

# Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Planning

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To: The Scrutiny Committee

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## DRAFT LOCAL PLAN TO 2031

### RECOMMENDATION

To review this report and the Pre-submission draft Local Plan 2031 Part 1: Strategic sites and policies document, and pass the views of Scrutiny Committee to cabinet and council for consideration

### Purpose of Report

1. To present to Scrutiny Committee an overview of the main changes to the local plan 2031. Cabinet and full Council will be asked to agree the draft Local Plan 2031 Part 1: Strategic Sites and Policies for publication for the purposes of pre-submission (Regulation 19) public consultation, and thereafter for submission to the Secretary of State for independent examination (together with supporting evidence base studies, topic papers and summaries of the consultation responses received).

### Strategic Objectives

2. The local plan is central to the achievement of the following strategic objectives in the 2012-2016 Corporate Plan
  - a strong local economy

- housing for people who need it.
3. The extensive public consultation carried out on the emerging local plan in accordance with our Statement of Community Involvement is part of how the council meets the following corporate objectives
- positive and constructive work with community groups
  - communities involved in decisions about development and other things affecting their local area.

## **Introduction**

### STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT AND APPENDICES

4. The report sections are
- Introduction and background
  - Current stage and next steps
  - Recent public consultation feedback
  - Summary of the local plan document and main changes to previous versions
  - How the local plan meets National Planning Policy Framework requirements
  - Local Plan Options
  - Financial and legal implications
  - Concluding recommendations
5. The appendices are
- appendix 1: a list local plan evidence base studies
  - appendix 2: a list of forthcoming topic papers that more fully document the work undertaken
  - appendix 3: a summary of the Housing Delivery update consultation
  - appendix 4: Cherwell Local Plan Examination Inspector's Note 9 June 2014
  - appendix 5: List of key infrastructure to support the local plan
  - appendix 6: Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal.
  - appendix 7: Strategic housing site selection, arriving at the recommended site package

6. The full local plan document in 'committee version' formatting is annexed to the report. Editorial improvements are continuing. The draft plan has been reviewed by a planning barrister and changes incorporated.
7. The local plan has been informed by the findings and conclusions of an extensive range of technical studies listed at appendix 1. These studies are in the process of final editing and will be available in October 2014.
8. During September and October officers are producing the Topic Papers listed at appendix 2 to more fully document how the evidence base, consultation feedback and sustainability appraisal informed the preparation of the plan policies and the selection of sites for development. These will be available to support the pre-submission consultation.

## BACKGROUND

9. To date there have been five main public consultation stages that have informed the Local Plan 2031 Part 1: Strategic Sites and Policies
  - Issues and Options (2007)
  - Preferred Options (2009)
  - Additional Consultation (Dec 2009 - Jan 2010)
  - Local Plan Part 1 Consultation Draft (2013)
  - Housing Delivery Update (2014).
10. From inception the core strategy, now local plan, has been prepared as a strategic document. The local plan includes a strategic housing site threshold of at least 200 homes. It will be followed by the Local Plan Part 2 which will replace the more detailed development management policies currently set out in Local Plan 2011, and identify smaller sites for development. The Local Development Scheme sets out the timetable. Until the Local Plan Part 2 is adopted the council will save and continue to rely upon for development management purposes a number of policies from the adopted Local Plan 2011. These saved policies are identified in the draft Local Plan 2031 Part 1.

## Current stage and next steps

11. Pre-submission 'regulation 19' public consultation is the first stage in the process of examining the local plan. It differs from previous consultations in that it is part of the local plan examination and the comments made are considered by the examining inspector rather than the council. The council does not need to formally consider or respond to them directly, although they will clearly be of interest and reviewed for information.

12. The council cannot make substantive changes to the local plan at this stage unless it chooses to withdraw the plan from examination, modify, re-consult and re-submit. This might happen if a significant unforeseen matter arose through or during pre-submission consultation. It can make minor clarification or corrections, which is suggested to be delegated to the Head of Planning in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning
13. Following pre-submission consultation the council would submit the local plan in its current form to the Secretary of State for independent examination, together with the supporting evidence base studies and reports. The supporting material would include a summary of the representations made to the pre-submission consultation.
14. We intend to submit the local plan for examination at the end of February 2015. As set out in the Local Development Scheme we anticipate that the local plan would be examined in May-June 2015 and adopted in October 2015.
15. Following the examination the inspector may recommend changes to the local plan, which the council would then consider (and usually accept unless there was a good planning reason not to). A 'Modifications' version of the local plan would then be published for consultation, incorporating any recommended changes the council agrees. The local plan would then be finalised and adopted

## **Recent public consultation feedback**

16. The latest Housing Supply Update consultation February – April 2014 generated 2,717 responses from 1,093 participants. Appendix 3 provides an initial summary. A full consultation statement will be published alongside the pre-submission consultation. The main response themes were similar to the 2013 consultation, selected key points of detail are also noted
  - calls for the provision of infrastructure before development and concerns about the lack of infrastructure to support new development- schools, health care facilities, sewage and water treatment works upgrading, flooding issues
  - traffic and congestion from the new development, and cumulative impact on the existing road network
  - loss of Green Belt land in the Abingdon / Oxford Fringe Sub Area, and opposition to development in the AONB at Harwell Oxford campus, including from statutory consultees Natural England, and by the AONB Management Board
  - concerns about harm to the identity and character of existing settlements including coalescence

- Oxfordshire County Council expressed concerns about the number of homes proposed on the Milton Heights site on highway capacity and safety grounds, and raised site access issues to land East of Sutton Courtenay
  - Oxford City Council objected that the local plan has not addressed Oxford City's un-met housing need from the SHMA
  - English Heritage raised various concerns about heritage and conservation matters including protection for the setting of designated heritage assets
17. We also received 81 alternative site proposals, of which three have been incorporated into the local plan, discussed below.

## **Summary of the local plan document and main changes to previous versions**

18. This section is best read alongside the executive summary overview in the local plan document. The key points and changes are noted below.
19. The spatial strategy of 'building on our strengths', policy treatment of the district in three sub-areas broad structure of the local plan are retained from the 2013 draft, as are the four organising themes
- building healthy and sustainable communities
  - supporting economic prosperity
  - supporting sustainable transport and accessibility
  - protecting the environment and responding to climate change.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

20. Two key strategic policies have been moved to the front of the document to give them greater prominence:
- **CP1: The presumption in favour of sustainable development**
  - **CP2: Cooperation on unmet housing need for Oxfordshire**
21. The supporting text to CP2: The Duty to Cooperate includes reference to the Oxfordshire Statement of Cooperation and the process agreed by council leaders to establish and address any agreed unmet housing need. We have included an indicative 12-18 month timeframe based on advice to SPIP (now the Growth Board) by a prominent former planning inspector and our counsel. The supporting text also includes reference to the possibility of a strategic Green Belt review as part of this process, and that the local plan may require

early review if it falls to this district to meet needs than cannot be met elsewhere.

22. This statement is important to demonstrate our commitment to helping to meet any unmet need, and responds as positively as we reasonably can do at present to the objection from Oxford City Council about their expected unmet need.
23. There are risks in seeking to first meet our own housing needs in relation to meeting the effectiveness test of the Duty to Cooperate. These can be reduced but not avoided by committing to active and timely joint working, in parallel with work to meet our own needs. Without this commitment the local plan would proceed at a much higher risk of failure.

#### CHAPTERS 2-3, KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES, SPATIAL VISION, STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

24. These contextual chapters have been significantly shortened to prevent repetition and focus on key messages.

#### CHAPTER 4 SPATIAL STRATEGY

25. **CP3 Settlement hierarchy.** The settlement hierarchy is unchanged other than to de-classify Charney Bassett as a small village (it would be treated as open countryside for development purposes), and to clarify that an enhanced Botley is intended to have a district centre role in the Oxford city context.
26. **CP4 Meeting our housing needs.** The full objectively assessed need (OAN) target of 1,028 homes per annum is retained. The Oxfordshire SHMA identifies objectively assessed need (OAN) for 1,028 homes per annum 2011-2031 in the Vale of White Horse, or 20,560 homes in this 20-year period. This must be our starting point in considering a plan target, and there would have to be compelling planning reasons to justify anything less. The most recent and contextually relevant confirmation of this is set out in the note of the planning inspector who suspended the Cherwell local plan examination stating as follows (emphasis added, full note attached as appendix 4)

“This is to enable the Council to put forward proposed modifications to the plan involving increased new housing delivery over the plan **period to meet the full, up to date, objectively assessed, needs of the district, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** and based on the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2014 (SHMA).

27. Paragraphs 66-69 provide further reasons why a lower housing target is not a reasonable option.

28. Since the Housing Supply Update we have recorded another monitoring year of completions plus additional planning commitments, reducing the residual homes we need to plan for. The strategic housing site allocations have been updated to reflect this together with feedback from consultation and further evidence base testing. The proposed housing site allocation package is shown below as figure 1. Fuller details and reasons for the site changes made are provided at appendix 7.
29. The following sites are no longer proposed for inclusion as strategic housing sites in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1
- South Cumnor
  - North Radley
  - East Wootton
  - South Marcham
  - South Drayton
  - East Challow
  - East Hanney (replaced by South East Hanney), and
  - South Shrivenham.
30. The revised local plan includes three alternative housing sites suggested through the consultation
- a new site east of Kingston Bagpuize and Southmoor
  - the reinstatement and enlargement of a site at the north of Harwell campus, and
  - land south of East Hanney, proposed by the parish as an alternative to land east of East Hanney.
31. Oxford Garden City was also submitted as an alternative site for consideration. Paragraphs 74-78 set out why this is not a reasonable alternative housing supply option for this local plan.

**Figure 1: Total housing supply and proposed strategic housing site allocations**

Category		Number of Dwellings
<b>Housing requirement for the full plan period (Apr 2011 to Mar 2031)</b>		<b>20,560</b>
Housing Completions (Apr 2011 to Mar 2015)	Known Completions (Apr 2011 to Mar 2014)	1,250
	Estimated Completions (Apr 2014 to Mar 2015)	781
Housing Supply (Apr 2015 to Mar 2031)	Known Commitments	2,769
	Local Plan 2031 Part 1 allocations	13,960
	Local Plan 2031 Part 2 allocations	Up to 1,000 <sup>a</sup>
	Windfalls	900

<sup>a</sup> Neighbourhood Plan housing allocations could contribute to some of this figure which also incorporates a small buffer

Figure 1 continued

### Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe Sub-Area:

Settlement/ Type	Settlement	Site Name	Number of Dwellings
Market Town	Abingdon-on-Thames (including land in the parishes of Abingdon, Radley, St. Helens Without and Sunningwell)	North of Abingdon-on-Thames <b>(increased)</b>	800
		North-West of Abingdon-on-Thames	200
Larger Village	East Hanney	South of East Hanney	200
	Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor	East of Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor <b>(new site)</b>	280
		North-West of Radley	240
	Radley	South of Kennington	270
<b>Sub total</b>			<b>1,990</b>

### South East Vale Sub-Area:

Settlement/ Type	Settlement	Site Name	Number of Dwellings
Market Town	Wantage (including land in Grove and Lockinge parishes)	Crab Hill (North East Wantage and South East Grove)	1,500
Local Service Centre	Grove	Grove Airfield	2,500
		Monks Farm (North Grove)	750
Didcot Town	Didcot (within Harwell and Milton parishes east of the A34)	Valley Park	At least 2,550
		North-West of Valley Park	800
Larger Village	Harwell Campus (Harwell parish including small land areas in Chilton and East Hendred parishes)	East of Harwell Campus <b>(reduced)</b>	850
		North-West of Harwell Campus <b>(reinstated and enlarged)</b>	550
	Harwell	West of Harwell	200
	Sutton Courtenay	East of Sutton Courtenay	220
Smaller Village <sup>b</sup>	Milton parish west of the A34	Milton Heights <b>(reduced)</b>	400
<b>Sub total</b>			<b>10,320</b>

<sup>b</sup> With facilities equivalent to those of larger villages in walking distance

### Western Vale Sub-Area

Settlement/ Type	Settlement	Site Name	Number of Dwellings
Market Town	Faringdon (including land in Great Coxwell parish)	Land South of Park Road, Faringdon	350
		South-West of Faringdon	200
		East of Coxwell Road Faringdon	200
		South of Faringdon	200
Larger Village	Shrivenham	North of Shrivenham	500
	Stanford-in-the-Vale	West of Stanford-in-the-Vale <b>(reduced)</b>	200
<b>Sub total</b>			<b>1,650</b>



32. The housing delivery trajectory from the site package together with planning commitments will provide a deliverable five year housing land supply plus a 20% buffer. The local plan makes up all previous housing supply backlog in full over the remainder of the plan period to 2031. The government would prefer backlog to be made up in the first five years from adoption ie 2015/16-2020/21. However, based on the our housing land supply position and the delivery trajectories of the site options available it is not possible to identify a deliverable and sustainable package of sites that could make up all housing backlog in this shorter time frame. This is a change to the position consulted on in the Housing Supply Update, but one that is supported by our evidence base.
33. **CP5 Housing supply ring fence:** This is a new policy to help ensure that jobs, homes and infrastructure are provided together in the key development locations within the Science Vale area, a main consultation issue. Key settlements, housing sites and business locations around Wantage, Grove, Harwell and Milton are grouped as a separate zone for housing land supply monitoring purposes, specifically excluding more rural part of the South East Vale. The ring fence complements a ring fence approach for Didcot in the adopted South Oxfordshire Core Strategy, and supports both the joint Science Vale Area Action Plan and joint Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Five year land supply in the rest of the Vale would be monitored separately.

## CHAPTER 5 SUB-AREA STRATEGIES

34. We have rationalised the South East Vale sub area boundary to better align with the Science Vale area. Sutton Courtenay has been added to South East Vale. Areas north of the railway and west of the A34 now form part of the Abingdon and Oxford Fringe sub area. East Challow now forms part of the Western Vale sub area.
35. The housing sections of the sub area spatial strategies are updated to reflect changes made to policies CP4 and CP5 (policies CP8, CP15, CP20).
36. The sub-area policies safeguarding land for transport schemes have been updated (policies CP12, CP18, CP21). Reflecting our transport and infrastructure work, further to safeguarding at appendix E of the 2013 draft local plan is additionally safeguarded land from development that would prejudice the future provision of the key transport infrastructure identified at annex 5, including
- a diamond A34 interchange at Lodge Hill
  - dualling of the A4130
  - a public transport link between Harwell Campus and Harwell village (with onward routing to Didcot that does not require safeguarding). This replaces the former Harwell Field Link Road proposal
  - a Thames crossing near Appleford
  - a Science bridge over the A4130 and railway connecting the Valley Park site to the former Didcot A site

- A420 junction enhancement at Faringdon and Shrivenham, and
  - a relief road west of Wantage (alignment being confirmed).
37. **CP 9 Oxford Brookes Harcourt Hill campus:** the policy remains supportive of education led modernisation of this site subject to the satisfactory resolution of local development constraints. An evidence-based masterplan would be supported through the development management process rather than as a supplementary planning document.
38. **CP13 The Oxford Green Belt:** policy refined but no further changes to proposed areas of Green Belt release which remain in accordance with the Green Belt review and as set out in the Housing Supply Update.
39. The South East Vale area section includes supporting and enabling references to the Science Vale Area Action Plan, which will in due course add delivery, implementation and masterplanning detail.

## CHAPTER 6 DISTRICT WIDE POLICIES

40. **CP24 Affordable housing:** the policy sets a lower 35% affordable housing target as this is sufficient to meet our affordable housing needs in full. Together with committed affordable housing supply a 35% rate is also sufficient to provide a good margin of supply above the level of provision currently needed<sup>1</sup>, a useful buffer against any fluctuations in future delivery.
41. A 40% affordable housing target was appropriate under the former South East Plan target, to get as close as we reasonably could to meeting affordable housing need<sup>2</sup>. It is no longer necessary with a much higher plan target based on the SHMA where need is driven by economic and labour market needs in excess of affordability.

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<sup>1</sup> The Oxfordshire SHMA identifies a need to provide 273 net additional affordable homes in the 18 year period 2013-2031 (para 6.51) or 4914 total affordable homes. Table 1 of this report shows we have 15760 homes still to provide after deducting completions and commitments (20560-1250-781-2769). Assuming cautiously that none of the 900 projected windfalls would be provided on sites above the affordable housing size threshold, we would need to secure 4,914 affordable homes from the provision of 14,860 homes on eligible sites (15760-900=14860). This is a rate of 33% (4914/14860). A target rate of 35% will be sufficient to achieve this requirement, allowing for some sites where the full 35% might not be viable, together with the 1300 affordable homes already secured within the known housing commitments on sites that are under construction or with planning permission.

<sup>2</sup> We consulted on a 40% affordable housing target in 2013 based on the now abolished South East Plan housing supply target of 578 homes per annum. At that point in time 40% was the highest rate we could justify on viability grounds, but it would not have meet needs in full (40% of 578 is 231 homes per annum).

42. Reducing the affordable housing rate from the previous 40% would have the benefit of significantly increasing the viability of development and thus the ability of sites to contribute to infrastructure provision whether by CIL or 106. The CIL rate to be set is highly dependent on the affordable housing target set due to the impact that affordable housing requirements have on viability. A high affordable housing rate across the board could have the effect of making some sites undeliverable, potentially jeopardising the soundness of the plan, and would also require the setting of a lower CIL rate, potentially jeopardising infrastructure delivery.
43. For the most part the remaining 2013 draft policies have undergone evolutionary refinement rather than major change. More notable changes include responses to representations from statutory consultees and the more general enhancement of infrastructure and transport policies
- **CP34 A34 Strategy:** a new policy supporting route based enhancement with delivery partners
  - **CP35 promoting public transport, cycling and walking** by working with the County Council, a new policy
  - **CP37 Design and local distinctiveness, CP38 Design briefs for strategic and major development sites** are incorporated following consultation in the Housing Supply Update, and supported by our emerging Design Guide SPD
  - **CP39 The Historic environment** is significantly strengthened including a commitment to produce conservation area appraisals, in response to objections from English Heritage, a statutory consultee
  - **CP40 Responding to climate change** has been amended to reflect the Government's Housing Standards Review in progress, whereby enhanced environmental standards for building are proposed to be secured through changes to Building Regulations, except where there is a clear local case to raise them further. We do so for water efficiency as the Environment Agency classify the Thames Water company area as an 'area of serious water stress', and it is a recommendation from the sustainability appraisal
  - **CP42 Flood risk** now uses wording recommended by the Environment Agency
  - **CP46 Conservation and improvement of biodiversity** has been enhanced to identify the main site designations of key biodiversity interest, and to introduce the concept of offsetting improvements to help restore priority Conservation Target Areas off-site, if harm to biodiversity on-site cannot be avoided or adequately mitigated. This is a new policy initiative first successfully applied in the Vale.
  - **Wiltshire & Berkshire Canal** – we will rely on Local plan 2011 saved policy and review through the Local Plan Part 2.

## How the local plan meets National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requirements

44. This section sets out how the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 has been prepared in compliance with national policy. Paragraph 182 of the Framework requires that a local planning authority should submit a plan for examination which it considers to be in a form suitable for adoption, sound and fit for examination. The requirements for a sound plan are that it is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. We believe our draft local plan meets these requirements, as set out in turn below.

### (A) A POSITIVELY PREPARED PLAN

***“the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development”*** (Framework para 182)

45. The first policy of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which lies at the heart of the Framework’s positive approach to meet development needs and to support growth when it is sustainable.
46. The local plan is clearly focused on and supportive of economic growth. The spatial strategy of Building on our Strengths sets out the organising principle for locating development to support the economic dynamic of the Science Vale growth area.
47. Policies including site designations and allocations identify and protect a sufficient quantum of business sites (including 189 hectares available for development) to meet needs identified in our Employment Land Review, which in turn fully reflects and will accommodate the significant growth in employment identified in the economic forecasting work that informed the SHMA<sup>3</sup>.
48. The strategic site templates in the local plan and forthcoming Infrastructure Delivery Plan set out the facilities and infrastructure required to support sustainable development based on evidence testing and consultation with providers and affected communities. The requirements have been developed in partnership with the County Council in particular, and tested for viability. As noted at paragraph 36 draft local plan policies safeguard the land required or

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<sup>3</sup> Economic Forecasting to Inform the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan and Strategic Housing Market Assessment (February 2014), Cambridge Econometrics....

likely to be needed for future transport network enhancements (see also appendix 5).

49. Local plan policies including site allocations identify housing supply to meet in full our objectively assessed need to provide for 20,560 homes 2011-2031 including 273 net additional affordable homes per annum as identified in the up-to-date Oxfordshire SHMA (2014). The local plan would restore a five year housing land supply with 20% buffer.
50. The housing target does not currently include any unmet need for housing that may be identified in the future. This arises if other authorities are unable to meet, in full, their own Objectively Assessed Need, as is likely to be the case for Oxford City Council. It is a risk to progress the local plan to meet district needs first. But we consider that it would cause unreasonable delay to the Vale local plan – and the timely meeting of Vale’s own housing needs including restoring a five year land supply – to wait until any unmet need is quantified and all the options to accommodate it in the housing market area are tested. We cannot do this work alone.
51. To minimise this risk the plan sets out a positive approach to dealing with any unmet need in a timely manner, should it arise, and reinforces our commitment to timely and effective working on this issue in accordance with the Oxfordshire Statement of Cooperation. This work can be twin tracked with the local plan, and may necessitate an early local plan review which is acknowledged in Core Policy 2: Duty-to-Cooperate including un-met housing need for Oxfordshire.

(B) A JUSTIFIED PLAN

**“the plan should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence (Framework para 182)**

52. To help understand the issues facing the district, the council has consulted widely in five stages and developed a very comprehensive evidence base to inform policy development, listed at appendix 2.
53. The local plan growth focus on Science Vale reflects the priorities of the district as well as those of the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan. The spatial strategy of building on our strengths emerged from testing through sustainability appraisal and consultation on a wide range of options to accommodate growth in the context of the former South East Plan. It has proved resilient and flexible enough to subsequently meet the full objectively assessed need for housing and economic growth in the district arising from the 2014 Oxfordshire SHMA. We consider it remains the most appropriate strategy for accommodating development.

54. Housing is allocated in a diverse range of sustainable locations in accordance with our spatial strategy, with different sizes and types of site to help maintain housing supply. Housing provision in both Science Vale and the rest of the district is balanced in relation to projected employment growth and its likely location.
55. Around sixty reasonable alternative strategic housing sites have been comprehensively tested including by sustainability appraisal to arrive at the 21 preferred strategic sites allocated for development (plus the saved Grove Airfield site). Public consultation has positively influenced site selection, identifying alternative sites that we have incorporated in preference to less sustainable alternatives, and identifying issues we have been able to respond to positively. For example, we have reduced the housing site allocations at Milton Heights and east of Harwell Campus to reflect updated evidence and advice.

(C) AN EFFECTIVE PLAN

**“the plan should be deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities**  
(Framework para 182)

56. We have worked closely with landowners and developers to ensure the proposed strategic development sites are available and deliverable. A Local Plan Viability Study demonstrates that the allocated development sites are viable in relation to plan policy and essential infrastructure requirements.
57. We have identified preferred housing sites that will restore and sustain a five year housing land supply, specifically including a range of site sizes and locations to provide a flexible and resilient housing delivery trajectory.
58. Under the duty-to-cooperate we have worked closely with organisations such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, Highways Authority, Thames Water and Oxfordshire County Council who are responsible for providing or managing key services including water resources, education and transport.
59. The council has also taken account of its other plans and strategies and those of other organisations and those produced at the local level, including the Sustainable Community Strategies for the council, the Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP)<sup>4</sup>, Strategic Economic Plan (SEP)<sup>5</sup>, and the strategies and programmes of the district council, town and parish councils, neighbouring authorities and other organisations. The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 will help to facilitate the delivery of many of the aspirations and objectives set out in these other plans and strategies.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/local-transport-plan-2011-2030>

<sup>5</sup> Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) (2014) *Strategic Economic Plan*-  
<http://www.oxfordshirelep.org.uk/>

60. Our commitment to working with our partners ensures that proper sustainable planning can be achieved across administrative boundaries, with examples including
- the Oxfordshire Statement of Cooperation (SHMA)
  - a statement of common ground between Vale of White Horse, Swindon Borough Council, Oxfordshire County Council and Western Vale Villages to ensure a cross boundary approach to the A420
  - working jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council to prepare the Science Vale Area Action Plan (AAP) and to identify the Science Vale transport infrastructure package, including those that span the district boundaries.
61. We have also significantly progressed our planning for infrastructure and service provision. We have published a Delivering Infrastructure Strategy<sup>6</sup> setting out how we are looking to secure funding for infrastructure from developers and other sources by use of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 agreements. We will be consulting on our CIL Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule alongside the local plan, and aim to adopt them at the same time. For the pre-submission local plan consultation we will also publish a significantly updated Infrastructure Delivery Plan. The key items of new infrastructure are listed at appendix 5.

(D) A PLAN THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH NATIONAL POLICY

**“the plan should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework (Framework para 182)**

62. In preparing the Local Plan 2031 Part 1, we have taken account of national policies, in particular the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the guidance within the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), which have informed the preparation of locally distinctive policies. As previously noted the first policy of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development, and in accordance with it the local plan seeks to meet in full identified needs.
63. The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 has been informed by Sustainability Appraisal (SA) that incorporates Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) throughout its production to shape its policies with the object of ensuring that its policies and site proposals contribute to achieving sustainable development.

A Sustainability Appraisal Report is being finalised for publication alongside the local plan and will set out in detail how the SA has been carried out and how it has influenced the preparation of the plan. For commentary on Oxford

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-08-28%20Vale%20Infrastructure%20Stategy.pdf>

Garden Cite see paragraph 78. Appendix 6 summarises the other main sustainability issues from the latest consultation and how we have responded to them, the main points being

- the reduced Harwell campus east site in AONB whilst still harmful is no longer significantly so, with further scope for landscape mitigation
- more generally, the potential for some minerals sterilisation (minerals could be extracted first), and the loss of higher quality agricultural land which needs to be justified (and can be, to meet housing and economic needs in the most sustainable locations).

64. The SA report also outlines a range of mitigation measures that will help to ensure the proposals minimise any adverse environmental, social or economic impacts associated with the proposed policies. Where mitigation measures are recommended these are being incorporated into the policies or site schedules where appropriate. We have also set aside the unacceptably harmful sites that we previously consulted on in favour of more sustainable alternatives.

65. The council has also carried out a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)<sup>7</sup> to ensure the policies in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 do not harm sites designated as being of European importance for biodiversity. The HRA concludes that the policies and proposals in the Vale Local Plan 2031 Part 1 do not have a significant adverse impact on any European nature conservation sites alone or in combination with other plans and programmes.

### **Local Plan Options considered and not recommended**

66. The local plan development process has tested a wide range of reasonable alternative policies including the housing target and site allocations. The options tested are being summarised in the Sustainability Appraisal. The process of identifying, testing and selection preferred options is being fully documented in our topic papers that will also be published alongside the local plan.

67. The main alternative strategic options considered and not recommended are

- setting a target lower than objectively assessed need
- seeking to make up our housing supply backlog in the first five years, and
- alternative housing site allocations including Oxford Garden City.

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<sup>7</sup> EU Habitats Directive (1992)  
[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm)



## SETTING A TARGET LOWER THAN OBJECTIVELY ASSESSED NEED.

68. For plan-making and planning for housing the presumption in favour of sustainable development means that Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs in full unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, assessed against the Framework as a whole (Framework paras 14, 47).
69. There is simply no credible path to opt for a lower local plan housing target. It is a fact that we have sufficient land available to physically meet our housing needs, based on either or both of the Housing Supply Update consultation and the published Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment that informed it.
70. Given the emphasis placed in the Framework on meeting housing needs in full, setting a lower target would dramatically increase the risk of failure at local plan examination, or early suspension of the examination process (the recent Cherwell experience, see appendix 4). Any attempt to hold back suitable and deliverable sites we are already aware of would quickly unravel at local plan examination.
71. Our evidence base also shows that we can accommodate our full need in a sustainable manner, when the three dimensions of sustainable development are considered – social, economic and environmental. The pre-submission version of the local plan improves on previous drafts in that harmful effects are removed where possible or reduced to acceptable levels through a combination of refined site allocations and mitigation including requirements to provide new infrastructure and facilities (critical infrastructure requirements summarised at appendix 5).

## SEEKING TO MAKE UP HOUSING SUPPLY BACKLOG IN FIVE YEARS.

72. We have not been able to identify a site package that could both achieve five years housing land supply and make up housing supply backlog in the first five years, based on a realistic housing sites delivery trajectory. To get close requires – as demonstrated by the Housing Supply Update consultation - the inclusion of sites that go beyond what we consider acceptable in terms of harm to the landscape and other considerations, sacrificing sustainability to attempt to achieve front-loaded delivery of development. The site package required would bring very significant risks at examination in trying to demonstrate that the local plan was sustainable or deliverable. A plan that cannot deliver its stated target and spatial strategy is not an ‘effective’ plan, and therefore would be at serious risk of being ruled unsound at examination. Our approach is instead to make up the supply backlog over the whole of remainder of the plan period.

## ALTERNATIVE HOUSING SITE ALLOCATIONS.

73. We no longer recommend a number of sites previously proposed for the purposes of public consultation. We have also tested and not selected a wide range of alternatives including sites proposed during public consultation. The Oxford Garden City proposal is addressed below. Appendix 7 provides a summary of the testing process, other alternative site options and reasons for not including them.

### Oxford Garden City

74. We do not consider the Garden City proposal to be a realistic alternative approach to meet our current housing needs. The council has met the promoters to discuss the scheme and explore whether it is deliverable. To date we have seen no technical evidence that advances the scheme any further than an illustrative concept. There is no information on whether or how the suggested new rail station or alternative light rail link could actually be provided. It has not yet been established that a new A34 junction can be provided in a manner that meets the requirements of the Highways Agency, let alone a solution to additional A34 traffic load from 12-15,000 homes in this location.
75. County Council comments include that the A34 Trunk Road, on sections both around and to the south of Oxford, is already at or above operational capacity during certain periods and would not be able to carry the expected additional traffic from a Garden city. Questions were raised about whether the scheme could support frequent public transport services, without which the resulting urban form would be low-density and car-dependant.
76. We therefore have no confidence that the Garden City can actually be delivered at this point in time. Even if it could be, the lead in time would be significant and the scheme would make little, probably no contribution towards meeting our housing need in the first five years of the local plan period.
77. The local plan also safeguards large parts of the proposed Garden City sites for the potential future provision of a reservoir. This is an important option for future water supply in the Thames Valley, identified to be in serious water stress by the Environment Agency<sup>8</sup>. Thames Water wishes the site to be safeguarded for review through their next Water Management Plan.
78. Sustainability appraisal of the Oxford Garden City site indicates that the scale of development proposed is not likely to be able to be mitigated satisfactorily due to effects on the setting of Conservation Areas, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings and views from the North Wessex Downs AONB. The Oxford Garden City could also reduce resilience to flood risk by affecting the proposed flood risk storage area in the Ock catchment.

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<sup>8</sup> Water stressed areas – final classification, Environment Agency 2013

## **Financial Implications**

79. The development proposed in this local plan could generate additional New Homes Bonus subject to the lifespan and continuation of this scheme.
80. A Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule is being prepared in parallel to the local plan, and once both are adopted will generate receipts for infrastructure funding.

## **Legal Implications**

81. It is a legal requirement for local planning authorities to produce a local plan and keep it up to date. Once adopted the local plan would replace (except for saved policies) the Local Plan 2011 as the basis for development management decision-making in the district.
82. The duty to cooperate on cross-boundary matters relevant to plan-making is a legal test that must be passed before a plan can proceed to examination.

## **Risks**

83. It is a risk under the duty to cooperate to progress the local plan to meet district needs first. But we consider it unreasonable to delay the Vale local plan – and the timely meeting of Vale housing needs – to wait until any unmet need is quantified and all the options to accommodate it in the housing market area are tested. These risks can be reduced but not avoided by committing to active and timely joint working, in parallel to work to meet our own needs. Without this commitment the local plan is would proceed at much higher risk of failure.
84. There is some risk in adopting a housing supply approach that does not make up backlog in the first five years, but the approach can be justified based on our housing trajectory and because the alternatives are higher risk.

## **Concluding recommendations**

85. Scrutiny committee is requested to consider this report and the Pre-submission draft Local Plan 2031 Part 1: Strategic sites and Policies document, and to make any recommendations to Cabinet.

## **Background Papers**

86. The Pre-submission draft *Local Plan 2031 Part 1: Strategic Sites and Policies* document.