

Scrutiny Paper

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Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031: Part 1

Purpose of paper

1. To provide Scrutiny with responses to their questions dated 16 June 2016.

Response to questions

- 1. Please discuss the rationale for each of the Council's responses to the Inspector's requests. What options did you consider and why were they discarded?**

The Planning Inspector's Interim Findings letter dated 7 June 2016 asked the council to respond to four questions (outlined below) to which the Council responded in their letter (dated 10 June):

Inspector's Question 1:

"I seek confirmation from the Council that it is content to pursue adoption of the Part 1 plan modified to retain the existing Green Belt boundaries, other than in respect of housing allocation sites 1, 2, 3 and 4".

Council response: "yes".

Alternative response considered: "no".

The implications of this response would be the Inspector finding the plan unsound and requiring the Council to commence preparation of a new plan for re-submission to the Secretary of State. As the Inspector's modification allows the plan to proceed to adoption without affecting the Council strategy this was not considered to be appropriate.

Inspector's Question 2:

"I seek confirmation from the Council that it is content to pursue adoption of the Part 1 plan modified to delete housing allocation sites 12 and 13".

Council response: "yes".

Alternative response considered: "no".

The implications of this response would be the Inspector finding the plan unsound and requiring the Council to commence preparation of a new plan for re-submission to the Secretary of State. As the Inspector's modification allows the plan to proceed to adoption without requiring additional/ or replacement sites being added to LPP1 and as the Council retains the flexibility of adding additional/ or replacement sites through LPP2, this was not considered to be appropriate.

Within his Interim Findings letter the Planning Inspector states:

"There would be little reason to delay adoption of the Part 1 plan by seeking to allocate replacement sites at this stage".

Inspector's Question 3:

"In order to assist my determination of whether or not this allocation is soundly based I would be grateful if the Council would formally consider if, in the light of a review of current evidence, housing development of the scale envisaged in the plan is appropriate in East Hanney and if the site 6 housing allocation is deliverable".

Council response:

"In light of Appeal Decision (Appeal Ref: APP/V3120/W/16/3142562) the Council is of the view that the strategic site at Land South of East Hanney should be removed from Local Plan 2031: Part 1. Consideration as to whether East Hanney may be an appropriate location for smaller (non-strategic) development could be considered through preparation of the Local Plan 2031: Part 2".

Alternative options considered:

The Appeal Decision (listed above) was received on the same day as the Inspector's Interim Finding's letter. It concluded that development of the scale set out in the Local Plan for site 6 at East Hanney was inappropriate. On this basis, any alternative responses were not considered appropriate as they would be likely to result in delay to the progression of LPP1 to adoption. Even without sites 6, 12 and 13, the plan would still provide a 7.1 years housing land supply and the Council would retain the flexibility of considering the potential for smaller scale development at East Hanney through LPP2.

Inspector's Question 4:

"In order that I can reach a view on whether or not the policy is soundly based I would be grateful to receive further comments from the Council in respect of policy CP11, having particular regard to:

- (a) The lack of any indication in the policy or its supporting text of the amount of retail floorspace which would be required at Botley Central Area to meet the objectively-assessed needs;
- (b) The exclusion from the boundary of the Central Area, as defined in Fig 5.3 of the plan, of a bank and a church, given their inclusion within the Botley Central Area SPD;
- (c) The inclusion of existing residential development within the Fig 5.3 defined Central Area without a policy requirement that it is replaced, noting in particular that part (iii) of the policy does require that the library and Baptist Church also included in the defined area are replaced. Whilst the SPD is not formally before me for Consideration I also note that the Sustainability Appraisal Report of the SPD scores housing provision as a significant beneficial effect when neither policy CP11 nor the SPD itself require the provision of housing as part of the scheme.

Council response:

"The Council will provide additional information to add clarity to the policy CP11 (Botley Central Area). For example, this will include:

- I. The quantum of retail floor space appropriate at Botley Central Area.
- II. Amending the Botley Central Area to include the bank and Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, to be consistent with the recently adopted Botley Centre SPD.
- III. Amending the policy (CP11) to confirm that any residential development within the defined Botley Central Area will either be retained or replaced".

Alternative responses considered:

The Inspector has sought to assist the Council by clearly indicating where changes may be need to the plan in order to make it sound. The main alternative response is not to provide the Inspector with the information/ clarity he requested. This was considered to be likely to cause delay to adoption of the LPP1 and therefore to be appropriate. The proposed modification to this policy provides clarity and improves consistency with the Botley Central Area SPD.

2. What are the key milestones for the remainder of the Local Plan Part 1?

Appendix 1 summarises the main steps that are expected to be required for the LPP1 to reach adoption. However, the process is entirely in the hands of the Planning Inspectorate and the Council has no control over what steps may be needed or how long they may take. For example, if the Planning Inspector chooses to hold a third public hearing that could delay the process through to adoption.

3. What the project time line and the budget for the remaining work? Please provide high level project plan (Gantt chart) for the remainder of the councils work on LPP1.

The project time line is set out in **Appendix 1** (discussed above).

The Budget for the VOWH Planning Policy team is £1M (approx.) for 2016/17. Individual projects are not separately budgeted for.

4. What work remains for Vale to do to get LPP1 to the next milestone? Please show us the project plan (Gantt chart) for that work.

Please refer to questions 2 and 3 (discussed above).

5. What is the impact of loss of key planning staff on this Local Plan work, and what steps are in place to manage the impact?

The Vale Planning Policy Team consists of 8 FTE including 1.5 FTE dedicated resource to support Neighbourhood Planning. The team currently have one G6 Planning Officer vacancy which is being recruited.

The team have approval to recruit two G6 Planning Officers on six month agency contracts to provide additional capacity to support the completion of LPP1 whilst progressing LPP2 and other key projects (AMR/ SCI/ IDP/ LDS).

The team have also initiated a quotes process to put in place a framework contract with a consultancy to support the preparation of LPP2. This contract includes a clause for the consultants to provide planning staff, at an agreed notice period, to provide additional resilience, should this be needed during preparation of LPP2 to ensure the submission date (February 2018) is met.

6. What steps have been taken to mitigate the risk of further project slippage?

LPP1 was submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2015 in accordance with the agreed timetable. Following submission LPP1 is entirely in the hands of the Planning Inspectorate and the Council have no control over the timetabling, steps or process followed. There was some delay before an examination hearing could be arranged in September 2015, which was entirely due to the capacity of the Planning Inspectorate.

The Council has sought to respond positively and promptly to support the Planning Inspector wherever he has requested information from the Council. Actions have been taken to provide additional resource and resilience (described above) to allow LPP1 to be completed whilst LPP2 and other projects are progressed simultaneously.

Appendix 1:

LPP1 Indicative Modifications Timetable (Subject to Change)	
Date:	Milestone:
29 April 2016	Deadline for all responses to Inspector's Requests for Information and all suggested modifications to be sent to the Inspector and published on website.
25 May 2016	Receipt of Inspector's letter back to the Council detailing his Interim Findings.
06/08 June 2016	Deadline for submission of responses to Inspector's initial letter.
01 July 2016	ICMD
July – September	Consultation on Main Modifications to Plan
October	Responses to Public Consultation collated and returned to Inspector
November	Receipt of Final Report from Inspector
December	Scrutiny Committee
December	Cabinet to recommend Adoption of Local Plan
December	Full Council to Adopt Local Plan
December	Notice of Proposed Adoption Published for 6 week period
January	Plan legally Adopted