

Cabinet Agenda



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Date: 1 March 2012
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A meeting of the

Cabinet

will be held on Friday 9 March 2012 at 2pm
The Abbey House, Abingdon, OX14 3JE

Cabinet Members:

Councillors

Matthew Barber (Chairman)
Roger Cox (Vice-Chairman)
Yvonne Constance
Reg Waite
Elaine Ware

A large print version of this agenda is available. In addition any background papers referred to may be inspected by prior arrangement.

Please note that this meeting will be held in a wheelchair accessible venue. If you would like to attend and have any special access requirements, please let the Democratic Services Officers know beforehand and they will do their very best to meet your requirements.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Reed'.

Margaret Reed
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Members are reminded of the provisions contained in the code of conduct adopted on 30 September 2007 and standing order 34 regarding the declaration of personal and prejudicial interests.

Agenda

Open to the Public including the Press

Map and vision

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A map showing the location of the venue for this meeting is attached. A link to information about nearby car parking is http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/transport/car_parking/default.asp

The council's vision is to take care of your interests across the Vale with enterprise, energy and efficiency.

1. Apologies for absence

To receive apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

To adopt and sign as a correct record the public minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 10 February 2012 (previously published).

3. Declarations of interest

To receive any declarations of personal or personal and prejudicial interests in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

4. Urgent business and chairman's announcements

To receive notification of any matters which the chairman determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the chairman.

5. Statements, petitions, and questions relating to matters affecting the Cabinet

Any statements, petitions, and questions from the public under standing order 32 will be made or presented at the meeting.

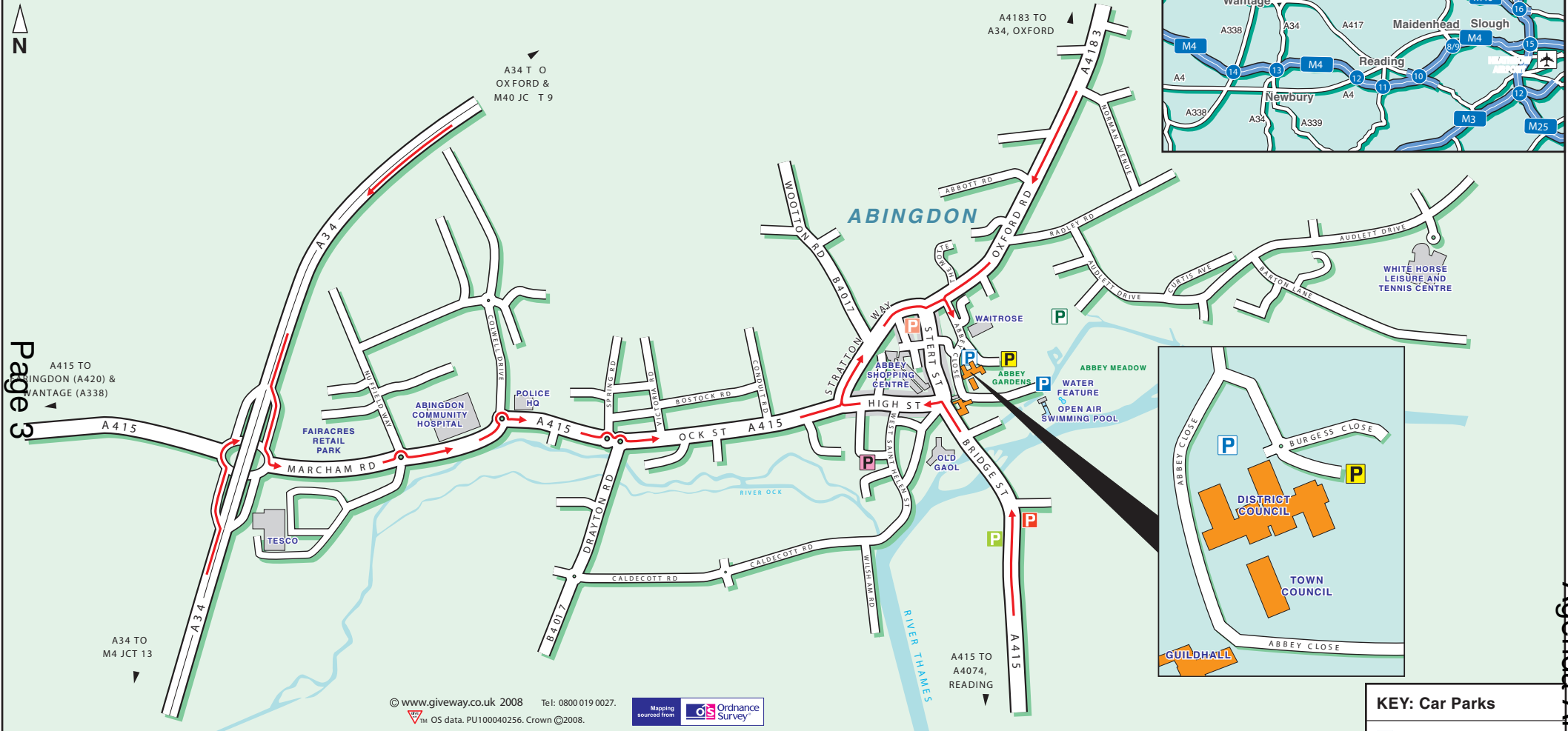
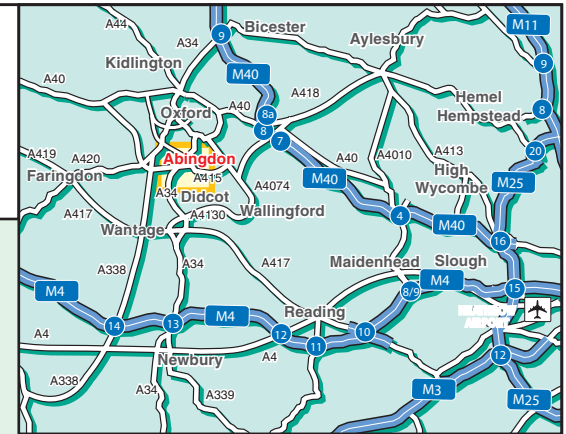
6. Local development framework core strategy

(Pages 4 - 25)

To consider report 78/11 of the head of planning.

Exempt information under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972

None



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KEY: Car Parks

	Abbey Close
	Cattle Market
	Charter Multi-storey
	Civic
	Rye Farm
	Hales Meadow
	Audlett Drive
	West St Helen Street

By rail – the nearest main line railway stations to Abingdon are either Didcot Parkway (seven miles) or Oxford (eight miles). Radley railway station is located on the main line between Oxford and Didcot and is three miles from Abingdon town centre. For details of train times visit www.nationalrail.co.uk or call 08457 484950

By bus – there are a number of bus routes serving Abingdon town centre. For details of services and timetables, visit Oxfordshire County Council’s website at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk. Contact details for bus operators can be found on the travel information pages on our website www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Parking – details of car parks charges can be found on our website

Agenda Annex

Cabinet Report



Report of Head of Planning

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To: CABINET

Date: 9 March 2012

Planning: Core Strategy progress and housing supply approach

Cabinet is recommended

- (a) To agree that the 2009/10 draft core strategy preferred options document be updated for further Regulation 25 public consultation incorporating:
 - i. a continued strategic economic and housing growth focus on the Science Vale UK area, the Enterprise Zone and the Vale's main settlements, whilst also supporting the future vitality of villages and rural areas, as set out in paragraphs 17-20 of the report
 - ii. refinement and re-expression of the spatial strategy for development as 'building on our strengths', as set out in paragraphs 24-28 and Annex B
 - iii. a 23-year plan period of 2006/7 – 2028/9 inclusive
- (b) To agree that the housing target be met from the strategic housing sites and other sources of housing supply identified at paragraph 8, with specific housing allocation numbers and specific large village sites to be reported back to cabinet after further assessment and consultation
- (c) To agree that the Local Development Scheme be updated, and to delegate the details to the Head of Planning in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Planning

Purpose of the report

1. The purpose of this report is to conclude the internal review of the Core Strategy and to indicate broadly how the Vale housing target to 2028/9 will be met. The report outlines the main possible components of future housing including what currently appear to be the strongest strategic housing site candidates, for cabinet to confirm which it is minded to put forward for further consideration and consultation.
2. Following this decision the core strategy document will be refreshed including additional technical work, and reported back to cabinet for agreement to publish for further public consultation later in 2012, provisionally commencing in September. The updated core strategy will specify the updated preferred strategic housing sites and the number of homes proposed to be allocated to them.
3. The report also outlines the subsequent timetable for production of the Core Strategy. The Local Development Scheme will need to be updated accordingly and published to set out the onward timetable for the core strategy and the rest of the Local Development Framework.

Strategic objectives

4. It is a council objective to have an adopted core strategy in place, to contribute towards achieving the following strategic objectives in the corporate plan:
 - Meeting people's need for housing
 - Supporting a vibrant local economy
 - Rising to the challenge of climate change

Summary, conclusions and recommendations

5. The core strategy internal review was initiated by the new administration to review decisions made by the previous council on the district housing target and proposed strategic housing sites. It has progressed through a series of internal discussions culminating in an all-councillor workshop¹ in January 2012 to debate housing supply options to inform this concluding report.
6. This report is structured as a narrative account of matters covered in the internal review, including the councillor workshop, expressing the key points considered. It presents a summary of the relative merits of various housing supply options and potential sites.
7. The report asks Cabinet to confirm an updated expression of the core strategy's economic growth priorities, strategic context and spatial strategy. Cabinet is also asked to agree the principle sources of housing supply that the core strategy will rely upon to provide the homes required to 2028/9, for officers to investigate further before additional public consultation. These include a combination of retained and new strategic housing site options.

¹ Summary at Annex C

8. Taking into account the available evidence on deliverability, sustainability, suitability and the January 2012 councillor workshop, officers recommend that the additional 6,300 homes required to 2028/9 be provided broadly as follows.
- (a) That the following 2009/10 draft Preferred Options sites be retained and taken forward.
 - i. Up to 2,150 homes at **Valley Park** (Harwell Parish west of Didcot, east of the A34)
 - ii. Up to 400 homes at **Harwell Oxford campus**.
 - iii. Up to 400 homes at **Faringdon** south of Park Road
 - iv. Up to 1,500 homes at Crab Hill, north east of Wantage
 - (b) To allocate an additional main settlement urban extension on land north of Grove including Monk's Farm, for around 750 to 900 homes
 - (c) To allocate strategic sites to accommodate up to 850 homes in the larger villages. First consideration to be given to options in Kingston Bagpuize, Shrivenham and Watchfield.
 - (d) To allocate smaller sites for up to 1,400 homes in the later Managing Development Development Plan Document (DPD)
 - (e) To make no reliance on windfalls as a source of supply in the plan period.
9. The sources of housing supply above are indicated on an 'up to' basis because they sum to 7,600 homes against the 6,300 we currently need and intend to plan for. Further technical work and consultation is needed to establish more precisely how many homes would be allocated to each of the strategic sites/locations identified. Some allocations will be lower than the maximum level indicated above, including possible reductions to the size of strategic sites consulted upon in 2009 and 2010.
10. The figure of 6,300 homes may be reduced further before the core strategy has to be approved for submission to the Planning Inspectorate, for examination, to reflect the contributions towards housing supply from any subsequent planning permissions for housing including any that might be brought forward through the proposed Interim Housing Supply Policy to be reported to Cabinet on 16 March 2012 (taking the prevailing five year housing land supply position into account). IHSP provision may also reduce the extent of core strategy allocations required in the larger villages, and/or the number of smaller sites to be found in the subsequent Managing Development DPD.

Core strategy progress and the internal review

Introduction

11. Preparatory work commenced on the Vale Core Strategy in 2007, progressing to preferred options public consultation in 2009 and additional public consultation early in 2010. Progress paused in the lead up to the general and local elections in May 2011 awaiting clarification about significant reforms proposed to the planning system, since taken forward through the Localism Bill and enacted on 15 November 2011.
12. On 30 June 2011 the council published a statement² on progress with the emerging Vale core strategy. The new administration confirmed that the core strategy would be completed but that there would first be an internal review of the district housing target and draft strategic housing sites. The purpose of the internal review has been to clarify how best to progress the core strategy and to consider possible measures to improve housing delivery. The process culminated in an all-councillor workshop³ held on 9 January 2012 to consider the housing options and inform this concluding report and cabinet's decision.
13. Many important details about the new planning system are still to follow, including accompanying regulations on plan-making and content, the finalised National Planning Policy Framework (due April 2012), and formal abolition of regional plans (requiring secondary legislation and therefore extant until abolished). These will need to be incorporated as appropriate as the core strategy progresses, and meanwhile key decisions on the broad strategic content of the core strategy still need to be made to enable work to continue.

Sustainability considerations

14. It is an important part of the policy development process to take sustainability into account in decision-making. Alongside the core strategy internal review, officers are updating the core strategy sustainability appraisal documents, which have become dated, with external guidance and 'critical friend' support from Levett-Therivel Sustainability Consultants. An updated Scoping Report, including the revised draft sustainability appraisal framework of eleven sustainability objectives attached at Annex B, will be published in April 2012 for public consultation.
15. The report notes some preliminary views on the relative sustainability merits of different options considered against the draft updated sustainability appraisal framework. It is important to note that this is work in progress for information purposes only and not firm sustainability conclusions based on actual detailed assessment. A revised sustainability appraisal document will be prepared to inform the next draft of core strategy, and published for public consultation alongside it.

² <http://tiny.cc/yymo0>

³ See paragraphs 54-61 below, and Annex C for a summary of workshop proceedings. The full report is available on request and will be published on the council website

Clarification of economic growth priorities and strategic context

16. The internal review has focused on housing, but the core strategy's wider strategic focus on the 'Science Vale UK' (SVUK) area from Wantage to Didcot remains. The then embryonic SVUK concept informed the development of the sub-regional strategy for Central Oxfordshire in the South East Plan (SE Plan), a strategy commissioned by the region from Oxfordshire local authorities.
17. The Localism Act confirms the SE Plan will be abolished in the near future, but the wider SVUK area remains a county-wide priority for housing, economic growth and infrastructure provision⁴, one of three county focal points for growth promoted by the Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership. Harwell Oxford Campus and Milton Park have since been designated an Enterprise Zone.
18. These factors bear on the provision and appropriate location of housing, supporting facilities and infrastructure in much the same way as the SE Plan sub-regional strategy influenced earlier core strategy drafts. In the context of localism there are now strong locally-based reasons to maintain a SVUK-focused spatial approach to development beyond SE Plan abolition. This primary focus should be complemented by greater support for economic growth and development in the western Vale, including supporting infrastructure, to ensure the future vitality of communities in that part of the Vale.
19. Officers recommend stating this for the public record to clarify the core strategy's strategic context and economic objectives.

The housing target and number of homes to plan for

20. The first stage of the internal review was to reassess the Vale housing target, given the planned abolition of the South East Plan which provides the current target. Cabinet on 9 September 2011⁵ considered the underlying demographic, economic and housing evidence and resolved to continue to plan for 578 homes per annum for a plan period of 2006/7 extended through to 2028/9, to provide the required⁶ 15-year coverage from adoption, which we anticipate reaching in 2014 (and to keep that evidence under review to refine the target if appropriate).
21. This equates to **6,300 homes still to be planned for** in the core strategy as at April 2011 (rounded figure, see table 1). This is approximately 450 more homes than planned for at 2009/10 Preferred Options stage; when the core strategy horizon was 2026/7.

⁴ Oxfordshire Local Investment Plan 2010

⁵ Item 9

[http://whitehorsedc.moderngov.co.uk/Published/C00000507/M00001554/\\$ADocPackPublic.pdf](http://whitehorsedc.moderngov.co.uk/Published/C00000507/M00001554/$ADocPackPublic.pdf)

⁶ Planning Policy Statements 3 (Housing) and 12 (Local Spatial Planning)

Table 1: Homes to plan for based on 2009/10 Preferred Options approach

Housing requirement 2006/7-2028/9	13,294	(578 homes per annum for 23 years)
Less		
<i>Completions 2006 - 2011</i>	2,082	
<i>Permissions at April 2011</i>	2,139	
<i>Local Plan allocations</i>	2,780	Includes 2,500 at Grove Airfield
Subtotal	7,001	
Balance to find	6,293	
<i>2009-10 Draft Core Strategy sites</i>	4,450	Figure as proposed 2009-10
<i>Future smaller sites</i>	1,400	As proposed 2009-10
Residual to plan for (rounded)	450	If 2009-10 strategic sites retained

22. The next stages of the internal review were to determine whether to retain, remove or vary any of the 2009/10 preferred option sites, followed by options to address the residual housing still required (450 from plan period extension plus or minus any changes arising from the preferred option sites review). The starting point has to be consideration of the appropriateness of the guiding plan principles for the location of development: the spatial strategy.

The spatial strategy for development

23. The search for and assessment of suitable housing sites is guided by the Core Strategy's 'spatial strategy'. This is a set of guiding principles for the location of all development the core strategy proposes to bring forward, of which housing has the greatest land requirement. At examination stage an independent planning inspector will consider whether the spatial strategy is appropriate to achieve the core strategy's objectives and would deliver a sustainable pattern of development, and in turn whether the site allocations proposed coherently follow from the principles put forward – an internal consistency check. If not satisfied then they will find the core strategy unsound. Thus the internal review process has also considered the draft spatial strategy.
24. At Preferred Options consultation stage (2009) the spatial strategy preferred was '**urban concentration**', which aimed primarily to provide the housing required in large extensions to the district's main settlements. In many respects this would be a continuation of the approach in the Vale Local Plan 2011, including its restrictive approach of limited housing development in villages. Its particular benefit in sustainability terms is in providing more of the new homes closer to established higher-order services, public transport networks and SVUK employment opportunities, and so comparatively it is likely to generate less need to travel especially by car.
25. The alternative put forward for consultation in 2009 was '**urban focus**', which as then proposed in essence would have entirely replaced the Crab Hill NE Wantage urban extension with medium-sized sites (typically lower hundreds of homes) in most of the larger villages⁷. This approach offers potential housing

⁷ Both spatial strategy alternatives were developed from earlier consideration of and consultation on six possible approaches to locating the housing and other development required.

provision advantages from a more diversified portfolio of sites, and in sustainability terms should also offer better support for rural communities albeit with likely greater reliance on travel by private car.

26. For the reasons below and to achieve a better overall sustainability and deliverability outcome officers recommend that the spatial strategy be refined to combine the best of the respective sustainability and deliverability advantages of the urban focus and urban concentration approaches.
- The name urban concentration is not a good fit to the preferred options core strategy approach to focus most new business development on existing key business parks in the Science Vale UK area, land now designated as an Enterprise Zone (which are not in urban areas).
 - At Preferred Options stage (2009) there was public consultation including workshop discussion⁸ on the spatial strategy including the relative merits of urban concentration and urban focus. Consultation responses included a significant minority view that there was a more appropriate hybrid position whereby the larger and more sustainable villages could accommodate some housing growth. Some respondents also referred to the recommendations in the *Living Working Countryside: The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing* (2008) to enable rural areas to fulfil their potential and meet the needs of rural residents and businesses.
 - In a similar vein, the former Government Office for the South East commented at preferred options stage that whilst it was right to focus a significant proportion of housing development on the main settlements, it was not clear whether the housing distribution (as then) proposed based on three major urban extensions would help to support the sustainability of rural areas, for example through the potential for development to make villages more sustainable.
 - At Preferred Options Further Consultation stage (2010) a further strategic housing site was proposed at Harwell Oxford campus in preference to allocating an additional main town urban extension. This was a departure from the urban concentration approach. It was in part a response to concerns raised in 2009 preferred options consultation over the deliverability of the core strategy if it remained reliant on just three large town extension sites, recognising that all Vale towns with potentially deliverable additional sites were already allocated high levels of proposed development.
27. Revised spatial strategy wording is set out at Annex B, re-titled '**building on our strengths**'. As amended the spatial strategy would propose – for further public consultation - that main settlement extensions would still accommodate the majority of housing growth, whilst also enabling significant but proportionate economic and housing growth in rural areas.

⁸ http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/vale/batchpdfs/4_Spatial_Strategy.pdf;
http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/vale/batchpdfs/Proteus_Summary_Report.pdf pp4-5

Housing supply and site options

Review of 2009/10 preferred option and alternative sites

28. The eleven main settlement extension options considered to date and those identified as ▶ **preferred** in 2009/10 are listed below. Their relative merits are discussed below.
- South Abingdon west of Drayton Road
 - South Abingdon east of Drayton Road
 - ▶ **West of Didcot, Valley Park Harwell (north of Wantage Road)**
 - West of Didcot, Valley Park Harwell (south of Wantage Road)
 - ▶ **South Faringdon, south of Park Road**
 - West of Faringdon east and west of Coxwell Road (Steed's Farm)
 - ▶ **Northern land within Harwell Oxford campus**
 - ▶ **Land NE of Wantage, Crab Hill**
 - Land NW of Wantage, Stockham Farm
 - Land north of Grove and south of the railway, east and west of Letcombe Brook
29. The internal review process has not identified any achievable new main settlement extension prospects, and has reconfirmed that **Botley** lacks suitable land opportunities outside the flood plain or Green Belt.

Abingdon

30. Core Strategy work to date and reconsideration through the core strategy internal review has confirmed that there are policy or delivery obstacles to allocating large housing sites at Abingdon. No significant new brownfield redevelopment sites have been identified within the town. Abingdon lacks suitable land outside the flood plain or Green Belt other than sites to the south considered at Preferred Options stage. Given existing congestion and air quality problems in central Abingdon these sites would require construction of a full town bypass through the River Ock floodplain that could not be fully funded by the development, and there is currently no prospect of securing the significant additional funding that would be required. Homes nonetheless continue to be built in Abingdon: 700 in the five years 2006/7 - 2010/11. Abingdon can reasonably be expected to continue to deliver homes over the period 20011/12-2028/9⁹ including unallocated infill and redevelopment sites. However, many of these will be from windfall sites that we cannot rely upon in planning to meet our housing need.

Didcot area including Harwell Parish east of the A34

31. Valley Park west of Didcot (up to 2,150 homes proposed) is in close proximity to and is well placed to provide essential housing supply support to the Enterprise Zone sites at Milton Park and Harwell campus, which are key strategic economic growth priorities within the SVUK area. This site would play a critical enabling role in the delivery of the Harwell Strategic Link Road, a key piece of transport infrastructure, essential to the wider future functioning of the SVUK area. In conjunction with Great Western Park (adjoining and in

⁹ Permissions as at 1 April 2011, and 80% of trend windfall completion rates on unallocated sites 2006/7-2010/11, projected forward to 2028/9.

- progress) there is good potential for servicing Valley Park by public transport. Together the sites can provide a comprehensive and conveniently accessible package of services and facilities, including future schools and local shopping in walking distance. For this reason it is likely to score well against social and economic sustainability objectives, and on balance these should outweigh the environmental impacts from the green field development (especially when combined with achievable mitigation measures).
32. The current position regarding the potential use of additional land **south of Wantage Road** is that it is contingency land, in case the Valley Park site north of Wantage Road cannot accommodate the 2,150 homes originally proposed. This is most likely to arise if aspirations to provide a Learning Park (a skills training facility) within Valley Park come to fruition (there is no current funding commitment). Whilst development south of Wantage Road could help deliver the southern part of the Harwell link road, it is less well located relative to future services in Valley Park and Great Western Park. Development here would also be more prominent in visual and landscape terms, especially the southernmost parts rising towards the edge of the Downs AONB.
33. In considering the merits of the Didcot area for possible further housing allocations over and above allocation of up to 2,150 homes at Valley Park, we need to take into account that 9,050 homes are already proposed for the wider Didcot area, including 6,300 on land in South Oxfordshire. These homes are phased for delivery over an extended time frame, dependent on the timely delivery of a significant and complex infrastructure package including the Harwell Link Road to be primarily funded from development. Additional housing allocation in this area within the current core strategy cycle would need to be carefully tested for timely deliverability including supporting infrastructure and services.
34. Following decommissioning, the **Didcot A Power Station site** will be available for new development, which may include new energy generating and employment development. The position is currently uncertain, but should be clearer before the core strategy has to be approved for submission to the Planning Inspectorate, for examination. The next draft of the core strategy will need to address the re-use of this site, and we are engaged with the site owners and their appointed master planners.
- Harwell Oxford Campus**
35. The site is adjacent to part of the Enterprise Zone, with similar economic and social benefits to Valley Park, including scope to help fund the Harwell link road. Whilst further from higher order services there are local facilities available nearby and scope to enhance them through development, plus existing bus service connections. The site lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty but it is partly previously developed land and is an allocated employment site in the Vale Local Plan 2011. There would be some landscape impact from development but this could be mitigated by design, layout and structural landscape planting. Initial discussions suggest there may be scope to enlarge the site within the Harwell campus boundary, possibly adding 100-200 homes to the 400 already proposed.

Faringdon

36. The land south of **Park Road** is a well contained site clearly defined and contained by surrounding development and the A420, to which it has excellent access. Local employment areas, public transport services, a secondary school and leisure centre are nearby, and the town centre is in walking distance. Whilst visually prominent from the south, landscape impacts can be mitigated by careful layout and landscaping. This was adjudged the most sustainable of the Faringdon alternatives at preferred options stage, and is highly likely to remain so when assessed against the updated SA objectives¹⁰. It is a suitable development location at the main town in the west of the district, to help consolidate its service centre role.
37. Land around **Coxwell Road** on the western edge of the town is more prominent with greater and potentially significantly adverse landscape and visual impact, especially west of Coxwell Road (Steed's Farm) and on higher ground near the town boundary. This location is not as well placed as Park Road for access to the town's employment areas and various facilities, although still reasonably close, especially east of Coxwell Road.

Wantage and Grove

38. The Grove Airfield site is allocated for 2,500 homes in the Vale Local Plan 2011. Whilst long delayed a planning application has recently been submitted.
39. Taken together Wantage and Grove is the second largest population centre in the district, and they form the approximate western extent of the SVUK area. Given the scale of development already proposed in the wider Didcot area, the lack of significant development options around Abingdon, and the package of transport measures¹¹ focussed on improving east-west movement within the SVUK area officers recommend that Wantage and Grove should accommodate additional housing to that allocated on the Grove Airfield site, in support of the SVUK growth agenda.
40. There are three strategic site options in Wantage and Grove. All three are likely to be broadly sustainable, when considered against the eleven draft updated sustainability appraisal objectives¹². The economic and social benefits of providing more homes should slightly outweigh the adverse consequence of development on green field land mostly of good agricultural quality (a status common to them all and an impact unavoidable in the district if sufficient homes are to be provided). Whilst the sites have relative pros and cons in landscape, environmental and accessibility terms, no one site is considered likely to be significantly more sustainable than the other two, and most of their relative sustainability disadvantages appear capable of being mitigated to some extent.
41. The **Crab Hill site north east of Wantage** has the principal advantage of being large enough to take sufficient homes to achieve economies of scale in school and service provision including a full, two-form entry primary school. It would also directly enable provision of the Wantage Eastern Link Road (WELR), a

¹⁰ See paragraph 15, above

¹¹ South Central Oxfordshire Transport Study (SCOTS), carried forward into the Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2030.

¹² See paragraph 15, above

strategic transport infrastructure priority for the wider SVUK area. The development would fully meet that 'non strategic' part of the WELR road cost that would in any case have to be provided to build local access roads to develop the site. The development would also contribute to the cost of building the WELR to a higher standard, suitable to serve as part of the strategic road network for the SVUK area. This is the site's main 'delivery' advantage over the alternatives: it significantly reduces the total cost to be found from elsewhere, and avoids the cost and uncertainty associated with the compulsory land purchase process.

42. This site has landscape and visual prominence disadvantages relative to alternatives in the area, but these have to be seen in the context of the impact that would arise from the construction of the Wantage Eastern Link Road. The landscape and visual impact of development at Crab Hill can also be mitigated, for example by the country park proposed.
43. **Land north of Grove** (including Monk's Farm) as currently promoted is not big enough on its own to be an alternative to allocation at Crab Hill Wantage. This site appears readily deliverable and could enable delivery of a northern link road necessary to unlock the later phases of the Grove Airfield site. This link road is a local rather than strategic priority, expected to be funded by development. The site would also need the WELR to be provided. It would not directly help deliver it although it would be expected to financially contribute.
44. The site is visually less prominent and less harmful to landscape character than either of the other Wantage alternatives, and is well placed for local services in Grove. It includes areas of Letcombe Brook flood plain and suffers from some standing surface water but these disadvantages appear capable of mitigation. The site is large enough to include a primary school, which is likely to be necessary to accommodate needs arising from the development. It could also include additional employment land adjacent to the existing Williams F1 site, offering potential local economic and employment benefits; although there is some reserve employment land available elsewhere in Wantage-Grove.
45. **Land west of Wantage** (Stockham's Farm) is also not big enough alone to be an alternative to Crab Hill and would also need the WELR to be provided, and again it would not directly help deliver it although it would financially contribute. On the plus side it could help to deliver a relief road heading west, although that is not a strategic priority and there is no other known funding source if it cannot be fully funded from the development (which appears very unlikely). Development on this site could also help restore part of the former Wiltshire and Berkshire canal, and is closest of the local alternatives to facilities in Wantage.

Subsection conclusions on preferred option and alternative sites

46. The internal review process supports a conclusion that the original 2009/10 preferred option sites at Valley Park west of Didcot, land south of Park Road in Faringdon, land at Crab Hill NE Wantage and at the north of Harwell Oxford campus should be retained as strategic housing sites.

47. Of the alternative sites considered and previously not preferred, the strongest candidate for an additional strategic housing allocation is considered to be the land north of Grove including Monk's Farm,.

Smaller sites and windfalls

48. At 2009/10 preferred options stage it was assumed that smaller sites (<200 homes) would contribute around 1,400 homes to total housing supply, based on two sources
- suitable and available sites with housing potential for ten or more homes in the main settlements and larger villages, as identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA, December 2009)
 - a trend contribution from windfalls relied upon in the last five years of the core strategy period (in compliance with government guidance).
49. Officers consider it is reasonable to continue to rely on smaller sites for around 20% of the housing supply still to plan for, based on the SHLAA and further work on possible housing sites it identifies in and around the larger villages. Not least to provide diversity of supply including village opportunities alongside a small number of large, strategic urban extensions.
50. As a guideline on location, capacity for around 600 homes was identified in the main settlements at 2009 Preferred Options stage, a figure still considered reasonable. Officers consider the villages are able to accommodate the remaining 800 homes, especially as there is likely to be moderate additional capacity in the smaller villages that was not identified through the SHLAA process.
51. However there is no prospect of successfully defending a housing supply strategy that relies on windfalls when, as is the case in the Vale, it is clear that there are sufficient, suitable sites that could be allocated for housing. This element of capacity can and should be allocated through the *Managing Development* Development Plan Document (MD DPD).
52. A further consideration is that the proposed draft *Interim Housing Supply Policy* aims to bring forward suitable, small-to-medium sized housing sites some of which might in due course have been allocated in the Managing Development DPD. Over time these should filter through as planning permissions and completions that contribute towards the overall housing requirement, reducing the number of homes it will be necessary to plan for later. Given uncertainties on precisely when potential IHSP sites might come forward, any changes arising to the total housing requirement can be made by consequential adjustments to the 1,400 home total we currently suggest for the Managing Development DPD. Adjustments should be reductions, subject to the five year housing land supply position when the Managing Development DPD is being finalised.
53. On this basis future supply from unallocated sites (especially windfall sites of less than ten homes not identified in the SHLAA) would provide a useful element of housing supply contingency, some of which the IHSP may again bring forward.

Further housing supply options and the Councillor workshop

54. As shown at Table 1 above, 450 extra homes need to be planned for to carry the core strategy forward to 2028/9 compared to the 2009/10 preferred options stage; the core strategy is required to plan 15 years ahead for housing. Thus additional housing site(s) or sources of supply have to be found. Through the internal review process three supply options were developed for consideration at the 9 January 2012 councillor workshop, as below, noting that in practice many permutations are possible. The workshop was independently facilitated and reported. A discussion summary is provided at Annex C, and the full independent report will be published on the council website.

55. Discussion during the internal review recognised the concerns about whether Crab Hill at Wantage was the right choice for a site allocation, and if so whether 1,500 homes was an appropriate number. The councillor workshop also explored views on this.

Workshop Option 1

56. To add **another main settlement urban extension** selecting from the alternative sites identified at 2009 preferred options stage. As discussed in paragraphs 29-48, land north of Grove is the strongest of the remaining candidates. If this approach was favoured then a concentrated, urban-centric housing distribution would result, with each of Didcot, Faringdon and Wantage/Grove accommodating between two and four major strategic housing sites, including those in progress and/or allocated in the Vale Local Plan 2011. This has potential benefits in terms of infrastructure provision and access to services for new residents, but there tend to be limits on how many homes can be sold each year in a given local market and therefore there are risks to the overall timely supply of housing. It also has little to offer in terms of supporting or enhancing services and opportunities in rural areas.

Workshop Option 2

57. **To allocate strategic housing sites for 450 homes in the larger villages**, with first consideration for options in Kingston Bagpuize, Shrivenham and Watchfield. Based on a desktop appraisal, including the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and a survey of facilities and services, these three of the district's larger villages appear to offer the strongest prospects for accommodating around 150-300 homes each, but further work including consultation with parish councils is required before any specific sites could be proposed for inclusion in the next draft core strategy, for public consultation.

58. As a housing package, combined with Harwell campus and the main settlement urban extensions, this option offers a more diversified site and location portfolio and thus potentially better delivery prospects, and a better balance of urban-rural and east-west economic and social benefits. It also best reflects the proposed spatial strategy of 'building on our strengths'.

Workshop option 3

59. To defer provision of the extra 450 homes to **smaller sites to be allocated after the core strategy** in the later Managing Development DPD. This is likely to require more small sites in smaller villages. In workshop discussion it was generally accepted that smaller villages could reasonably take a small amount

of housing, but a number of councillors expressed misgivings about going further than this. This approach also has disadvantages in terms of planning and delivering supporting infrastructure and demonstrating housing supply deliverability at core strategy examination stage (because the site locations are unspecified).

Grove and Wantage revisited

60. The workshop also explored the case for a deeper change in Wantage, by reducing the allocation at Crab Hill to around 1,100 homes. This would then require finding 850 rather than 450 homes via options 1-3, above. This approach may increase risks to the timely provision of the Wantage Eastern Link Road, a strategic requirement regardless of which housing sites are allocated. There is insufficient information to quantify this risk, but it could be reduced if a reduction at Crab Hill is re-provided for elsewhere in Wantage or Grove e.g. north of Grove.

Conclusions from Councillor Workshop debate

61. The facilitator's headline summary of workshop proceedings is attached at Annex C. It states as follows:

"Whilst there will always be differences on such issues and across a wide group, the most generally held view emerging from the discussion was that more development could take place at the larger villages as a relatively sustainable and deliverable approach, little but still some development should occur in smaller villages, but the greater part of the unaccounted for development [i.e. 6,300 homes to plan for] should be accommodated at the larger settlements.

Whilst there is clearly some opposition to the Wantage and Grove development [i.e. Crab Hill site], no realistic alternative for this scale of development emerged and gained wide support."

Housing supply conclusions and recommendations

62. See report summary paragraphs 5-10, above.

Next Steps

63. Indicative dates for the next stages of the core strategy process are tabled below. The extent of additional work still required depends on the housing supply option preferred, but the earliest realistic date for the next stage of public consultation is September 2012. The 'pessimistic' path factors in the risk that further work may be required both before submission and after examination to respectively address issues arising from public consultation or the examining inspector's recommendations.

	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
	2012											2013											2014											
Core Strategy - optimistic path																																		
Internal review																																		
Pre production																																		
Further options consultation (Reg 25 v3)																																		
Submission draft (Reg 27) consultation																																		
Submit to Secretary of State																																		
Pre examination meeting																																		
Examination sessions																																		
Inspector's report published																																		
Adoption																																		
Core Strategy - pessimistic path																																		
Internal review																																		
Pre production																																		
Further options consultation (Reg 25 v3)																																		
Submission draft (Reg 27) consultation																																		
Submit to Secretary of State																																		
Pre examination meeting																																		
Examination sessions																																		
Inspector's report published																																		
Possible changes /reconsultation																																		
Adoption																																		

64. The onward timetable will need to be published by an update of the Local Development Scheme, which is the project plan for preparation of the local development framework including the core strategy. We recommend that cabinet delegate approval of the refreshed Local Development Scheme to the Head of Planning in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Planning.

Financial implications

65. Significant costs will be incurred in researching, publishing, consulting upon and especially independently examining the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy internal review has delayed progress and has used some of the significant sum budgeted for in 2011/12. These costs will now fall in 2012/13 and early 2013/14.

Legal implications

66. Production of a Local Development Framework, of which the Core Strategy is the principal document, is a legal requirement for local planning authorities under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Risk management

67. Some of the options include sites that are 'new' to the core strategy process thus with a lesser level of prior investigation and background evidence than exists for the preferred and alternative option sites considered in 2009/10.

They appear suitable and deliverable on the evidence to hand, but it is possible that deeper assessment may identify problems and possibly rule them out at a later date, with potential process delays. To mitigate this risk we have identified potential for more homes than we need to allocate.

Annex A: Updated draft sustainability objectives and appraisal framework

SA Objective	Appraisal factors
1	
Provide sufficient suitable homes including affordable homes.	<p>Provide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enough homes • of appropriate types • in appropriate locations • at the appropriate times <p>Provide enough affordable homes</p>
2	
Ensure the availability of high quality services and facilities in the Vale's towns and rural areas.	<p>Provide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriate facilities and services • in appropriate locations • at the appropriate times <p>These should be well designed, inclusive & should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • health • education • recreation and sport • community and leisure, and • other essential services
3	
Reduce the need to travel and improve provisions for walking, cycling and public transport and reduce road congestion	<p>Reduce the need to travel through more sustainable patterns of land use and development</p> <p>Encourage modal shift to more sustainable forms of travel</p> <p>Enable key transport infrastructure improvements</p>
4	
Improve the health and well being of Vale residents	<p>Provide and enhance the provision of community access to green infrastructure, in accordance with national standards</p> <p>Reduce opportunities for crime and anti-social activities, and reduce fear of crime</p>
5	
Reduce inequality, poverty and social exclusion in the Vale, and raise educational achievement and skills levels.	<p>Promote regeneration of deprived areas</p> <p>Enhance community identity and local engagement</p> <p>Improve opportunities and facilities for all types of learning</p> <p>Encourage an available and skilled workforce which</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meets the needs of existing and future employers • reduces skills inequalities • helps address skills shortages

SA Objective	Appraisal factors
<p>6</p> <p>Support a strong and sustainable economy within the Vale's towns and rural areas.</p>	<p>Promote economic growth and a diverse and resilient economy</p> <p>Provide opportunities for all employers to access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • different types and sizes of accommodation • flexible employment space • high quality communications and infrastructure <p>Build on the knowledge-based and high tech economy in the Central Oxfordshire and Science Vale UK area, including the Science Vale UK Enterprise Zone</p> <p>Promote and support a strong network of towns and villages and the rural economy</p>
<p>7</p> <p>Improve and protect the natural environment including biodiversity, water and soil quality</p>	<p>Protect and enhance natural habitats, wildlife, biodiversity and geodiversity</p> <p>Protect the integrity of European sites and other designated nature conservation sites</p> <p>Encourage the creation of new habitats and features for wildlife</p> <p>Prevent isolation/fragmentation and re-connect / de-fragment habitats</p> <p>Enhance water quality and help to meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive</p> <p>Protect groundwater resources</p> <p>Minimise and reduce the potential for exposure of people to ground pollution</p>
<p>8</p> <p>Protect the cultural heritage and provide a high quality townscape and landscape.</p>	<p>Protect and enhance archaeology and heritage assets, and areas of sensitive landscape including AONB and Green Belt.</p> <p>Improve access to, and enjoyment, understanding and use of cultural assets where this will not cause harm</p>
<p>9</p> <p>Reduce air, noise and light pollution</p>	<p>Minimise and reduce the potential for exposure of people to noise, air and light pollution</p>

SA Objective	Appraisal factors
<p>10</p> <p>Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the use of resources and improve resource efficiency</p>	<p>Reduce greenhouse gas emissions</p> <p>Re-use existing buildings</p> <p>Promote development on previously developed land and minimise land use</p> <p>Encourage sustainable, low carbon building practices and design</p> <p>Reduce energy use</p> <p>Promote renewable energy generation</p> <p>Reduce water use</p> <p>Provide adequate infrastructure to ensure the sustainable supply of water and disposal of sewerage</p> <p>Maximise opportunities for recycling and minimising waste</p>
<p>11</p> <p>Increase resilience to climate change and flooding</p>	<p>Minimise and reduce flood risk to people and property</p> <p>Respond to the likelihood of future warmer summers, wetter winters, and more extreme weather events</p> <p>Minimise development on high quality agricultural land</p> <p>Provide for local needs locally</p>

Annex B: Re-expression of the spatial strategy

A spatial strategy of **building on our strengths** would look to

- Promote, in partnership, central Oxfordshire as a world-class location for science and technology-based enterprise and innovation primarily through the redevelopment and intensification for business purposes of land in the Science Vale UK area, especially Enterprise Zone sites at Milton Park and Harwell Oxford campus, and at the Didcot power station site in the medium to longer term.
- Reinforce the Vale's network of market towns and the main settlements of Abingdon, Botley, Wantage & Grove, Faringdon and Didcot by
 - Identifying sites within and on the edges of these settlements to accommodate about **TBC** of 6,300 homes required, of which around **TBC%** will be within the SVUK area.
 - Concentrating larger shopping, tourism and community facilities in the main settlements to improve their vitality and ensure facilities are widely accessible including by alternatives to the private car
 - Encouraging and identifying suitable locations for small to medium scale business development to provide additional local employment opportunities
- Promote thriving villages and rural communities whilst safeguarding the countryside, village character and overall quality of life by enabling and encouraging
 - Proportionate housing, service, community and business development in villages. This will include allocating development sites within and where appropriate on the edges of villages, including strategic housing sites for a combined total of **TBC** homes in the larger villages of **TBC**
 - Appropriately scaled rural enterprise that meets local rural business needs including farming, forestry and equestrian centres, or that enables informal countryside recreation and rural tourism.

Annex C: Brief notes from the Vale of White Horse Core Strategy Members Workshop

- C1. All of the Council members were invited to an evening workshop held on 9 January on some of the critical issues that will have to be decided to take the Core Strategy forward. About 30 members took part. The event was designed by officers from the planning policy team, involved Levett-Therivel Sustainability Consultants on sustainability issues and in the management of one of the group working exercise, and Councillor Claire Denham of Crawley Borough Council. The event was facilitated by John Baker of planning consultants Baker Associates as an independent party acting on behalf of the Planning Advisory Service in its role of supporting local authorities succeed with plans.
- C2. The event took the form of presentations from the planning policy team on the position reached on the Core Strategy, from Councillor Denham on the benefits as she saw them of making a plan even when this means facing difficult decisions, and from Levett-Therivel Sustainability Consultants on sustainability issues, together with two sessions where participants tackled specific exercises in small groups. These were themed around how the statutory requirement to undertake a sustainability appraisal can be used to assist in making and explaining the choices between options, and how the plan can be demonstrably deliverable as it is required to be through the appropriate use of different sources of housing supply.
- C3. The event addressed the recognition that according to the level of housing provision to be made through the plan, the way in which about 450 dwellings will be provided has still to be identified when the completed, committed and identified provision has all been taken into account. Three broad options were presented as ways in which this could be done
- By adding to the development proposed for the main settlements
 - By adding to the development proposed for the larger villages
 - For more development to take place in the smaller villages.
- C4. Further discussion took place on the desirability of progressing the proposal for about 1,500 dwellings at Crab Hill in Wantage and Grove, and the alternative ways of providing this number of dwellings if this development didn't happen.
- C5. Whilst there will always be differences on such issues and across a wide group, the most generally held view emerging from the discussion was that more development could take place at the larger villages as a relatively sustainable and deliverable approach, little but still some development should occur in smaller villages, but the greater part of the unaccounted for development should be accommodated at the larger settlements.
- C6. Whilst there is clearly some opposition to the Wantage and Grove development, no realistic alternative for this scale of development emerged and gained wide support.

- C7. Though these broad outputs are clearly useful in taking the plan forward, there were other evident benefits from the event taking place, including
- More members have a greater familiarity with the issues to be addressed in making the plan, and the implications of the various options (as well as the implications of not making the critical decisions)
 - The comparison of alternatives was seen to be a good way to tackle the decisions to be made, with the use of sustainability objectives helpful in providing a structure for assessing those alternatives
 - The need for the plan to be supported by clear evidence and justification was appreciated
 - There is a need to be clear on the way that employment and housing are related.
- C8. The event seemed to be appreciated and indeed enjoyed. One Councillor went as far as to say that such events 'help to take the politics out of planning'. Though this cannot be entirely the case, common recognition of the value of having a plan, what has to be done in order to have a sound plan, and where the balance of political aspiration and hard evidence lies, will all help the Council in succeeding with its task.

**John Baker 19 January 2010
Baker Associates**