

Petition in respect of:

“The adoption of the IHSP by the Vale of the White Horse District Council”.

We the undersigned wish to make clear representation to the Vale of the White Horse District Council to strongly reject the proposal to adopt the IHSP. We believe the process has been totally ill conceived and all stake holders have not had a proper opportunity to present objections via the accepted channels. The rushing through of this policy could be a serious error of judgement by those elected to look after our interests. We urge you to cast aside your political bias and vote for what is the right policy for the future development of housing within the Vale.

The use of the concept of proportionality is seriously flawed. The stated intention is to preserve the population of settlements by building new houses to meet the projected demographic changes over the next 15 years, and this would avoid putting undue pressure on the infrastructure since the actual population would remain essentially the same. However, if the new houses are all built in the first two years of that period then there will be considerable pressure on the infrastructure at that point in time, and the population will have increased, probably permanently.

In the majority of villages the number of new homes built under the existing rules over the last 10 years has more or less kept pace with these demographic changes, and there is no reason to suppose that that will not continue to be the case over the next 15 years. However, this front loading would produce a permanent increase in the population of villages. The schools in the county are already struggling to meet the demand, and this policy would almost certainly result in some children in the villages being sent to Schools out of the local area with all the damage which that would cause to community life and the well-being of those children, as well as adding to Oxfordshire’s existing traffic problems.

The policy in its present form gives few criteria by which new sites will be judged, and seems to be on a first come, first served basis for each village. This is very unlikely to select the most suitable sites across the District, and more likely to end up choosing those sites which have the most active owner/developer combination.

The relaxation of Policy GS2 (development in the countryside) is highly undesirable. The danger of doing so is that villages will lose their essential character and identity. There will be a risk of ribbon development and even blurring the separation between villages and their adjacent towns. Once such a process has started, it will be very difficult to stop, or even to control.

The present shortage of new housing in the Vale is more a function of the difficulty that low to middle income buyers have in getting a mortgage. As a result, developers find it difficult to sell new houses at that end of the market, so move more slowly in building them. This proposed policy would be likely to lead to developments which have a large number of ‘executive’ houses – which developers know they can sell, particularly in villages. However, this will not solve the mortgage shortage, and developers may well slow down even further on the large projects.

The process of identifying suitable sites for development is seriously affecting house prices adjacent to these IHSP identified sites and creating a housing blight through uncertainty. It should be a very urgent priority of the Vale to reject this policy and by doing so prevent the damage being inflicted on innocent bystanders to this process.

As a general rule we would expect due consideration to the number of houses built over recent years as in the proposed IHSP areas many villages have already had housing developments including social and low cost that have met the local housing requirement. These developments have been phased and have not put undue pressure on the existing infrastructure.

The undersigned propose that:

- 1) The table on page 9 and in Annex F should be deleted from the policy since the rationale behind their use is seriously flawed;
- 2) The policy if accepted should identify proper criteria for choosing which sites within villages are suitable. There should be a strong emphasis on the requirement for sufficient infrastructure and a presumption in favour of the views of the relevant local councils;
- 3) Policy GS2 should be maintained in its present form.

With consideration of all the aforementioned points we urge the rejection of the IHSP policy / Statement forthwith.