

# Your Vale – Your Future

Draft Core Strategy  
Additional Consultation  
January 2010

Please use this form for your comments on the additional matters we are consulting on in preparation for writing the core strategy. The closing date for submitting comments to the council is **12 February 2010**. We are unable to keep your comments confidential and they will be available for people to read.

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## Please make your comments below

### General

This consultation is unsatisfactory for two reasons and we wish to register a complaint over the procedures.

- Paragraph 5.8 of the VHW *Statement of Community Involvement* of May 2009 says that where practicable the Council will attempt to avoid public holidays and the summer vacation period when holding public consultation exercises. The letter announcing this consultation was dated 15 December 2009 with responses required by 29 January 2010. This not only included the Christmas/ New Year holiday period, but the letter was delayed by the Christmas post. Although the response date was subsequently revised to 12 February as a result of the snow the original procedure left too little time.
- No revised Core Strategy document has been made available, so it is not possible to see what changes have really been made. We are only given a summary in a leaflet. In particular, a map published in *Harwell News* that was made available to the Parish Council by VWH officials shows housing planned on land south of the B4493 between Harwell and Didcot. This was not the 'favoured location' in the draft Core Strategy of January 2009 (p.105) and the change is not mentioned in the Additional Consultation leaflet. The leaflet also omits mention, and inclusion on the map, of improvements to Rowstock junction. Both of these features were however covered in the display boards for the events. Such inconsistencies make the process flawed.

### Transport

If the Council (and SODC) does proceed with its plans for housing and employment (see comments below) the proposed transport improvements are vital. In the context of housing at Didcot and in Harwell Parish both the *Harwell Strategic Link Road* and the *Harwell Field Link Road* are essential, along with other measures involving public transport and cycle tracks.

We support these changes and welcome the recognition that the *Harwell Field Link Road* is needed as well as the *Harwell Strategic Link Road*.

We note that Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) is stating that the recommended transport infrastructure required in the SCOTS area is essential to deliver the growth in the area. We request that VWH makes similarly strong statements in its LDF. These statements should make it clear that (a) the strategic aim reflected in policies in the LDF is that the transport infrastructure will be in place before the tranche of development beyond Great Western Park starts; and (b) the completion of the transport infrastructure before the start of development is a condition on any planning permissions for major development in the Didcot/Harwell area beyond those already agreed.

The *Rowstock Western Link* also seems to be a measure that would help to relieve traffic congestion. However, it is not clear how crucial it is and it cuts across an ancient byway (Hungerford Road, the 'Golden Mile') and might blight homes in the area. Its purpose and route therefore need careful care and consultation; it might need re-assessment once the practical effects of other road improvements are evident.

We are concerned that traffic from the south heading for many parts of Didcot (and vice-versa) will still go through West Hagbourne and add to the problems there. Also, unless Wantage Road in Didcot is improved there will still be heavy congestion there at peak times and at the start and end of the school day. These locations are outside VWH, but there should be joined up plans with SODC on these problems.

### **Housing: Didcot**

We maintain our opposition to VWH plans for 2,150 homes west of Didcot. We still maintain that if the planned level of expansion of Didcot from 2016 to 2026 (or 2027) goes ahead then a much larger fraction of the housing numbers should be in SODC.

The locations north of Didcot proposed by SODC are capable of more development than seems contemplated by that Council, and SODC in its documents does not cite for those locations two of the disadvantages that VWH cites for locations west of Didcot viz: the use of BMV land and the need for noise and air quality buffers along the A34. The argument that the housing split between VWH and SODC is constrained by the figures required in the South East Plan is feeble if both Councils are serious in working jointly over the development of Didcot in a way that '*sets aside administrative boundaries and plans for the community as a whole*' (quoted from the report 77/09 to the VWH Executive, December 2009). We maintain that a change to the distribution of housing numbers between VWH and SODC would still be 'in general conformity' with the SE Plan, whose policies are presumably directed (in this case) at expansion of Didcot and not at micromanagement of numbers within District Councils, especially when the 50/50 split of numbers was offered by the Councils themselves. If Growth Point funding is not forthcoming that adds to our view that the VWH share of Didcot housing is disproportionate.

The section of the revised Core Strategy that deals with joint working with SODC over the development of Didcot should therefore include a commitment to review the spatial distribution of the housing numbers, with a view towards increasing the share in SODC and decreasing the share in VWH.

We object most strongly to the intention now to develop south of the B4493. This area is entirely BMV land, unlike the areas north of the B4493 towards Milton that are excluded from the 'Conceptual Masterplan', which are almost entirely Grade 3b land. The further profligate development on BMV land will reduce the flexibility of planning to adapt to developing national priorities, especially the criticality of increased food production. The excuse that the northern area is not big enough is inconsistent with the VWH's own previous Core Strategy document, which stated a 'capacity' for many more than the intended housing numbers. The exclusion of the land to the west towards Milton was because of difficulty of integrating housing across the link road. Why is the link road route, at this early stage, set in stone? Why can't the Learning Park, if it materialises, be integrated more efficiently with the secondary school on Great Western Park?

In the past we have seen features in illustrative masterplans that have helped make the case for development in a particular location, and then vanished once a toe-hold has been secured. What happens if the Learning Park never materialises? Will it be like the bridge across the railway and roads into Milton Park in the conceptual masterplans for the original 'Didcot West', that was part of the case for going west not north east and then disappeared after the west was selected? If VWH allows development south of the B4493 will it creep later round towards West Hagbourne?

The current 'Conceptual Masterplan' shows many areas excluded for housing, such as in the north (south of Meadow Lane) and playing fields that are next to playing fields on Great Western Park. The capacity of the site should be critically re-examined before allowing it to extend south of the B4493.

Developing south as well as north of the B4493 also removes any way of preserving some semblance of a rural gap between Harwell and Didcot, something that VWH has claimed to protect up until now and indeed has always been recognised as important by planning inspectors. It also threatens the gap with the Hagbournes. This proposal is a betrayal of all that has gone before and must be rejected.

### ***Housing: Harwell Science and Innovation Centre***

We do not support a further increase to the VWH housing numbers by adding 400 homes in the north of the Harwell Science and Innovation Centre. This just adds further to stress on the infrastructure of the area and the erosion of the rural character of Harwell Parish. We would be more sympathetic to this proposal if it were instead of some of the proposed development west of Didcot, since on balance, if handled properly, re-development of some of the proposed area would be preferable to developing on pristine green field land, and would be closer to a prime employment site.

If there is to be housing development at Harwell Science and Innovation Centre then it needs to be in keeping with the starter home-style of the existing houses. We agree with the list of conditions put forward by Harwell Parish Council (Annex 1). All these factors should be reflected in planning policies in the LDF and be conditions required of any ultimate planning permissions.

Alongside whatever housing developments are proposed in the vicinity of Harwell there should be commitment in the VWH LDF that developer funding will be sought to ensure that amenities in the Parish can be improved to cope with the increase in local population.

### **Affordable Housing**

Given the priority of providing more affordable homes, we support the lowering of the current threshold of 15 homes or more in towns and 5 in villages. However, even with 'trade off' provisions we think that lowering the threshold to 3 is undesirable in terms of local balance and will be impracticable. We suggest that the threshold should be lowered universally to 5.

### **The Economy**

We note that the total of new jobs envisaged for Milton Park and Harwell SIC has been reduced from 12,000 to a range from 7,000 to 10,500. We remain sceptical of the reality of these figures by 2026, but time will tell. We do though contend that VWH should ensure that employment growth and housing provision motivated by it remain in step, otherwise there will be an undesirable increase in long distance commuting.

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## **Annex 1: Conditions for development north of the Harwell Science and Innovation Centre**

1. No development to start until commitment of funding for the Harwell Link Road, the Harwell Field Link Road and the Rowstock Western Link road.
2. Work is done to ensure that this site really can support 400 homes at an acceptable density, and that the design criteria must include a high proportion of affordable houses, and low rise or single storey units, in keeping with the housing already on the site.
3. All appropriate trees to be preserved. The site must be reviewed and tree preservation orders must be put in place as soon as possible. Any orders already in place must be adhered to.
4. Any tree which has to be removed must be replaced by equivalent or better planting.
5. As much as possible the open spaces near to the existing houses must be preserved as an open community area. These open spaces, which are used by children, are critical to the success of the existing community, and is one of the reasons why there are so many young families living there. Therefore any further development should compliment what is already in use.
6. Open community areas must provide play areas, and provision must be made for their long term maintenance.
7. Existing residents (assuming they wish it) must receive equity of services, comparable to those of new residents. Specifically, existing roads must be adopted, and any relevant maintenance charges borne by the current residents must be shared with all the new residents.
8. Studies must also be done before development to ensure that it does not affect the drainage, sewage and soak-away systems from the existing houses which might extend into the proposed development site.
9. Satisfactory transition planning is in place to ensure that existing open spaces which are maintained (e.g. grass cut) are not neglected between the handover of the land to the builders and work starting on specific areas.

10. Traffic studies must be undertaken to make sure that traffic from this development can enter and exit the site at peak hours. We understand that there are often queues of traffic on the road from Rowstock approaching the Harwell Campus and it can already take some time to get out of North Drive. We also understand that as traffic to the Harwell Campus has increased, so have the number of accidents. We need to be assured that traffic from this new development will have a safe and feasible way out onto the main road.

11. The integrated transport plan for the area must ensure the provision of bus services to the development, and these services must connect through Harwell Village so that the residents of the new development are not isolated from their nearest village.

12. Appropriate enhancements to local schools (Harwell and Chilton primary schools, and relevant secondary schools), together with provision for nursery and pre-school places, must be agreed before planning permission is granted.

13. Appropriate community facilities in term of meeting rooms and halls etc. either on site or in Harwell Village, or both, must be agreed before planning permission is granted.

14. Access to the sports facilities in the proposed new hotel, adjacent to the site, must be negotiated together with the provision of additional sports facilities in the village. If that development has not started then alternative sports facilities should be negotiated.

15. Appropriate healthcare facilities must be available to the new residents. This needs to be planned in conjunction with the Chilton Field development and the Didcot West /Harwell East expansion.

16. Adequate and appropriate access to shops, post office and other services must be planned and provided in conjunction with the Chilton Field development, and the development plans for the Harwell Campus site.

17. Appropriate transport infrastructure (e.g. refurbishment of the Winnaway which connects the site with Harwell Village) must be agreed before planning permission is granted.

18. Easy and environmentally friendly routes and access methods must be provided between the houses in the new development, and Harwell Campus as a place of work, so as to discourage the use of cars for this local commute.

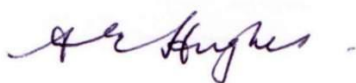
19. Existing rights of way, such as the Icknield Way, must be maintained with no interruption or inappropriate diversion during any building work.

20. Appropriate environmental surveys must be been conducted to make sure that no rare or protected species will be unlawfully affected by the development.

21. Appropriate surveys must be conducted to ensure there is no contamination, health or other risk to existing and new residents from building on land previously used for sewage/waste, and that there are no other hazards as a result of once being part of a nuclear site. All remedial work must be done before any building is started.

22. Note must be taken that the site is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and any developments must take account of this.

Signature



Date

10 February 2010

Thank you for completing this form. We would be grateful if you could spend a minute completing the attached 'about you' sheet which will be kept confidential and separate from your comments.

Please return both forms to:  
Development Policy,  
Vale of White Horse District Council  
Abbey House  
Abingdon  
OX14 3JE

Or by email to [planning.policy@whitehorsedc.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@whitehorsedc.gov.uk)