

Planning

HEAD OF SERVICE: Adrian Duffield



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Your Reference:

Our reference:

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Dear Mr Hughes

Vale core strategy: proposed further expansion of Didcot town at Valley Park, Harwell Parish

Thank you for your letter to Councillors Margaret Turner and Reg Waite dated 20 June 2011 passed to me for a response, and please accept my apologies for the delay in replying.

Following the change in political control at the May 2011 elections the council is undertaking a review of the emerging core strategy, including its targets and sites. We anticipate this will conclude by autumn 2011 with a decision on how the core strategy will be progressed, followed by public consultation on the updated core strategy document (early 2012).

Whatever specific housing numbers or sites emerges from the review, demographic and other evidence shows we still need to plan for significant amounts of new housing. The choice between plausible sites to accommodate significant housing growth is never an easy one. At site level, a balance has to be struck taking account of the need to provide housing on the one hand, and on the other the extent of benefit or harm that development may cause, and whether any harm can be mitigated to a level considered acceptable (including by provision of infrastructure). Points (1) to (4) in your letter are valid considerations of this type. There are similar points that can be made about all the plausible alternatives to Valley Park. These are summarised in the Core Strategy Preferred Options (2009) document.

I expect you would accept that homes are built to accommodate expected household growth, not to enable infrastructure provision for its own sake. It follows that the ability of development to adequately contribute to any infrastructure necessary to address needs and effects arising from it, is an important deliverability consideration.

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It remains to be established through the review in progress whether there are genuine alternatives to Valley Park to accommodate the 2,150 homes proposed there. If there are, they will have to be better candidates in terms of their fit to the council's emerging strategy for development, and in terms of their suitability (including sustainability), availability and deliverability (the key planning tests). That assessment would be publicly documented, and would provide the specific explanation requested in the last paragraph of your letter if Valley Park were to remain a preferred housing option.

What I can confirm at this stage is that the package of sites put forward in the final version of the core strategy will be those the council consider to be the best of the available options, taking all relevant planning considerations into account. They will then be open to public consultation and independently tested at Examination in Public.

Yours sincerely



Mark Williams
Team Leader Planning Policy