following are of particular relevance to the West Hanney Neighbourhood Plan:

- a plan led system– in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and Parts 1 and 2 of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031;
- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving local communities;
- taking account of the different roles and characters of different areas;
- always seeking to secure high quality design and good standards of amenity for all future occupants of land and buildings; and
- conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance

6.6 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally, and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development, which is identified as a golden thread running through the planning system. Paragraph 16 of the NPPF indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.

- 6.7 In addition to the NPPF I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy including Planning Practice Guidance and recent ministerial statements.
- 6.8 Having considered all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance in general terms. It sets out a positive vision for the future of the parish within the context of its position in the District's settlement hierarchy. It includes a series of policies that seek to ensure the character and appearance of the neighbourhood area is safeguarded. The Basic Conditions Statement maps the policies in the Plan against the appropriate sections of the NPPF.
- 6.9 At a more practical level the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraphs 17 and 154). This was reinforced with the publication of Planning Practice Guidance in March 2014. Paragraph 41 (41-041-20140306) indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. Policies should also be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence.
- 6.10 As submitted the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. The majority of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan fully accords with national policy.

*Contributing to sustainable development*

- 6.11 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the contribution that the submitted Plan makes to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social and environmental. It is clear to me that the submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. In the economic dimension the Plan includes a policy on the location of new development (Policy RS3). In the social role, it includes a policy on infrastructure and community facilities (Policy INF1). In the environmental dimension the Plan positively seeks to protect its natural, built and historic environment. It has specific policies on village character and design (Policy RS1), and on The Hanney Gap (Policies RS2). The Parish Council's assessment of this matter is set out in the submitted Basic Conditions Statement.

*General conformity with the strategic policies in the development*

- 6.12 I have already commented in detail on the development plan context in the wider Vale of White Horse District area in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of this report.
- 6.13 I consider that the submitted Plan delivers a local dimension to this strategic context and supplements the detail already included in the adopted Local Plan. The Basic Conditions Statement helpfully relates the Plan's policies to policies in the Local Plan 2031 Parts 1 and 2. Subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications in

this report I am satisfied that the submitted Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan.

*European Legislation and Habitat Regulations*

- 6.14 The Neighbourhood Plan General Regulations 2015 require a qualifying body either to submit an environmental report prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 or a statement of reasons why an environmental report is not required.
- 6.15 In order to comply with this requirement VWHDC undertook a screening exercise (August 2018) on the need or otherwise for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be prepared for the Plan. The report is thorough and well-constructed. As a result of this process, it concluded that the Plan is not likely to have any significant effects on the environment and accordingly would not require SEA.
- 6.16 The screening report also included a separate Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan. It concludes that the Plan is not likely to have significant environmental effects on a European nature conservation site or undermine their conservation objectives alone or in combination taking account of the precautionary principle. As such Appropriate Assessment is not required.
- 6.17 The HRA report is both thorough and comprehensive. It takes appropriate account of the following protected sites within close proximity to the neighbourhood area:
- Frilford Heath, Ponds and Fens SSSI (approx. 5km)
  - Barrow Farm Fen SSSI (approx. 5km)
  - Appleton Lower Common SSSI (approx. 6km)
  - Cothill Fen SSSI (approx. 7.5km)
  - Cothill Fen SAC (approx. 7.5km)
  - Shellingford Crossroads Quarry SSSI (approx. 10km)
  - Hackpen, Warren and Gramp's Hill Downs SSSI (approx. 10km)
  - Hackpen Hill SAC (approx. 10km)
  - Chimney Meadows SSSI (approx. 10km)

It provides assurance to all concerned that the submitted Plan takes appropriate account of important ecological and biodiversity matters.

- 6.18 Having reviewed the information provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that a proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various regulations. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with this aspect of European obligations.
- 6.19 In a similar fashion I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. In addition, there has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. On the basis of all the

evidence available to me, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

*Summary*

- 6.20 On the basis of my assessment of the Plan in this section of my report I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications contained in this report.

## 7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 7.1 This section of the report comments on the policies in the Plan. In particular, it makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that the various policies have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.
- 7.2 My recommendations focus on the policies themselves given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended changes to the associated supporting text.
- 7.3 I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan is fit for purpose. It is distinctive and proportionate to the Plan area. The wider community and the Parish Council have spent time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that they wish to be included in their Plan. This sits at the heart of the localism agenda.
- 7.4 The Plan has been designed to reflect Planning Practice Guidance ((Section 41-004-20190509)) which indicates that neighbourhood plans must address the development and use of land.
- 7.5 I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted plan. For clarity this section of the report comments on all policies regardless of whether or not I have recommended modifications in order to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions.
- 7.6 Where modifications are recommended to policies they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

### *The initial sections of the Plan*

- 7.7 The presentation of the Plan as a whole has been prepared to a good standard. It is well-organised and includes very effective maps and carefully-chosen photographs that give real depth and purpose to its format. The Plan makes an appropriate distinction between the policies and their supporting text.
- 7.8 The initial elements of the Plan set the scene for the policies. They are proportionate to the neighbourhood area and the subsequent policies. The Introduction provides a very clear scene-setter for the wider Plan. The second chapter provides a context to the development of the Plan, its relationship with the Vale of White Horse Local Plan and the definition of the neighbourhood area itself. It advises about procedural matters such as the screening exercise and the examination and referendum stages of plan preparation. It also comments about the way in which the community was engaged in its production and provides a context for the more detailed Consultation Statement.
- 7.9 To bring the clarity required by the NPPF I recommend that the map of the neighbourhood area is replaced by that proposed by VWHDC. Whilst it does not affect its geographic area it identifies its boundaries in a clearer fashion. I also recommend that the Plan period is included in the Plan itself to supplement the details on the front cover.

*Replace the map on page 4 with that supplied by VWHDC*

*At the end of paragraph 2.2 add: 'The Plan period is 2016 to 2031'*

- 7.10 Chapter 3 comments about the neighbourhood area. It includes comprehensive information about the village, its location, its history and the challenges for the future. It also provides a detailed assessments of the policies in the Local Plan which have influenced the details of the submitted Plan.
- 7.11 Chapter 4 sets out the Vision and a series of Objectives for the neighbourhood area. Their combined effect is clear, concise and proportionate. The overall Vision is underpinned by five objectives, all of which are distinctive to the neighbourhood area.
- 7.12 The wider Plan has two defining features. The first is the way in which there is a clear connection between its themes, objectives, evidence base and the resulting policies. The second is the way in which its policies are very clearly-defined, distinctive to the parish and designed to add to the strategic approach already included in the adopted Local Plan. The Parish Council should be commended for taking this concise and focused approach to the plan-making process.
- 7.13 The remainder of this section of the report addresses each policy in turn in the context set out in paragraphs 7.5 and 7.6 of this report.

#### Policy RS1 Village Character and Design

- 7.14 This policy sets out a comprehensive approach to character and design. It is underpinned by the Character Assessment work which identified seven distinctive village areas which are broadly linked by common characteristics or geography. They are as follows:
- West Hanney Green
  - Church Green and Church Street
  - Main Street
  - The Post War Developments
  - The Western Approaches
  - The Wider Parish
  - The Hanney Gap
- 7.15 The Character Assessment is a very impressive piece of work. Its findings are summarised in the supporting text and set out in Table 1.
- 7.16 The policy comments that development proposals should preserve or enhance local character by way of their scale, density, height, landscape design, layout and materials, making particular reference to the West Hanney Character Assessment. It also includes a series of more specific development management matters such as amenity and boundary treatments. There is a clear and functional relationship between the Character Assessment and the policy itself.

- 7.17 In general terms I am satisfied that the policy meets the basic conditions. It is both well-constructed and evidence-based. In addition, it is non-prescriptive in its approach. Its final section on property boundaries is particularly impressive. I saw the importance of such features to the character of the wider area during the visit.
- 7.18 I recommend detailed modifications to three of the criteria to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. In turn they recognise that planning applications will be assessed against the development plan and any other material planning considerations. In this context VWHDC will need to make balanced judgements on development proposals on a case-by-case basis. Otherwise, the policy provides an excellent basis against which development proposals can be prepared and determined. It will play a major part in delivering the environmental dimension of sustainable development in the parish.

**Replace criterion b with: ‘They minimise impacts on the natural environment of the parish and provide net gains for biodiversity’**

**Replace the initial part of criterion c with: ‘They do not result in the unnecessary loss of trees that’**

**In criterion d replace ‘significant’ with ‘unacceptable’**

**In criterion e replace ‘adverse’ with ‘unacceptable’**

Policy RS2 The Hanney Gap

- 7.19 This policy seeks to safeguard the Hanney Gap. The importance of the existing Gap between West Hanney and East Hanney is self-evident in the wider landscape.
- 7.20 The Plan comments that the physical separation of the two communities has been vital to retaining the established distinctiveness of the two communities. West and East Hanney have always been physically separated by the open fields of the Gap, which is delineated by the parish boundary with East Hanney to the east, the parish boundary to the south beyond the Church Farm Meadow and the Nigel Eady Community Woodland, the parish boundary to the north which is the Childrey Brook and to the west by the village built-up area and Winter Lane.
- 7.21 I looked at the proposed Gap carefully during the visit. I saw the way it extended both to the north (by around 1200 metres) and to the south (by around 700 metres) of School Road. I sought advice from the Parish Council on the extent to which the Gap as proposed in the Plan was the smallest area necessary to secure the objectives of the policy. I also sought advice on the extent to which the policy would have the same effect if the northern boundary of the Gap was defined by the footpath which runs due east from Winter Lane at the northern edge of the village and along the northern boundary of the community orchard to the south of the village. In its response the Parish Council advised about its thinking on the Gap in the pre-submission Plan, its relationship with the Character Assessment work and the significance of the parish boundary between West Hanney and East Hanney.
- 7.22 I have considered all the evidence very carefully. In general terms I am satisfied that the Plan’s intention to safeguard the existing gap between the two communities serves

a clear planning purpose. In addition, it is general conformity with strategic policies in the development plan in general and the approach for the Abingdon/Oxford fringe sub-area as identified in the Local Plan. Similarly, I am satisfied that the policy itself is appropriately-worded.

- 7.23 However I recommend that the spatial extent of the proposed Gap is reduced so that it only applies to those parcels of land which are in close proximity to the two villages. The modification defines the northern boundary of the Gap by the footpath which runs due east from Winter Lane at the northern edge of the village and the southern boundary by the northern extent of the community woodland to the south of the village. This approach is shown in Appendix 1 of this report. It recognises that these are the areas where potential developments are more likely to come forward and where the potential for the erosion of the gap (and the potential coalescence of the settlements) is most critical. Such an approach will introduce a specific policy approach in a confined area which will supplement the general approach to development in the countryside.

*Modify the extent of the West Hanney Gap to that shown in Appendix 1*

*Replace the seventh paragraph of the supporting text with: 'The physical separation of the two communities has been vital to retaining the established distinctiveness of the two communities. West and East Hanney have always been physically separated by the open fields of the Gap, which is shown on Map 2'*

*At the end of the eighth paragraph of supporting text add: 'The West Hanney Gap as defined for planning purpose in the Plan is not as extensive as that identified in the Character Assessment. The Gap identified in the Plan is that part of the wider Gap where the potential for built development to erode the gap between West Hanney and East Hanney is at its greatest'*

#### Policy RS3 Location of Development

- 7.24 Policy RS3 sets out an overarching strategy for the neighbourhood area. It focuses new development within the built-up area. Development outside the built-up area will only be supported where it is consistent with a countryside location. These development principles overlap with the key elements of village design (Policy RS1). The policy does not restrict development on the edge of the built-up area if this is in keeping with village character.
- 7.25 The policy meets the basic conditions.

#### Policy INF1 Community Infrastructure and Facilities

- 7.26 West Hanney's village life is supported by a series of community facilities including Hanney War Memorial Hall, St. James the Great Church, community shop and Post Office. However, as set out in the Community Infrastructure Report (Appendix D), some of these facilities are operating at or near capacity, while some are in need of physical improvement. The Vale of White Horse District Council Town and Villages Facilities Study (2014), part of the Local Plan Part 2 Evidence Base, collated information on the services and facilities available in West Hanney and gives what could be described as a 'sustainability score.' West Hanney's score of 7 was the joint-lowest for smaller

villages (average was 9.4). Table 2 comments about the nature of the existing community facilities in the parish.

- 7.27 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that new developments make appropriate contributions to the improvement or enhancement of community infrastructure to help meet the needs of new and existing residents. However, given that future development in the village is likely to be modest, it is recognised that the scale of potential contribution may likewise be modest.
- 7.28 The policy is underpinned with evidence on the scale and nature of the existing community facilities. Nevertheless, I recommend that both the policy and the supporting text make reference to the approach in the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations on the relationship between a proposed development and the need or otherwise for it to make contributions to community or other local facilities. I also recommend that the second part of the policy is deleted and repositioned into the supporting text. This reflects that it provides a degree of explanation to the policy rather than being policy in its own right.
- 7.29 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will play a significant part in delivering the social dimension of sustainable development in the parish.

**Replace the policy with: ‘Where it is necessary to do so, residential development proposals should contribute towards the improvement and/or enhancement of existing community infrastructures as detailed in Table 2 of the Plan’**

*At the end of the first paragraph of supporting text add: ‘Developers and decision makers should pay due regard to the priorities set out in this Report and in negotiating any contributions to existing facilities which may arise from new development’*

*After the supporting text add a further paragraph to read: ‘The approach taken in Policy INF1 has been designed to take account of national policy (as currently set out in the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations) on the relationship between a proposed development and the need or otherwise for it to make contributions to community or other local facilities’*

#### Other Matters

- 7.30 This report has recommended a series of modifications both to the policies and to the supporting text in the submitted Plan. Where consequential changes to the text are required directly as a result of my recommended modification to the policy concerned, I have highlighted them in this report. However other changes to the general text may be required elsewhere in the Plan as a result of the recommended modifications to the policies. It will be appropriate for VWHDC and the Parish Council to have the flexibility to make any necessary consequential changes to the general text. I recommend accordingly.

*Modification of general text (where necessary) to achieve consistency with the modified policies.*

#### Modification of specific text

- 7.31 VWHDC has suggested amendments to the Plan in its representations. I have found its comments very helpful. I recommend the following modification over and above those which have already been incorporated earlier within this report on a policy-by-policy basis. It is required to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions.

*Replace the second paragraph of text on page 12 with: 'West Hanney benefits from its proximity to the Didcot Parkway mainline station, as many residents commute. However, with no access to bus services car usage has continued to increase. Parking within the village, particularly close to village assets such as the school/pub/church, is limited and on street parking can cause local congestion'*

## 8 Summary and Conclusions

### *Summary*

- 8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2031. It is distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community.
- 8.2 Following my independent examination of the Plan I have concluded that the West Hanney Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.
- 8.3 This report has recommended some technical modifications to the policies in the Plan. Nevertheless, it remains fundamentally unchanged in its role and purpose.

### *Conclusion*

- 8.4 On the basis of the findings in this report I recommend to Vale of White Horse District Council that, subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report, the West Hanney Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum.

### *Referendum Area*

- 8.5 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the Plan area. In my view, the neighbourhood area is entirely appropriate for this purpose and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved by the District Council on 19 June 2015.
- 8.6 I am grateful to everyone who has helped in any way to ensure that this examination has run in a smooth and efficient manner.

**Andrew Ashcroft**  
**Independent Examiner**  
**23 June 2021**

Appendix 1: West Hanney Gap

