

Brief Summary of the Inspector's Report on the Local Plan 2011

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Inspector's Report was formally received on 13th February 2006. In his covering letter to the Chief Executive, the Inspector considers it is 'a generally sound plan' and that 'overall it is well written with a sensible structure and a logical explanation of the overall strategy adopted'. He is satisfied there has been more than adequate public consultation on the plan during the various stages and specifically on the proposals at Grove and Faringdon.
- 1.2 The Inspector points out that although his report contains a number of changes 'it is important to clarify that many are of a minor nature, often relating only to a word or two in the supporting text rather than the policies themselves. Some have arisen from the Council's own pre-inquiry changes whilst others emerged during the inquiry process in response to discussions with objectors'. He considers that the 'willingness of Council staff to explore even the smallest possible improvement to the plan' was 'positive' and 'commendable' and in his opinion should lead to a better plan.
- 1.3 Of the 161 policies in the plan (this does not include policy H7 for Didcot which was considered at a previous joint inquiry with South Oxfordshire's policy for development west of the town), the Inspector has recommended changes to the wording of only 39. Of the changes recommended by the Inspector, 16 are very minor wording changes leaving only 23 policies where more substantive wording changes are proposed.

2.0 The Key Conclusions and Recommendations of the Inspector

- 2.1 **The Aims and General Strategy** – The Inspector judges the aims of the plan to be 'essentially logical, comprehensive and reasonable'. Having examined the other potential strategies, he has no doubt that concentrating development in the five main settlements is 'the most sustainable option and entirely consistent with current national, regional and strategic guidance'. The Inspector considers the alternative approach of spreading development to about 70 villages 'would be less efficient in transport terms, less able to provide new facilities to support and build new communities, more harmful environmentally and thus clearly less sustainable'. In his view the plan provides a clear rural dimension that recognises the social and economic needs likely to arise. The proposition that new housing should be located at existing employment centres outside towns 'fails to take account of the movement of new residents to higher order retail, recreation and education opportunities in the towns and would lead to a less sustainable pattern of development in the district'.
- 2.2 **Housing Allocations** – The Inspector accepts that the proposed urban extension west of **Grove** is 'a sustainable location in PPG3 terms' and ' would

help serve the needs of the expanding employment base in southern Oxfordshire'. Providing that public transport is improved and a road to the north of Grove is started early in the second phase of development, he considers that it is appropriate for development beyond 2011. However, given the amount of detail to be agreed, he considers it is only likely to deliver 500 homes by 2011. This coupled with the anticipated initial delays on the allocations west of Didcot (500 dwellings) and Faringdon (400 dwellings), the past low rates of completions and the need to provide a significant increase in the district build rate, leads him to recommend three new housing sites be included in the plan. These are the Red House/Winslow in **Faringdon** (37 dwellings) and Tilbury Lane and Lime Road in **Botley** on formerly safeguarded land (150 and 130 dwellings respectively). Taking into account the fact that the former Dow site at **Letcombe Regis** could be re-used for employment, possibly on an increased scale to the previous use in terms of job numbers and traffic movements, the Inspector recommends an increase in density from 44 to 100 dwellings. He also considers a well designed housing scheme on the site at the PPG3 minimum density would enhance rather than detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area. In total the Inspector rejects 50 housing omission sites proposed by objectors.

- 2.3 The Inspector supports the policies for the **re-use of buildings outside settlements**, including the distinction between vernacular and non-vernacular buildings which he considers 'genuine' and 'appropriate' in the Vale context. The Inspector considers the policies for **village housing** should be less restrictive and he recommends that developments of up to 15 dwellings should be allowed in the larger villages (not 9 as in draft policy H10) and up to 4 small dwellings in the smaller villages (not 1 or 2 as in draft policy H11). Outside the main towns and villages he recommends 1 or 2 small dwellings should be allowed within the built up area of settlements (only local need in draft policy H12). The recommended references to small dwellings in policies H11 and H12 is a notable change to the existing policy wording.
- 2.4 For **affordable housing** the Inspector recommends that policy H16 be changed to expect 40% affordable housing (not 50%) on sites of 15 or more dwellings in the larger settlements (not 10) and 5 elsewhere (not 4). As this reflects the findings of the Housing Need Assessment undertaken in 2001 it is not entirely surprising. Expecting 50% **small dwellings** (i.e. 2 bedrooms or less) is supported, but only on sites of 10 or more dwellings (not 4 as in draft policy H15) and the Inspector recommends the deletion of the last two sentences referring to the withdrawal of permitted development rights to extend new dwellings with two bedrooms or less.
- 2.5 For the **Green Belt**, the Inspector rejects 13 objections to remove land from the Green Belt and create or significantly expand major development sites or village boundaries within which development will be allowed. This includes a proposal for '**Pembridge eco village**' at Sunningwell which he considers cannot be taken as a serious alternative for Grove in the absence of firm proposals to review the Green Belt boundary in the Structure Plan. The Inspector recommends the

deletion of the **safeguarded land** policy (draft policy GS5) as he recommends that two of the three safeguarded sites be identified for housing for the reasons explained in paragraph 2.2 above. The third area, he believes, can be defended by the other policies in the plan until such time it is needed. Changes are recommended to the boundary of the major developed site at **Radley College** and the town **development boundary at Faringdon** to include Sudbury House.

- 2.6 The Inspector rejects the 13 sites proposed by objectors for additional **employment** land, and supports important employment sites being protected from other forms of development (including the Crown Cork and Seal site at Wantage which was proposed for housing). He recommends the removal of the floor space limit of 240,000 sq metres at UKAEA **Harwell** (draft policy E7) and the removal of the last part of draft policy E16 which refers to permitting an alternative site for **Steventon Storage Facility**.
- 2.7 For transport the Inspector supports the provision of a **Wantage relief road scheme** and he recommends a replacement policy for **walking and cycling** (TR3) which was removed at second deposit.

3.0 The Next Steps

- 3.1 This briefing note is a factual note on the Inspector's key recommendations; it does not go into detail or express the views or recommendations of officers. Although the Inspector's report will be published on the Council's website and made available for inspection at the Council's offices and Local Service Points and in local libraries, there is no formal stage for people to make comments on the report. The Strategic and Local Planning Advisory Group will consider the Inspector's report and its implications for supplementary planning documents (SPD) in confidential session. The Advisory Group will recommend proposed modifications to the local plan and revised SPD to meetings of the Development Control Committee and the Executive on Monday 20 March. Recommendations will then be made to full Council on 22 March. The proposed modifications to the local plan and revised draft SPD will be published for a six week consultation period from 23 March to 4 May 2006. The plan should be adopted early in July 2006.