

APPLICATION NO.	P14/V2873/O
APPLICATION TYPE	OUTLINE
REGISTERED	20.1.2015
PARISH	HARWELL & MILTON
WARD MEMBER(S)	Janet Shelley Reg Waite Stuart Davenport
APPLICANT	Hallam Land Management Ltd
SITE	Land to the West of Great Western Park (Valley Park), Didcot (in the parishes of Harwell and Milton)
PROPOSAL	Outline planning application for a residential development of up to 4,254 dwellings, mixed-use local centres, primary schools, sports pitches, community and leisure facilities, special needs school, open space and extensive green infrastructure, hard and soft landscaping, attenuation areas, diversions to public rights of way, pedestrian and vehicular access and associated works.(as amended by drawings and information accompanying letter from Agent dated 10 March 2016)
AMENDMENTS	Two amendments and re-consultations carried out on 29/09/2015 and 10/03/2016
GRID REFERENCE	449973/190341
OFFICER	Holly Bates

SUMMARY

- The application seeks outline planning permission for the erection of up to 4,254 dwellings and associated facilities and infrastructure including new highway works, primary schools, local centres, leisure centre and open space.
- Only the principle of housing on this site and means of access are to be considered as part of this application with all other matters (appearance, landscaping, layout and scale) being reserved matters for future consideration should outline permission be granted.
- The main issues are:
 - Whether the principle of development is acceptable;
 - Whether the site is a suitable location for new housing that can contribute to the five-year housing supply shortfall;
 - Landscape and visual impacts;
 - The suitability of the proposed accesses and whether the proposal will impact unreasonably on the highway network, highway safety or traffic flows;
 - Implications for flood risk, foul and surface water drainage;
 - Implications for ecology;
 - Infrastructure improvements through s106 contributions and compliance with CIL regulations.
- This report seeks to assess the planning application details against the development plan, national and local planning policy framework where relevant

and all other material planning considerations.

- Overall the proposal is considered to be sustainable development meeting the three roles (economic, social and environmental) referenced in the NPPF. The limited identified harm this proposal would cause is not considered to be so adverse as to significantly or demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal.
- The application is therefore recommended for approval subject to conditions and the signing of a s106 legal agreement to secure affordable housing and contributions.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The application site, approximately 178 hectares in size, is located to the western edge of the Garden town of Didcot, but lies within the parishes of Harwell and Milton within the Vale of White Horse District. The site consists of agricultural fields dissected by hedgerows, ditches and areas of trees.

1.2 The A34 runs along the western edge of the site, while the Great Western Park development abuts the site to the east. The A4130 lies to the north of the site, with the large business centre Milton Park beyond. Open fields lie to the south, and Harwell village is positioned to the south-west of the site, beyond the A34. The site is dissected towards the southern end by the B4493 which connects Harwell and Didcot.

1.3 Two bridleways traverse the site: Cow Lane which runs north-south through the site and The Driftway which is located alongside the A34, and traverses the southern section of the site. A footpath also passes through the western part of the site (Harwell public footpath 03) and this would be diverted as part of the application proposals.

1.4 The application site is not located within a designated landscape area, however the boundary to the North Wessex Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is located to the south of the site. The Lowland Vale local landscape designation applies to the site.

1.5 The site is not located within a conservation area and contains no listed buildings. Part of the northern edge of the site alongside the A4130 is located within Flood Zones 2 and 3.

1.6 The site location plan is **attached** at Appendix 1.

2.0 PROPOSAL

2.1 The application seeks outline planning permission for the erection of up to 4,254 dwellings on the site along with various associated infrastructure and facilities including:

- Two primary schools;
- Land for a special education needs school;
- Mixed used local centres including small scale retail;
- A leisure hub including new leisure/community building and sports pitches;
- Public open space and play facilities;
- Green infrastructure;
- Pedestrian and vehicle accesses;
- Attenuation ponds;
- Diversions to an existing public right of way;

- Ecological and biodiversity enhancements.

- 2.2 The application is made in outline form with all matters other than access are reserved. Therefore, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale are all matters to be assessed under any subsequent reserved matters or detailed applications. All matters, including access, are however reserved for the linear strip of land running parallel with the A34 that could accommodate the southern stretch of the Harwell Strategic Link Road, to be delivered by Oxfordshire County Council.
- 2.3 The average density across the site would be approximately 40 dwellings per hectare. 35% of the dwellings would be affordable, in line with the council's emerging local plan.
- 2.4 The main vehicular access points would be from the A4130 to the north which would be designed with a double roundabout arrangement to facilitate delivery of the Science Bridge across the A4130, and via a new five arm roundabout along the B4493 towards the south which would also facilitate connection to the Harwell Strategic Link Road. The other more minor access point proposed is a T-junction onto the A4130 at the northwest side of the site.
- 2.5 A main spine road would traverse the site from north to south, and a network of internal highway routes would provide pedestrian, cycle and vehicular connections through the site and to the Great Western Park development to the east.
- 2.6 Over 15% of the site would be dedicated to public open space including formal playing pitch provision, informal open space, play areas, incidental space and allotments.
- 2.7 The proposed development, although made in outline, seeks to set parameters for development to ensure that the density, buildings heights and land uses are appropriate for its location and will not adversely affect the visual amenity of the area or any adjacent buildings.
- 2.8 A full suite of surveys and assessments have been undertaken to support the application, including the submission of an illustrative masterplan. All plans and supporting technical documents accompanying the application are available to view online at www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk Extracts from the application drawings are **attached** at Appendix 2. The plans have been amended twice to take account of consultation comments.

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

- 3.1 Below is a summary of the responses received to both the original plans and the amendments. A full copy of all the comments made can be viewed online at www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk.

3.2

Consultee	Comments
<p>Harwell Parish Council</p>	<p>Object for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalescence of Didcot and Harwell- a green wedge should be provided on both sides of the B4493; • Design of five arm roundabout is poor and unfriendly for pedestrians, cyclists and horses (issues raised by safety audit do not appear to have been addressed); • Access, movement and lack of permeability with

	<p>GWP and Didcot;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycle connections do not appear to have been allowed for; • Traffic modelling does not include A417, Reading Road, or Hagbourne Hill Road; • Application is silent about treatment of footpath connecting GWP to Cow Lane; • Noise levels and pollution levels have not been independent verified; • Public transport needs to be integrated more widely than just the site; • Net density of 40dph is much greater than local plan guidelines; 30pdh would be a better compromise; • 4 storey buildings are not suitable for the development in this rural setting; • Parking must be provided throughout the development; • Leisure routes for pedestrians/cyclists are not compatible with being used as a noise screen; • Lack of consideration for archaeological sites; • Lack of clarity on what community facilities and centres are being provided; • Position of LEAPs are right next to roads; • Allotments are posited within the POS and in unsuitable positions, no indication of access or parking; • No land is reserved for the expansion of the A34; • Consideration must be given to appropriate medical, nursery and pre-school facilities and accommodation for the elderly; • Errors within the design and access statement; • Errors within the SEI; • Requested conditions; and • Requested S106 contributions including community and sports facilities, cemetery provision, faith provision and a number of highway improvements including a footbridge over the A34.
<p>Milton Parish Council</p>	<p>Object for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor traffic management plans; • Coalescence with the neighbouring villages; • Lack of burial space and sites for worship; • Lack of school places until the schools are complete; • Lack of planning for renewable energy.
<p>Didcot Town Council (South Oxfordshire)</p>	<p>Object for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would overwhelm Didcot's services and facilities; • Prematurity; • Too high density to centre of site; • Such tall buildings would be out of character to the semirural setting; • Impact on Harwell village and GWP residents; • Shortfall in public open space and pitches;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on GWP secondary school; • No integration with GWP, Didcot or Milton Park; • Poor highway and cycle links; • Noise impacts; • Lack of identity; • Lack of suitable sewerage infrastructure; • Unlikely rate of construction; • Impact on ecology; • Visual impact from AONB; • Flood risk and SUDS; • Building standards; • Community effects.
<p>East Hendred Parish Council (adjacent parish)</p>	<p>Object for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of dwellings is too high; • Lack of appropriate infrastructure; • Access to employment sites is limited; • A34 has limited capacity; • Road infrastructure unlikely to cope; • None of the junction layouts are compatible with cycle routes.
<p>West Hagbourne Parish Council (South Oxfordshire)</p>	<p>Object for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent of the development extended beyond Great Western Park which appears unjustified and would affect the rural character of this part of South Oxfordshire; • Position of playing fields, associated buildings and allotments is not supported.
<p>Oxfordshire County Council One Voice</p>	<p>Overall – no objections subject to contributions and conditions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways – No objections, subject to conditions and contributions. Summary: Having considered the revised Transport Assessment for this development proposal, and subject to an appropriate agreement on contributions towards the identified strategic transport schemes required before 2031 (Science Bridge, A4130 widening and Harwell Link Road) and a commitment to undertake the identified further schemes (at Milton Interchange, Collett and Rowstock roundabouts), it is no longer considered that an objection can be sustained on strategic transport grounds. • Archaeology – No objections, subject to conditions. Summary: The applicant has undertaken the required pre-determination archaeological evaluation. A condition should be imposed requiring a staged programme of archaeological investigation and recording in advance of development.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecology – No objections, subject to conditions. Summary: As a result of the amendments allowing more land for the Science Bridge, and subject to an appropriate agreement on contributions towards biodiversity offsetting, the County Council also no longer objects on ecology grounds. • Education – No objections, subject to contributions. Summary: The location of the three school sites as set out on the Parameter Plan (including the revised location of the SEN school) is generally acceptable. Additional information will be required at Reserved Matters to ensure that these sites meet the County Council’s requirements, for example in relation to noise, the provision of safe access points, and the location of drop off parking. • Property – No objections, subject to conditions and contributions. Summary: Provision of 60-80 Extra Care housing apartments has been sought on previous comments. A condition for 70 Extra Care housing apartments is appropriate. It is recognised that these are not shown on the illustrative masterplan but there is sufficient flexibility on this large site to provide them. Contributions towards library and adult day care facilities. • Fire Service – No objections. Recommendations regarding access, water supplies and automatic water suppression systems. • Economy and skills – No objection, subject to condition requiring a community employment plan.
Highways England	No objections raised, subject to conditions.
Planning Policy Team – Vale	No objections.
Urban Design – IBI Group consultants	No objections raised, subject to conditions.
Landscape Officer Vale	No overall landscape objection, subject to detailed considerations for reserved matters/detailed application stage.
AONB Board	Holding objection raised to original submission requesting additional information be submitted to review the landscape impact. The additional information has been submitted but to date no updated response has been received.
Countryside Officer Vale	No objections raised, subject to conditions. Minor negative impacts on the way the local bat population

Vale of White Horse District Council – Planning Committee - 20 April 2016

	use the stream corridor, to be weighed in planning balance. Contribution for biodiversity off-setting required.
Natural England	Comments regarding viewpoints from the AONB, soil and land quality, green infrastructure, SUDs and water management, biodiversity enhancements, local wildlife sites and protected species.
Environmental Health – Air Quality	No objections raised, subject to conditions.
Environmental Health – Noise	No objections raised, subject to conditions.
Environmental Health – Contaminated Land	No objections raised, subject to conditions.
Environment Agency	No objections raised, subject to conditions.
Drainage Engineer Vale	No objections raised, subject to conditions.
Thames Water	No objections raised, subject to conditions.
Waste Management Officer Vale	No objections raised; contribution required. Comments provided for any subsequent reserved matters or detailed applications.
Police Funding Officer	Contributions requested.
Crime Prevention Design Officer	No objections, comments supplied regarding detailed elements for consideration.
Equalities Officer Vale	No objections raised; comments regarding detailed design for any subsequent reserved matters or detailed applications.
Housing Team Vale	No objections. Following discussions and negotiations, 35% affordable housing is acceptable on this site. Tenure split: 75% rented accommodation and 25% shared ownership.
Leisure Team Vale - Nortoft consultants	Amended plans address previous concerns raised; contributions requested.
Sport England	No objections subject to conditions.
Young People’s Co-ordinator Vale	Comments provided on detailed aspects of design of facilities for young people; contribution requested for youth worker and youth facilities.
Public Art Officer Vale	No objections, subject to contribution.
NHS England	Request for financial contributions towards GWP or a site and financial contributions towards providing additional capacity on-site. No further responses received.

<p>National Planning Casework Unit</p>	<p>No comments.</p>
<p>Local Residents Representations – Objections</p>	<p>A total of 122 objections or comments raising concerns have been lodged to the application by local residents (including from Harwell, Milton, Didcot, West Hagbourne, Upton, Rowstock, Chilton, Sutton Courtenay, East Hendred, Steventon, Abingdon, Wantage, Carterton, Bishopston and Oxford);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 52 were received to the original consultation in December 2014 • 10 were received to the second consultation in September 2015 • 60 have been received to the third consultation in March 2016 <p>These objections and concerns are summarised as follows:</p> <p>Landscape and site</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalescence of Harwell and Didcot; • Insufficient green buffer left between the two settlements; • Not compliant with local plan policies NE9 and NE10; • Adverse impact on the AONB; • Not compliant with Garden Town status; • Harmful impact on the identity and character of the village of Harwell; • Harmful impact on the heritage of Harwell - conservation area and listed buildings; • Impact on undesignated heritage assets; • Harmful impact on the village identity of Milton; • Harmful impact on the village identity of West Hagbourne; • The area is semi-rural and should not contain such a large, dense development. <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient infrastructure being provided on site; • Existing infrastructure is at capacity within Didcot and surrounding area; • New medical and dentist facilities are required; • New school and nursery facilities are required; • Cemetery provision should be made; • Faith provision should be made; • Public service and utility companies unable to provide adequate infrastructure; • Location of the allotments is not suitable; • Does not comply with local plan policy DC8; • Insufficient leisure facilities;

- Infrastructure should be built first before houses.

Highways and traffic

- Unacceptable level of additional traffic;
- Roads are at capacity and cannot cope with additional traffic;
- Existing roads in a poor condition;
- Streetlights and crash barriers are needed on A4130;
- Harwell Link Road must remain strategic and not just serve the development;
- Increase traffic through West Hagbourne;
- The TA is insufficient in detail and is not comprehensive enough;
- A low car or car free development should be promoted;
- Proposed five arm roundabout does not cater for cyclists, pedestrians or horses;
- Another access point to the A4130 is needed and a better junction/slip road to the A34;
- Consideration should be given to parking;
- Further traffic modelling is required.

Development

- The increase in houses over the local plan is unjustified and unnecessary;
- Too many houses for the site;
- Cumulative impact should be assessed;
- The density is too high for the rural location;
- The density is too low and does not make efficient use of the land;
- Overdevelopment;
- The application is premature as the local plan process is not complete;
- Application contravenes planning policy;
- Insufficient green infrastructure and open space would be provided;
- Loss of agricultural land;
- Unsustainable development does not meet definition of sustainability;
- Location of southern section is not sustainable;
- Insufficient information provided on delivery within the plan period;
- Housing product will not deliver an alternative to Great Western Park (GWP); will not be tailored to meet specific needs of existing or future employees within the innovation campus environment;
- 4 storey buildings are not acceptable for the rural setting;
- Piecemeal planning;
- Masterplan is not detailed enough;
- Unknown how it will harmonise with GWP.

	<p>Environmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would increase flood risk; • Flood risk assessment is not comprehensive; • Lack of suitable sewerage infrastructure; • Would create a poor environment for residents so close to the A34; • Harmful impact on ecology and wildlife on the site; • Hedgerows should be retained and protected; • Quality of life reduced for neighbouring existing residents and new residents; • Noise impacts; • Air pollution impacts. <p>Connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No consideration has been given to cyclists in relation to routes or junctions; • Development would be unsafe for cyclists and would not promote cycling; • Insufficient footpaths and pedestrian links; • Insufficient links through to GWP and Didcot; • Insufficient links through to Harwell. <p>Application</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unusual and undefined terms are used in the application documents; • Lack of consultation and time to consult.
<p>Harwell Campus Bicycle Users Group (HarBug)</p>	<p>Object on the basis that the proposed road junctions have not been designed for use by cyclists. These designs and layouts would not encourage cycling and would dis-incentivise those who do currently cycle. Should reach the standard required of a premium cycle route.</p>
<p>Keep Harwell Rural Campaign</p>	<p>Object for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prematurity; • No rural gap between the development and Harwell; • The boundary to Harwell has not been treated with care and a green corridor should be provided; • Impact on traffic and highways infrastructure; • High number of houses and high density for urban fringe/rural area.
<p>Oxfordshire Cycling Network</p>	<p>Object because of a lack of connections between Valley Park, Didcot and Harwell. Route should be based on appropriate standards including coherent direct safe comfortable and attractive routes. The Science Bridge also needs to be designed with cyclists in mind.</p>
<p>Oxford Bus Company/Thames Travel</p>	<p>Object to the original plan as the spine road does not meet aspirations for bus rapid transit linking Harwell Campus with Didcot through the Valley Park site.</p>

<p>County Councillor Nick Hards (Didcot West)</p>	<p>Summary comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Density should reduce towards the edge of a settlement; not increase;• Serious impacts on the road network;• Unsustainable due to number of homes proposed;• Didcot Hospital and Woodland Medical Centre are seriously overcrowded;• Flood risk – new hard surfaces will therefore increase the run-off even with SUDs; calculations should be independent verified;• Landmark buildings up to 15m high are totally inappropriate for edge of town location.
<p>County Councillor Stewart Lilly (Hendreds and Harwell)</p>	<p>Summary comments (from Feb 2015):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No justification for larger number of units;• Lack of adequate infrastructure such as medical facilities, education facilities, public transport, community worship,• Insufficient vehicle links to be provided;• What provision will be made for elderly persons?• No thought given to self-build enterprise;• Contributions required for fire and rescue service. Ambulance service and police law and order;• Adequate sport and leisure facilities are required;• Special attention must be given to car parking;• All services must be fit for purpose and upgraded locally as necessary;• Vets practice should be provided for the new pets;• Land should be made available for a new library;• 15% public open space is required;• All current proposals for traffic flow improvement should be completed prior to first occupation at Valley Park and suitable contributions are required. No points of access should be made from south of the B4493 to Harwell Bypass.

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 [P14/V2593/CM](#) - Approved (28/01/2015) (County consultation on the Harwell Link Road)

Development of a single carriageway road between the B4493 (Didcot Road) and the A417 (London Road), including new roundabout junctions with the B4493 and A417, diversion of The Driftway bridleway along the eastern edge of the new link road, provision of a Pegasus signalised crossing, combined footway/cycleway along the full length of the link road, surface water drainage balancing pond, site compound, street lighting, signage, landscaping and planting at Land between the B4493 Didcot Road and the A417 London Road, to the east of the A34.

[P02/V1594/O](#) - Approved (18/07/2008) (Great Western Park)

Mixed-use urban extension of 3300 new dwellings together with associated open space, leisure, community, local shops and services and drainage and utility infrastructure (site area split between SODC & VWHDC).

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 **Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan 2011**

The development plan for this area comprises the adopted Vale of White Horse local plan 2011. The following local plan policies relevant to this application were 'saved' by direction on 1 July 2009.

Policy No.	Policy Title
GS1	Developments in existing settlements
GS2	Development in the countryside
DC1	Design
DC3	Design against crime
DC4	Public art
DC5	Access
DC6	Landscaping
DC7	Waste collection and recycling
DC8	The provision of infrastructure and services
DC9	The impact of development on neighbouring uses
DC10	The effect of neighbouring or previous uses on new development
DC12	Water quality and resources
DC20	External lighting
TR3	A34 related development
H7	Major development west of Didcot
H11	Development in the larger villages
H15	Housing Densities
H16	Size of Dwelling and Lifetime Homes
H17	Affordable Housing
H23	Open Space in New Housing Development
HE1	Conservation Areas
HE4	Listed buildings
HE10	Archaeology
NE6	North Wessex Downs AONB
NE9	Lowland Vale
NE10	Urban fringes and countryside gaps
CF2	Provision of new community services and facilities
L8	Provision of small-scale local leisure facilities
L10	Safeguarding and improving public rights of way

5.2 **Emerging Local Plan 2031 – Part 1**

The draft local plan part 1 is not currently adopted policy. Paragraph 216 of the NPPF allows for weight to be given to relevant policies in emerging plans, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise, and only subject to the stage of preparation of the plan, the extent of unresolved objections and the degree of consistency of the relevant emerging policies with the NPPF. Whilst the plan has been through Examination the Inspector’s report has not been received and the objections to it remain unresolved. At present it is officers’ opinion that the emerging Local Plan housing policies carry limited weight for decision making. The relevant policies are as follows:-

Policy No.	Policy Title
Core Policy 1	Presumption in favour of sustainable development
Core Policy 2	Co-operation on unmet housing need for Oxfordshire
Core Policy 3	Settlement hierarchy
Core Policy 4	Meeting our housing needs
Core Policy 5	Housing supply ring-fence
Core Policy 7	Providing supporting infrastructure and services
Core Policy 15	Spatial strategy for South East Vale sub-area
Core Policy 17	Delivery of strategic highway improvements within the South-East Vale Sub-Area
Core Policy 18	Safeguarding of land for transport schemes in the South-East Vale Sub-Area
Core Policy 22	Housing mix
Core Policy 23	Housing density
Core Policy 24	Affordable housing
Core Policy 26	Accommodating current and future needs of the ageing population
Core Policy 33	Promoting sustainable transport and accessibility
Core Policy 34	A34 Strategy
Core Policy 35	Promoting public transport, cycling and walking
Core Policy 36	Electronic communications
Core Policy 37	Design and local distinctiveness
Core Policy 38	Design strategies for strategic and major development sites
Core Policy 39	The historic environment
Core Policy 42	Flood risk
Core Policy 43	Natural resources
Core Policy 44	Landscape
Core Policy 45	Green infrastructure
Core Policy 46	Conservation and improvement of biodiversity

5.3 **Supplementary Planning Guidance**

- Design Guide – March 2015

The following sections of the Design Guide are particularly relevant to this application:-

Responding to Site and Setting

- *Character Study (DG6) and Site appraisal (DG9)*

Establishing the Framework

- *Existing natural resources, sustainability and heritage(DG10-13, 15, 19)*
- *Landscape and SUDS (DG14, 16-18, 20)*
- *Movement Framework and street hierarchy (DG21-24)*
- *Density (DG26)*

- *Urban Structure (blocks, frontages, nodes etc) DG27-30*
Layout

- *Streets and Spaces (DG31-43)*
- *Parking (DG44-50)*

Built Form

- *Scale, form, massing and position (DG51-54)*
- *Boundary treatments (DG55)*
- *Building Design (DG56-62)*
- *Amenity, privacy and overlooking (DG63-64)*
- *Refuse and services (DG67-68)*

- 5.4
- Open space, sport and recreation future provision – July 2008
 - Sustainable Design and Construction – December 2009
 - Affordable Housing – July 2006
 - Flood Maps and Flood Risk – July 2006
 - Planning and Public Art – July 2006

5.5 **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – March 2012**

5.6 **National Planning Practice Guidance 2014 (NPPG)**

5.7 **Neighbourhood Plan**

Paragraph 216 of the NPPF allows for weight to be given to relevant policies in emerging plans, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise, and only subject to the stage of preparation of the plan, the extent of unresolved objections and the degree of consistency of the relevant emerging policies with the NPPF.

5.8 Harwell has not submitted a neighbourhood plan.

5.9 Milton has not submitted a neighbourhood plan.

5.10 **Environmental Impact**

This is EIA development and the application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement.

5.11 **Other Relevant Legislation**

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990
- Community & Infrastructure Levy Legislation Human Rights Act 1998
- Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010
- Localism Act (including New Homes Bonus)

5.12 **Human Rights Act**

The provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 have been taken into account in the processing of the application and the preparation of this report.

5.13 **Equalities**

In determining this planning application the Council has regard to its equalities obligations including its obligations under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The relevant planning considerations in the determination of this application are:

1. Principle of the development
2. EIA and cumulative impact
3. Use of land
4. Locational credentials
5. Affordable housing and housing mix
6. Design and layout
7. Traffic and highway safety
8. Landscape and visual impact
9. Open space
10. Flood risk and surface/foul drainage
11. Ecology and biodiversity
12. Residential amenity
13. Archaeology and historic environment
14. Environmental impacts
15. Viability and developer contributions

6.2 **1. The principle of development**

The background policy position

The starting point is Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which requires applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Section 70 (2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides that the local planning authority shall have regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations.

6.3 The development plan currently comprises the saved policies of Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011. Paragraph 215 of the NPPF provides that due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

6.4 Other material planning considerations include national planning guidance within the NPPF and NPPG and the emerging Vale of White Horse Local Plan: Part 1-Strategic Sites and Policies and its supporting evidence base.

6.5 ***The Emerging Vale of White Horse Local Plan and prematurity***

Under the emerging Vale of White Horse Local Plan it is proposed to allocate this application site for 2,550 dwellings. However, this outline planning application has proposed 4,254 dwellings. Consequently, there is the unusual issue of prematurity to consider as part of the considerations as to whether the principle of development is acceptable.

6.6 To aid officers in the consideration of prematurity Counsel opinion has been sought. Counsel have noted that the mere fact of a grant of planning permission might ultimately lead to more housing being provided than being promoted in an emerging Vale of White Horse Local Plan, would not amount to a sustainable objection to the grant of planning permission. The Government's policy as set out in the NPPF is that the supply of housing should be *significantly boosted* and so there is no policy objection to over-provision being made. In light of this, unsurprisingly, prematurity (prejudice) to the local plan process has not fared well since the introduction of the NPPF in appeal decisions.

6.7 The above is against the backdrop that the Council is not able to demonstrate a five year land supply and so its housing policies must be treated as out of date as

advised by Government policy (NPPF para.49). In those circumstances, paragraph 14 of the NPPF requires that planning permission is granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would *significantly* and *demonstrably* outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF as a whole or unless the development is specifically restricted by other NPPF policies. It is important to note that the NPPF itself, does not refer to prematurity, all it does is advise on the weight which may properly be afforded to emerging policies.

6.8 In terms of the emerging Local Plan 2031, whilst the plan has been through Examination, the Inspector's report has not been received and the objections to it remain unresolved. There are many objections to the policies of the Local Plan, including some (from Oxford City Council) arguing that the Duty to Cooperate has not been discharged.

6.9 Therefore, it is the opinion of officers that very little planning weight can be accorded to the issue of prematurity on the emerging Vale of White Horse Local Plan for the clear reasons set out above.

6.10 ***Principle of development***

Given the above assessment significant planning weight will be attached to the principles of the NPPF which to conclude notes (para.49) "*Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites*". This means that the relevant housing policies in the adopted Local Plan are not considered up to date and the adverse impacts of a development would need to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits if the proposal is refused. In order to judge whether a development is sustainable it must be assessed against the economic, social and environmental roles.

6.11 Consequently the proposal should be assessed under the NPPF where there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Sustainable development is seen as the golden thread running through the decision making process. Having a deliverable 5 year housing supply is considered sustainable under the 3 strands.

6.12 Therefore, with the lack of a 5 year housing supply, and clarification on the issue of prematurity, the proposal is acceptable in principle unless any adverse impacts can be identified that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of meeting this objective.

6.13 **2. EIA and cumulative impact**

This is an EIA development and the application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement as required by the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 as amended for a development of this size. The submitted ES and updated addendum does not identify any significant impacts as a result of this development that cannot be mitigated. These are covered in more detail in the specific topic areas of the report.

6.14 The ES also considers the cumulative impact of the proposal in relation to other committed or emerging development within the area as required by the regulations. These include development at Great Western Park (3300 units) to the east of the site which is progressing, North West Valley Park (800 units) adjacent to the application site, Milton Heights (400 units), North East Harwell (200 units), Harwell Campus (850 and 550 units), and the redevelopment of Didcot A (400 units) within the Vale District

alone.

- 6.15 It is recognised that the proposed development in addition to other emerging allocations in the area would significantly increase the level of housing development in the town and the wider area, however the NPPF does not suggest that populations of settlements should be limited in some way or not be expanded by any particular figure. It expects housing to be boosted significantly.
- 6.16 The site is located within a key growth area of the District within the heart of Science Vale which extends from Didcot Garden Town to the east of Wantage. The area has been identified as a strategic priority area for growth by the Oxfordshire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) with a programme for job creation enabled by the Milton Park and Harwell Campus Enterprise Zones. Key to this growth is the delivery of new housing and associated infrastructure to support this including road projects such as the Harwell Link Road (included within Valley Park) and the Science Bridge linking the development to the Didcot A site.
- 6.17 In recognition of the requirement for housing growth in this area, the site is included in the emerging Local Plan (2031) for up to 2550 dwellings with scope for in the region of a further 1600 beyond this period. The site therefore forms part of the planned growth for the town with other allocations enhancing its role as a key service centre within the Science Vale area and ensuring this status is maintained and enhanced.
- 6.18 Enforcing this role as a key growth centre, at the end of last year the Government announced that Didcot was to become a Garden Town enabling the delivery of up to 15,000 new homes and 20,000 new jobs. The proposed development will help to achieve this and deliver significant funding for key infrastructure projects required.

6.19 **3. Use of land**

The NPPF identifies the need to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land from development (paragraph 112). According to Natural England's agricultural land classification map the site contains 'Very Good Quality' (grade 2), 'Good Quality' (grade 3a) and 'Moderate Quality' (grade 3b) agricultural land. Agricultural land survey data submitted with the application shows that:

- 7.6% of the site is grade 2;
- 50.1% of the site is grade 3a and;
- 41.6% of the site is grade 3b (the remaining 0.7% is non-agricultural).

- 6.20 The proposal will result in the loss of this agricultural land. There will also be potential for loss of other agricultural land with other housing proposals permitted and applications pending consideration. In an area such as this district where it has a limited supply of previously developed sites and an unmet housing need, it is inevitable that some greenfield sites and agricultural land will be lost. There is some limited harm in taking this grade 2 and 3 land out of agricultural production.
- 6.21 The majority of the surrounding agricultural land in the vicinity falls within the same identified categories, and the locational benefits of the application site within the Science Vale area and in close proximity to the sustainable Garden Town of Didcot and the Milton Park Enterprise Zone are recognised and important material planning considerations.
- 6.22 There are mitigation measures proposed to limit impacts of the development as

advised by best practice, for example a soil management plan is proposed which would maximise the retention of soil material for the beneficial re-use within the site and minimise any loss of functional capacity of that soil.

6.23 However, the overall loss of the agricultural land for production cannot be mitigated against and as such the harm resulting from the loss of this agricultural land needs to be balanced against the benefits of the proposal. Officers consider there is limited harm to the loss of this agricultural land to housing given the economic, social and environmental benefits this proposed development will bring.

6.24 Therefore, on balance the proposal is considered to comply with the NPPF in this regard.

6.25 **4. Locational credentials**

The NPPF requires the need to travel to be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes to be maximised (paragraph 34).

6.26 The site is located on the very edge of Didcot Garden Town approximately 3.4km from the Orchard centre and Sainsbury's. Although peripheral to the town, the proposal includes on site leisure, community and retail facilities all within walking distance (800m) of the majority of the development. The development also includes 2 on site primary schools, and a special needs school.

6.27 The proposal includes good links to the adjacent Great Western Park development which has 2 local centres and a larger district centre containing a community centre, number of retail units, supermarket, public house and health centre. In addition there is a secondary school and university technical college both within cycling distance. Other secondary schools located within Didcot are between 3km and 5km away.

6.28 The site is also well located for key employment sites within the area including Milton Park and Harwell Campus, and Didcot train station providing easy access to London.

6.29 Given the inclusions of upgraded footpath links, cycle links and improved bus services in the area, and the proposed enhancements associated with this development, it is considered that the site is well located and a considered a sustainable form of development in relation to its location and provides the opportunity to minimise travel and maximise the use of non-car modes of travel.

6.30 **5. Affordable housing and housing mix**

Affordable housing

The application makes provision for 35% affordable housing. Based on the upper limit of 4,254 dwellings, this would equate to 1,489 affordable units. While this does not accord with Policy H17 of the adopted local plan; it does comply with Core Policy 24 of the emerging Local Plan 2031 Part 1.

6.31 The emerging Local Plan 2031 Part 1 is based on the most up to date evidence in relation to housing need and its evidence base includes the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA, April 2014) which is in accordance with the approach within the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance.

6.32 Topic papers and reports prepared by the council for the emerging Local Plan 2031 Part 1 explain why a lower percentage of affordable housing is being sought from the current adopted local plan 2011. A 40% affordable housing target would not be

consistent with the NPPF because it is not based on up-to-date local evidence in the SHMA. Based on the SHMA objectively assessed need, the emerging Local Plan 2031 Part 1 proposes a lower 35% affordable housing target as this is sufficient to meet the affordable housing needs in full.

- 6.33 The NPPF confirms (at paragraph 205) that where obligations are being sought local planning authorities should take account of changes in market conditions over time and wherever appropriate be sufficiently flexible to prevent planned development being stalled.
- 6.34 The Planning Practice Guidance is also clear that affordable housing contributions should not be sought without regarding to individual scheme viability (paragraph 019). Officers must also consider the delivery of the significant infrastructure required for the project including the strategic highway works and education provision.
- 6.35 Therefore, officers consider that the provision of 35% affordable housing is acceptable in this specific case because the application site is an allocated site for housing in the emerging Local Plan 2031 part 1 considered alongside the most up-to-date evidence on housing need, and given the projected timescales this is likely to be the policy position at the time of construction. The council's housing team have confirmed their support for this conclusion on this application.
- 6.36 ***Housing mix***
This is an outline application and the actual number of dwellings that might be accommodated on site is not known at this stage. The application makes provision for up to 4,254; this figure being the maximum. Therefore, the housing mix has not been confirmed and this would be a matter for any subsequent reserved matters or detailed applications. However, an indicative market housing mix which complies with the SHMA April 2014 has been indicated within the submitted planning statement.
- 6.37 Officers will expect the market housing mix to closely comply with the April 2014 SHMA (unless superseded by any more up to date objectively assessed need for housing in the district), and the affordable housing mix to complement the expectations of the council's housing team with the current preference being listed in their consultation response (75% affordable rent and 25% shared ownership tenure split), which Officers support. This will be covered in the s106 and flexibility will be added to accommodate any changes to the tenure split and/or type in response to changes to national and local planning policy such as the introduction of starter homes.
- 6.38 Therefore on balance, the proposal is considered to comply with national and local plan policies relating to the delivery of affordable housing.
- 6.39 **6. Design and layout**
The NPPF provides that planning decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment (paragraph 60). It gives considerable weight to good design and acknowledges it is a key component of sustainable development.
- 6.40 A number of local plan policies seek to ensure high quality development is achieved and the protection of the amenities of neighbouring properties (Policies DC1, DC6, and DC9). In March 2015 the Council adopted its design guide, which aims to raise the standard of design across the district.

- 6.41 This is an outline application with only access to be considered. The details concerning layout, scale, external appearance of the dwellings and landscaping are reserved matters and would be considered as part of any subsequent reserved matters or detailed applications; they are not part of the consideration of this outline application.
- 6.42 However, given the scale of the application an illustrative masterplan of the site has been submitted, as well as key parameter plans to fix certain elements of the development such as: density, land use, building heights, and access and movement through the site. This is to ensure there is coherence and continuity to the development that binds all the elements together in an integrated way. A design and access statement outlining design principles to be adopted throughout the delivery of the site has also been submitted. If granted planning permission the reserved matters planning applications will be expected to follow these agreed parameter plans
- 6.43 **Site, setting and framework**
Of the 178ha site, about 107ha would be residential land use (the net developable area). The application site lies to the west of Didcot Garden Town and would in-fill the area of open land between the edge of the Great Western Park development and the A34. Significant concerns have been raised by the parish councils and local residents with regards to the impact of the development on Harwell and potential coalescence of Didcot Garden Town with the village. Officers have taken these concerns fully into account in the consideration of the application.
- 6.44 Policy NE10 of the adopted local plan seeks to protect urban fringes and important open gaps between settlements. The application site is covered by this policy, stating:

"These fringe areas also serve as gaps which help to maintain the separate identities of Didcot and its surrounding village communities and to avoid the coalescence of development in the area in general".
- 6.45 Therefore this policy, in the context that the plan period, has expired and the application site has been put forward as a strategic allocation for housing in the emerging local plan 2031.
- 6.46 The Vale of White Horse Landscape Capacity Study prepared for the emerging local plan 2031 evidence base, concludes that the function of the northern section of the site in maintaining a separate distance between Didcot and Harwell is not significant. There would be some erosion of the separation distance around the B4493 where the space between Didcot and Harwell would become narrower but again this is not significant.
- 6.47 The intent of policy NE10 to avoid coalescence is continued with the emerging plan, with the strategic sites and policies document site allocation for Valley Park requiring that:

"The boundary between the development areas and Harwell village must be carefully treated in order to protect the separate identities of Valley Park and Harwell."
- 6.48 The A34 forms the western edge of the site boundary to the development, forming a strong physical and visual barrier. This main route is also significantly screened by tall mature trees providing only limited views.

- 6.49 The illustrative masterplan and land use parameter plans also indicate a strong woodland landscape boundary along the A34 within the site to incorporate noise attenuation measures and a significant landscape buffer to the residential development. This buffer varies in width from between approximately 20 metres to 28 metres. The buffer to the residential development within the southernmost part of the site would be even larger, as this section includes a reserved area for necessary OCC highways strategic infrastructure including the Harwell Link Road and associated works.
- 6.50 In addition, in response to the parish council and local residents concerns the illustrative masterplan has been amended by the applicants to incorporate a wider landscape buffer alongside the B4493. Furthermore, in response to repeated concerns raised by the parish council and local residents, a further landscape buffer to the northern side of the B4493 will also be preserved as open space with no built development to ensure a wider landscape buffer on both sides of the road, reflecting the position to the west side of the A34 approaching Harwell.
- 6.51 The application site would not impact on the settlement structure and pattern of Harwell and would be seen within the context of development to the eastern side of the A34, including Great Western Park and Milton Park.
- 6.52 The distance to Harwell village including the ribbon development of individual dwellings along the B4493, together with the illustrative layout of the proposed development and the strong physical barrier in the A34 is considered to be sufficient to ensure that no coalescence would occur as a result of the development and that Valley Park would be seen to be visually separate from the village of Harwell which would retain its identity as a larger village, separated from Didcot Garden Town by the A34.
- 6.53 ***Spatial layout***
Layout, appearance, scale and landscaping are all reserved matters for this application. However, the illustrative masterplan that has been submitted with the application to demonstrate how the development will be accommodated on the site. It shows a clear spatial layout providing a coherent and legible environment for all users. Officers would expect any subsequent reserved matters masterplan to closely reflect the principles demonstrated.
- 6.54 Organised around a key central spine road traversing the site from north to south and clear network of streets, the site would be separated into distinct character areas such as the gateway to the site from the main northern point of access, through the northern and southern neighbourhoods including the main local centre and main street.
- 6.55 Vignettes within the design and access statement demonstrate how these different character areas would be presented, with differing plot sizes, dwelling types, street hierarchy, parking arrangements, density and green infrastructure. These vignettes are sufficiently detailed to show dedicated cycle lanes, ecology and landscape buffer zones, shared surface areas and have been amended to reflect key comments from Oxfordshire County Council highways and technical officers such as the landscape officer and urban design consultants.
- 6.56 The principles established within the submitted design and access statement will inform a site wide design code to address all the detailed elements of the design and layout of each character area and how they will be delivered. This is to be secured by

way of a condition, which requires each reserved matters or detailed application to also submit a design statement confirming how the application conforms to the approved site wide design code. The key elements presented within the parameter plans and design and access statement can be summarised as follows:

6.57 **Scale and massing**

Principle DG26 of the council's design guide 2015 states that density should be appropriate to the location, and it requires a range of densities for larger development proposals. Policy H15 of the adopted local plan requires densities of at least 30 dwellings per hectare (dph), and stipulates 40dph at Didcot (Great Western Park).

6.58 The average density across the site would be approximately 40dph. The density pattern concentrates higher density areas to the centre of the site, following the main spine road and local centres. The lower density areas are reserved for the outer layers of the site, adjacent to existing development and the boundaries of the site. The higher density areas are directed towards the lowest part of the site, and the lower density areas are at higher points to take into account the topography of the site.

6.59 The building heights parameter plan supports this approach, directing 2.5-3 storey buildings (maximum 13.6m) and higher landmark buildings (up to 15m) to the 'Gateway' to the site and the main northern local centre. Landmark buildings are important in enhance legibility and can help to create a varied sequence of spaces and character to a location. Lower 2 storey buildings (maximum 10.5m) are positioned to the southern part of the site adjacent to the AONB and where views of the site are more apparent.

6.60 These density and building height patterns enhance legibility and create a sense of arrival at the gateway and key local centre areas, reserving the lower density and lower buildings towards the boundaries of the site to respect adjacent buildings and landscape settings, such as the AONB to the south. The application complies with principle DG26 of the design guide in that it focusses increased densities around key movement intersections, strategic routes, public spaces and local centres.

6.61 **Access and movement**

Principles DG23 and DG24 require new developments to link with existing routes and access points, and provide a clear network of connected streets.

6.62 The spine road through the development running north to south has been realigned to create a more legible corridor with provision for high frequency bus services to aid connectivity. The amended northern access and connection to the Science Bridge provides a more clearly expressed sense of arrival from the A4130. A clear hierarchy of streets and spaces is proposed which responds to the identified character areas for the development, for example: Main Street, secondary streets, tertiary mews streets, tertiary shared surface streets etc.

6.63 Two vehicle links, two footpath links and two cycle links are proposed to connect to the Great Western Park development to the east of the site. These have been strategically placed for direct links between key nodes of infrastructure on each site. A potential vehicle link is also provided for the adjoining site to the north-west, known as North West Valley Park which forms another strategic local plan 2031 allocated site.

6.64 A comprehensive network of cycle paths is to be provided throughout the site,

including dedicated on-street cycle lanes along the main north-south spine road, and primary east-west streets through the site providing safe and direct access throughout the site. Footpath links would also be provided, including the connections through the Great Western Park and the existing public rights of way through, and abutting the site.

- 6.65 The application complies with the design guide principles by providing links to external routes and throughout the site, and providing a clear network of streets which responds to landscape features and has been designed to provide optimum routes for public transport as well as taking into account safety and visual amenity considerations.
- 6.66 **Local centres**
Principle DG25 of the design guide identifies that larger developments will require local facilities and services which should be conveniently located along main routes and should integrate with other community facilities to reinforce hubs and contribute to the viability of local retail use.
- 6.67 The local centre to the north, the larger of the two local centres proposed, has been substantially redesigned through the application process. Located at a prominent intersection between the north-south and east-west main streets and the green infrastructure network, it provides an active frontage to all public realm aspects and integrates with the open space, leisure building and primary school to form a central community hub serving resident's needs at the heart of the development. The primary routes open up to a large integrated public realm with key uses framing this space.
- 6.68 The local centre would consist of landmark buildings that provide a mix of uses such as small scale retail and community uses, as well as a higher density of residential development to provide a level of activity throughout the day. Exact details of what would be incorporated within the local centre would be addressed at any subsequent reserved matters or detailed application stages, but the principles for its design are established in the design and access statement to inform any subsequent later applications.
- 6.69 The local centres would form key focal points to the development; the northernmost larger local centre featuring a strong building enclosure at a greater scale, marking the arrival into the site and provide a central focal point to the development. This dynamic inter-dimensional space would provide a heart to the community and its dual-functions would interact to allow multiple activities for the community, including shopping, recreation, play, sports and local meetings and functions.
- 6.70 The shared area would be designed to slow traffic speeds within this largely pedestrianised area, along with a dual-use car park and cycle lanes and parking. The pedestrian and cycle network would allow ease of movement to all key uses in this area, through to the leisure/community building, school and public open space.
- 6.71 The application complies with the design guide principle by locating both local centres on main routes at key nodal junctions and integrating them with other uses, such as primary schools, open space and leisure uses.
- 6.72 **Leisure and community building**
Principle DG25 also applies to the proposed leisure and community building. The proposed dual-use leisure and community building has been re-located during the application process to position it within the south-eastern corner of Common Park,

which inter-connects key community functions – leisure, retail/civic, school and play/recreation. A multi-purpose facility, the building could also incorporate the pavilion for ease of operation, and would serve the football pitches, tennis and MUGA provision to be located at Common Park.

- 6.73 The leisure and community building would provide the required amount of sports provision including a gym with 57 stations and a four court hall as well as space for the community to meet and utilise for functions. A key focal point to the development, the building would be of a high quality design and finish to provide an all-round community facility within the heart of the development. This element therefore also complies with principle DG25 of the design guide.
- 6.74 **Landscape and open space**
Principles DG16 and DG17 of the design guide 2015 require a clear landscape structure, retention and integration of existing landscape features where possible and formation of open space networks.
- 6.75 The proposed open space hierarchy provides a clear and flexible approach that integrates existing landscape features with new open space provision. Areas of formal playing pitches, informal open space, play areas, incidental open space and allotments are provided for and are linked through a green network traversing the site, following where possible existing landscape features such as public rights of way or existing hedgerows. The strategy incorporates a significant woodland belt along the southern edge of the development as well as more sensitive uses such as allotments.
- 6.76 The application complies with the design principles by setting out a clear landscape and open space hierarchy offering different types of uses, linking them throughout the development and integrating them with existing retained features where possible.
- 6.77 Details such as building form, materials and architectural detailing would be addressed as part of any subsequent reserved matters or detailed applications. Officers expect these elements to be informed by the principles set out in the submitted design guide, and conditioned detailed design code.
- 6.78 Therefore in conclusion, officers consider that the proposal, subject to conditions, would provide a high quality environment in accordance with the NPPF, NPPG, local plan policies and design guide 2015.
- 6.79 **7. Traffic and highway safety**

Policy background

Adopted local plan policy DC5 requires safe access for developments and that the road network can accommodate the traffic arising from the development safely. Policy DC8 seeks to ensure the provision of infrastructure and services to accommodate additional traffic arising from development. The NPPF (Paragraph 32) requires plans and decisions to take account of whether:

- the opportunities for sustainable transport modes have been taken up depending on the nature and location of the site, to reduce the need for major transport infrastructure;
- safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people; and
- improvements can be undertaken within the transport network that cost effectively limit the significant impacts of the development.

Paragraph 32 goes on to state: “Development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe.”

6.80 **Traffic assessments and modelling**

Since the submission of the planning application in January 2015 there have been several modelling assessments (SATURN, VISSIM, PICADY, ARCADY and LINSIG models) undertaken by the applicants using the TRICS database in accordance with the guidance set out by OCC and Highways England. The latest modelling used the transport model known as Oxfordshire Strategic Model (OSM), which involved assessing the impact of the development on 18 existing junctions. In addition to this OCC have also undertaken additional transport modelling to further test the impact on the wider highway network. To conclude and as noted in the updated Transport Assessment (TA) from the 18 junctions assessed that may require mitigation works as a result of this development, 3 of them were found to require mitigation works. These were as follows:

1. Milton Interchange will require alterations to the circulatory carriageway and several approach arms with works to the slip roads of the A34.
2. Collet Roundabout on the A4130 will require alterations to the circulatory carriageway and several approach arms.
3. Roundabout junction of the A4310 and A417 will require alterations to the circulatory carriageway and several approach arms.

6.81 These works are designed to improve and increase the traffic capacity to accommodate the increased traffic flows created by the development and will be subject to s278 agreements to ensure delivery. The full extent of the works are covered in the TA under ‘Summary of Junctions to be improved’ paragraphs 9.83 to 9.85. The Milton Interchange has the majority of issues given current capacity concerns. The mitigation strategy has been worked up in full consultation with Highways England in light of the impact the increased traffic would have on this junction and therefore the A34.

6.82 The TA has also assessed the impacts on transport modes and users, covering pedestrians, cyclists, public transport users and vehicle drivers and passengers. This was assessed against and in consideration with the OCC Transport Strategy. This strategy seeks to integrate the various transport strategies and support the Districts significant amount of growth.

6.83 **Public transport**

The development seeks to enhance and connect to existing bus routes. Discussions have taken place between the applicants, OCC and local bus operators. There will be 3 services envisaged that would run through the site as annotated in the TA under figure 5b. The strategic spatial layout has been conceived with the bus routes in mind in terms of accessibility for residents, convenience of route for both providers and users and legibility & permeability in urban design terms.

6.84 In addition, the primary routes have been designed in the manner that ensures buses have sufficient space on the highway and that there is clear segregation with other users such as cyclists and pedestrians. This therefore ensures the proposed bus routes are not compromised whilst also not dominating the public realm.

6.85 Lastly, the development will pump prime these bus services and fully fund bus shelters with real time displays. The public transport approach has been an integral aspect to how the spatial layout has evolved striking the right balance between public

transport needs and best practice in urban design terms.

6.86 ***Walking and cycling networks***

Didcot Garden Town benefits from a network of footways. The network becomes further dispersed towards the west. Cycling trips are predominantly catered for within the existing road network with very limited dedicated cycle provision, which is a key concern and current drawback for Didcot and beyond.

6.87 The development does seek to address this with cycle and pedestrian routes incorporated within the development that provide links east to west and north to south. The primary route being the main spine road and the east west link will have segregated cycle and pedestrian paths as illustrated on the Illustrative Access & Movement Plan (0044-14). This then connects to A4130, B4493 and Great Western Park. There will be three connections from Great Western Park thus providing links from the east and Didcot beyond. There will also be connections to the west from B4493 and public footpaths & bridleways. There is additional green corridor routes that offers more scenic attractive alternatives. These corridors are also existing green routes that are to be utilised and enhanced. These go east to west and north and south linking the site to outside routes. It is particularly important to note there are public rights of way that connects A4130 with Harwell.

6.88 Overall, as with the public transport approach, connections, links, retaining of important established green corridors and the enhancement of the pedestrian and cycle routes has been the key driver to the spatial layout. The spatial layout has been designed to achieve clear integration and legibility. The routes will become 'places' reinforced by the layout of plots and blocks when the Reserved Matters planning applications come in.

6.89 ***Proposed access***

A number of vehicular accesses are proposed into the existing highway network being from the A4130 and B4493 Didcot Road. Two access points are proposed to link the A4130 into the northern part of the development and a junction is proposed to link from the B4493 Didcot Road north and south into the development.

6.90 In terms of the two access at the north onto the A4130 a T-junction will be delivered to the west, which will facilitate the initial phase of the development that will then enable construction of the second access. The second access will form a double roundabout to link the A4130 with the development and the Science Bridge. To accommodate anticipated traffic flows the A4130 approach arm will be a dual carriageway. Once these access are delivered the development will be developed in a southerly direction. This will then facilitate the proposed roundabout onto B4493. This will be a 5 arm roundabout to accommodate the proposed Harwell Link Road. All junctions have been prepared and designed in accordance with Design Manual for Roads and Bridges Design Guide.

6.91 Lastly it is worth noting that in addition to the proposed junctions the development is making land available from the Science Bridge and Harwell Link Road. Both pieces of infrastructure are not required in terms of mitigating the harm of the development proposed. However, both pieces of infrastructure will play important part to the wider area in terms of easing current demand on the highway and future increased demand. Therefore, the site and development have created opportunities to integrate and delivery key pieces of infrastructure for the benefit of the wider area.

6.92 ***Networks***

The primary route is the main spine road that runs through the middle of the site and

the east west link through the local centre from the Great western Park development. It will be designed at a 30mph speed limit and would cater for public transport. The purpose of the main link is to distribute the traffic on to the secondary routes, keeping the main route free flowing. Importantly, the pedestrian and cycle routes, as shown within the Design and Access Statement will be separated having their own designated routes.

- 6.93 The secondary routes are designed for lower speeds and will feed into the perimeter blocks. The secondary routes will then lead onto tertiary routes which will serve individual housing areas incorporating either mews or shared spaces that enhance the public realm.
- 6.94 OCC have specified in their response design expectations which is helpful and will be adopted under the conditions and reserved matters stage of the planning process. It is important to note that with the right connections having been achieved under the proposed spatial layout however, the right design and material used for these networks and routes will be critical to their success.
- 6.95 **Parking provision**
The parking provision has been considered whereby the density zones can accommodate the OCC car parking standards. It is recognised by professionals that car parking and how it is accommodated can have a significant impact to the achievement of high quality development. Therefore, when the detailed design elements are submitted under the condition and / or Reserved Matters stage the car parking approach will need to be integrated within the plots, the layout of the buildings and on street in manner that does not dominate the frontages, street scene and public realm.
- 6.96 **Travel plan**
A Travel Plan Framework has been prepared and is within the TA. It covers the issues in accordance with national and local guidance. The full framework is covered under Figure 7a of the TA. It basically seeks to encourage a modal shift towards more sustainable modes of transport. As acknowledged research shows that Travel Plans needs to be managed by a Travel Plan Coordinator. It is the expectation that a Travel Plan Coordinator will be in post for 5 years after first residential occupation to manage and implement the Travel Plan.
- 6.97 **Conclusion**
Local residents and the parish council are concerned that the proposal will increase traffic for the wider area. These issues have been clearly aired and taken on board. The level of modelling, on-going assessments and conclusions clarify that the impact to the wider area is acceptable and in accordance with national and local policy
- 6.98 OCC as highway authority does not object. They advise that the proposed vehicular accesses are acceptable providing appropriate visibility and geometry for vehicles to manoeuvre safely to and from the highway. The accesses will be conditioned or within the s106 to ensure delivery and allow changes where necessary as advised by County Officers. OCC key concerns have primarily related to the Science Bridge and the ecological impact but with changes introduced, contributions and off-setting agreed these concerns do not stand. There is now sufficient land for OCC to facilitate the bridge.
- 6.99 OCC have advised that the submitted TA provides a fair appraisal of the likely trip generation of the development and the derived impact upon the local highway network. OCC have advised on a number of conditions. The head liners of these

conditions are acceptable but the exact wording will need to be in accordance with best planning practice and therefore will be open to change. They have also noted a list of obligations which has been covered. On this basis the Parish Council's request for a pedestrian bridge has been considered but is not reasonable in this case in light of other substantial improvements being delivered by this development.

- 6.100 It is noted that phasing and understanding a delivery plan is critical. All parties have discussed the general approach of the anticipated phasing. Through further s106 discussions and with the use of conditions the phasing strategy will be firmed up to the satisfaction of all parties.
- 6.101 Highways England raise no objection on the works and impact to the A34.
- 6.102 In conclusion therefore subject to the agreed obligations and headline conditions the proposed development is in accordance with national and local planning policy and therefore there are no objections to this development on highway grounds.

6.103 **8. Landscape and visual impact**

The NPPF seeks to enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (paragraph 109). In NPPF terms this is not a valued landscape. Policy NE9 of the adopted Local Plan designates the site as part of the wider Lowland Vale which is a distinctive landscape and valued for its own quality.

- 6.104 The application site is not located within the North Wessex Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), however the boundary to the AONB abuts the southern edge of the site. Therefore while no direct impacts on the designation will occur, it is important to assess any indirect impacts of the application on the setting of the AONB as a nationally important landscape to which great weight is attached to its conservation and enhancement.
- 6.105 The council's landscape officer has reviewed the application and has raised no objections to the proposal, subject to detailed requirements being taken into consideration at any subsequent reserved matters stages. It is acknowledged and necessary to ensure that the design of the southern half of the development successfully assimilates with the AONB at any subsequent reserved matters stages. The AONB board initially raised a holding objection for more detailed information on the potential landscape impact of the development. This information has been submitted, resulting in the landscape officer confirming a response of no objections. The AONB board have not submitted amended comments at the time of writing this report.
- 6.106 ***Landscape character***
In considering the site as part of a possible strategic housing site this authority commissioned a landscape and visual impact appraisal. This was undertaken by Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd in February 2014 (the Kirkham report). The Kirkham report concluded the landscape capacity of the site as High in the northern section (site 12), Medium/ High for the middle section either side of the B4493 (site 12) and Medium in the southern section (site 10).
- 6.107 The majority of the site has been assessed to have low landscape sensitivity to change due to the value of the existing landscape features on site and the presence of urbanising influences including Didcot, Great Western Park, the industrial development to the north and the A34 to the west.

- 6.108 The southern section of the site is more sensitive and open, located adjacent to the boundary of the AONB and less affected by urbanising influences. The loss of countryside in this southern section would be more visually prominent and may affect the setting of the AONB. However, it is noted that there is already some affect to this setting from Great Western Park. In addition, any subsequent reserved matters applications at this part of the site will be expected to adopt design principles in layout, building type and design details that are sensitive to the AONB.
- 6.109 The development of the site would significantly alter the landscape character of the area, however the northern area of the site would be seen within the context of the existing and permitted built form of Didcot Garden Town, Great Western Park and the A34 corridor. This northern section therefore is considered to have a low inherent value and sensitively and the change in character here would not be significantly or demonstrably harmful given its context.
- 6.110 The level of impact to the southern area of the site as already noted would be greater, given its more open and sensitive context. The southernmost section of the site adjoins the AONB, classified within the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2014-2019 as 'Open Downland' character type, with adjacent character area of 'Downs Plain and Scarp'.
- 6.111 In addition to the expectations already laid out for any subsequent reserved matters stages, the proposal at this stage has been designed to minimise the visual impact on the landscape using the following methods:
- Avoidance of impacts to the landscape:
- The proposal seeks to retain a large amount of existing landscape features including trees and hedgerows of higher ecological/arboreal/landscape importance, key existing green corridors including along Cow Lane and streams within the site.
- Mitigation in terms of reducing the landscape impact:
- Inclusion of a woodland edge buffer established between the A34 and residential development;
 - Low-medium density and two storey height buildings only to be located to the south of the Driftway along with new structural planting and uses such as public open space and allotments;
 - Low-medium density and lower height buildings positioned to the periphery of the site;
 - New landscape planting such as native woodland, tree and hedgerow planting, ponds, grassland/wildflowers and allotments.
- 6.112 **Visibility**
As part of the Landscape and Visual Assessment submitted, a zone of theoretical visibility was included to show potential areas surrounding the site from where the development might be visible. Various photomontage viewpoints have also been provided of the site from key vantage points to inform assessment of how the development would be seen within the landscape.
- 6.113 The assessment of visual affects submitted has concluded that close-range and direct views of the northern section of the development would be largely confined to the edges of the site. Views of the north would be restricted to the A4130 frontage and buildings beyond; while to the east views would be limited to the edge of Great Western Park.

- 6.114 The A34 and its line of trees to the western site boundary heavily filters views from the west to Harwell. There are some small gaps which have been identified that would be closed by reinforcement woodland edge planting. Views from the public rights of way within the site would be significantly altered, from predominantly rural to urban. However, the rights of way are proposed to be surrounded within green infrastructure corridors to help mitigate localised impacts.
- 6.115 From outside the development, significant visual effects would be confined to the immediate vicinity of the site and over a small section of the AONB immediately to the south between the A417 and Hagbourne Hill. The magnitude of these effects would be reduced by the mitigation as identified above, including the lower building heights, low-medium density south of the B4493 and establishment of structural planting on the southern edge of the site.
- 6.116 Views from the remainder of the AONB would be largely restricted to distance and partially screened glimpses from higher vantage points to the south and east including the Ridgeway and Wittenham Clumps, which would not be significant.
- 6.117 Overall for the site, officers consider that moderate to minor landscape and visual harm is identified and this has to be balanced against the benefits of the proposal including the lack of a five year land supply of housing. Also, with a considered and sensitive approach taken under the any subsequent reserved matters applications this can be minimised further. Officers are of the opinion that the moderate to minor landscape harm with the included avoidance and mitigation measures proposed, is not significant and demonstrable and the benefits of the proposal outweigh the harm identified.
- 6.118 Therefore on balance the proposal is considered to comply with local and national planning policy, including policies DC6 and NE9 of the local plan and the NPPF and NPPG.
- 6.119 **9. Open space**
- Policy H23 of the adopted Local Plan requires a minimum of 15% of the residential area to be laid out as open space. Approximately 48.32ha of public open space is proposed, include:
- Formal playing fields: 12.75ha
 - Public open space including play areas: 18.01ha
 - Incidental open spaces: 14.45ha
 - Allotments: 3.11ha
- This is more than 15%, meeting the policy, and provides a sufficient and varied amount of public open space for the development.
- 6.120 The design and access statement has been amended to provide a level of detail to indicate how some of the more linear green corridor spaces would be provided to ensure these areas provide suitable areas for informal recreation use. The amended details show a flexible approach to green corridor areas, which can be narrowed and widened to accommodate play areas and focal points where desired. Further details of the delivery would be provided at any subsequent reserved matters or detailed application stages.
- 6.121 The landscape offer wishes to see further details of how the public open space and play areas will be integrated into the development, and this level of detail would be

provided by any subsequent reserved matters or detailed application stages. This would include details of green spaces being provided within the areas of residential development shown indicatively on the illustrative masterplan.

- 6.122 Formal sports provision would be located within two parks forming key sports hubs for the development: Common park to the north, and Alma Park to the south. The provision would include:
- Senior and junior football pitches;
 - Artificial grass pitch;
 - Tennis courts;
 - Cricket pitch;
 - MUGAs (multi-use games area);
 - Skate park or parkour facility;
 - Leisure/community building including fitness and indoor courts and a pavilion to Common Park;
 - Changing room and catering facilities to Alma Park.
- 6.123 This amount of sports and leisure facilities, including provision of an AGP on-site, is sufficient to meet the needs of the development and has been negotiated with the applicants following discussions with Sport England and community development officers to ensure that the provision would meet existing needs and would provide high quality and useable facilities. Sport England have raised no objections to the amended proposal, subject to conditions.
- 6.124 Officers consider that a sufficient level of public open space would be provided, in line with the local plan policy. The detail of its integration and delivery would be a matter for any subsequent reserved matters or detailed application stages.
- 6.125 The public open space can be secured within the s106 with the developer expected to provide and maintain the open spaces, with a management company taking control of the maintenance in the long term. The land use parameter plan submitted with the application shows the designated areas of public open space to be adhered to.
- 6.126 The proposal therefore complies with local plan policy H23, the NPPF and NPPG.
- 6.127 **10. Flood risk and surface/foul water drainage**
- The NPPF provides that development should not increase flood risk elsewhere and should be appropriately flood resilient and resistant (paragraph 103). It states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst other things, preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution (Paragraph 109).
- 6.128 Adopted local plan policy DC9 provides that new development will not be permitted if it would unacceptably harm the amenities of neighbouring properties or the wider environment in terms of, amongst other things, pollution and contamination. Policy DC12 provides that development will not be permitted if it would adversely affect the quality of water resources as a result of, amongst other things, waste water discharge. Policies DC13 and 14 are not considered to be consistent with the NPPF, because they do not comply with paragraphs 100 to 104 which require a sequential approach to locating development and provide that flood risk should not be increased

elsewhere.

6.129 **Flood risk**

According to the Environment Agency (EA) up to date flood maps, the majority of site is located within Flood Zone 1 which is the area at lowest risk of fluvial flooding. Whilst the maps identify the northern most end of site within Zones 2 and 3, the EA's most up to date surface water maps show this area to be subject to surface water flooding (pluvial) rather than fluvial given the current inability for storm water to enter the existing system at this point. Officers are satisfied that all of the built development falls within Flood Zone 1 at least risk, and only the access onto the A4130 falls within the higher risk area.

6.130 On this basis the EA are satisfied that the requirement for a sequential test has been met as all of the development is contained within Flood Zone 1. They have therefore raised no objections in relation to flood risk.

6.131 **Surface water**

In terms of surface water drainage it is proposed to mitigate this by a number of different means. The site characteristics are such that a SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage System) can be utilised to enable water to discharge at or below baseline conditions. This would include attenuation features such as swales within some of the green infrastructure on the development, open channels and ditches throughout the site, and within the highway network and parking areas permeable paving and filter strips.

6.132 An illustrative surface water drainage strategy has been submitted with the application and updated as part of the most recent amendments. This includes drainage attenuation ponds along the northern site boundary adjacent to the A4130 and at key points throughout the site to hold water and control discharge to the wider system. New connections into the wider drainage network are also proposed including at the northern site boundary where there are currently ponding issues. There are also a number of existing water courses running through the site that are suitable as storm water receptors.

6.133 The details of these elements would be incorporated into the design of each phase of the development within the reserved matters applications. The EA, in addition to the District and County drainage engineers have raised no objection to the development in relation to surface water subject to conditions in relation to the detail.

6.134 It is intended that the proposed SUDS would be managed and maintained by an on-site management company unless relating solely to highway run off where it would be managed by the County Council.

6.135 **Foul drainage**

Thames Water have raised concerns that the existing foul water network does not have capacity to accommodate the needs of the development. However it does not object to this proposal but recommends a condition securing a drainage scheme prior to the development commencing and for the approved scheme to be implemented prior to any discharge being accepted into the public system.

6.136 Paragraph 004 Reference ID: 34-004-20140306 of the NPPG refers to funding wastewater infrastructure. It advises that companies such as Thames Water "are subject to a statutory duty to 'effectually drain' their area. This requires them to invest in infrastructure suitable to meet the demands of projected population growth. There is also statutory provision for developers to fund additional sewerage infrastructure

required to accommodate flows from a proposed development". Funding is a matter for Thames Water and the developer.

- 6.137 Thames Water, have a legal obligation under Section 94 of the Water Industries Act 1991 (WIA 1991) to provide developers with the right to connect to a public sewer regardless of capacity issues. This, when read in conjunction with Section 91(1) of the Act in effect makes it impossible for Thames Water to object or for the Council to refuse to grant planning permission for development on the grounds that no improvement works are planned for a particular area. In this case, a condition can secure appropriate sewage disposal.
- 6.138 Notwithstanding the above, discussions between the applicant and Thames Water are on-going in seeking to mitigate the impacts of the development. The adjacent site developers at Great Western Park are also in discussions to enable the delivery of a new trunk sewer connecting directly to the treatment works. This would increase the capacity of the network to accommodate the needs of both developments. Thames Water also provide scope to enable developers to deliver infrastructure sooner by forward funding if necessary to ensure development is not held up.
- 6.139 Thames Water have confirmed that the issue relates to the network and not the Didcot Sewage Treatment Works which has capacity. Within the site a series of pumping stations will be required which will then control flows to connection points to be agreed with Thames Water. The details of this would be submitted as part of the foul water drainage strategy required by condition.
- 6.140 On the basis of the above, Officers are satisfied that the scheme is acceptable in terms of flood risk, surface and foul water drainage subject to the submission of details required by condition. The proposal would comply with local and national planning policy.
- 6.141 **11. Ecology and biodiversity**
- Paragraph 117 of the NPPF refers to the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, whilst Paragraph 118 sets out the basis for determination of planning applications. Paragraph 118 states that *"...if significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused..."*
- 6.142 The council's countryside officer has reviewed the application and concludes that overall, the site has a relatively low ecological value comprised mainly of habitats which are widely distributed across the county. However, there are some features of elevated value such as some hedgerows with mature trees, the two watercourses and small areas of species rich grassland.
- 6.143 ***Hedgerows***
The proposal has been amended to retain the majority of the more important hedgerows on the site and include more new hedgerow planting which should ensure there is no net loss in hedgerows overall.
- 6.144 ***Watercourses***
At the request of both the countryside officer and the Environment Agency, the proposal has been amended to include a minimum of an 8 metre undeveloped buffer area alongside the watercourses to help mitigate the impacts of urbanising the watercourses. This is also to be conditioned and is shown on the vignettes.

6.145 **Habitats**

The best areas of unimproved Priority Habitat neutral grassland are to the north of the site adjacent to the A4130. These areas are shown to be retained on the proposed illustrative masterplan, however the inclusion of the proposed Science Bridge and associated infrastructure is likely to result in loss of the majority of this grassland. The addition of new road crossings over the main watercourse as shown in the amended illustrative masterplan would also have additional impacts on the habitat corridor.

6.146 The Science Bridge element of the proposal does not form part of this application. The applicants are ensuring that the scheme does not prejudice its delivery by demonstrating how it could be accommodated. While the responsibility for dealing with the issues related to the Science Bridge would be with OCC, the responsibility for any impacts associated with the access to Valley Park would lie with the applicants.

6.147 It is not possible to avoid impacts on the grassland, and watercourse, if the Science Bridge is built. In order to ensure that the cumulative impacts of the scheme (including the science bridge) result in a no net loss for biodiversity, a compensation package will be required alongside mitigation proposals. OCC are investigating the use of Biodiversity Offsetting as a means of providing the required compensation arising from the Science Bridge proposals. This is considered to be the preferable approach to compensation, and a contribution by the applicants towards this is included within the S106 package.

6.148 **Species**

Water vole

The countryside officer is confident that subject to the detailed design of the mitigation proposed by the applicants (to include box culverts with wildlife ledges or open span designs) and its successful implementation, the habitats for water voles can be protected to ensure they can continue to disperse along the habitat corridor.

6.149 **Bats**

The countryside officer has identified that specific mitigation of bats using the stream corridor will be more difficult as a result of the road crossings. Bats will cross roads and other barriers to movement but the degree of impact depends on variables such as the width of the road, the degree of lighting and height of the crossing. These details are unknown until any subsequent reserved matters or detailed applications are submitted.

6.150 Overall, the countryside officer is of the opinion that the addition of the two road crossings is likely to have a minor negative impact on the way that the local bat population use the stream corridor. Some of the impacts may be mitigated as a result of the new habitat features within the site, particularly the attenuation features along the northern site boundary. This minor negative impact has to be balanced against the benefits of the proposal including the lack of a five year land supply of housing.

6.151 Given that more specific mitigation measures can be explored once more details are known about the design of the road crossings, this limited harm is not considered to be significant or demonstrable to the local bat population. Officers are of the opinion that the benefits of the proposal do outweigh this limited adverse impact.

6.152 **Other species**

The site also contains populations of a number of other protected species such as

breeding schedule 1 birds and badgers. Detailed mitigation strategies will have to be developed to ensure that the species are not harmed as a result of the development proposals. An outline of the approach to species mitigation is provided in the submitted Environmental Statement. The countryside officer is confident that the required mitigation for these species can be achieved on the site, subject to conditions which are included at 8.2 of the report.

- 6.153 The recommended conditions include the submission of a construction environmental management plan for biodiversity which requires updated ecological surveys prior to the commencement of each phase, as well as the identification of biodiversity protection zones and times during construction when specialist ecologists need to be present on site to oversee works. A landscape and ecology management plan is also required by condition to cover the whole site which focuses on the long-term maintenance and management of landscape and ecology features.
- 6.154 These conditions are also endorsed by the Environment Agency, whose original holding objection to the application has been overcome by the submission of amended and additional information, subject to the inclusion of these conditions.
- 6.155 OCC also previously raised an objection to the proposal on ecology grounds, but upon receipt of the amended submission have registered a no objections subject to a contribution towards the off-setting and conditions. The amended application and conditions recommended by the countryside officer and the EA are considered to also address the comments raised by Natural England.
- 6.156 On balance, the proposal is therefore considered to comply with local and national planning policy with regards to ecology and biodiversity.
- 6.157 **12. Residential amenity**
- Adopted local plan policy DC9 seeks to prevent development that would result in a loss of privacy, daylight or sunlight for neighbouring properties or that would cause dominance or visual intrusion for neighbouring properties and the wider environment. Protecting amenity is a core principle of the NPPF. Design principles DG63-64 of the Design Guide pertain to amenity, privacy and overlooking.
- 6.158 Layout, scale and appearance are all reserved matters and therefore at this stage, the detailed impacts of the proposed dwellings on existing neighbouring properties cannot be assessed.
- 6.159 Officers do expect however that all measures within the council's adopted design guide are adhered to in order to ensure that no harmful overlooking, dominance or over-shadowing occurs as a result of the proposal. Detailed layouts would be able to accommodate these requirements (for example a minimum 21m distance between upper floor habitable room windows).
- 6.160 Hillview and Sunnyside are residential properties located to the north of the B4493 and would be surrounded by proposed development site to the north, east and west and therefore it will be particularly important here to adhere to the design guide principles and consider a suitable landscape boundary to protect the amenities of these dwellings. The density is indicated at being low density in the areas adjoining these existing properties, and building heights will be no higher than 2.5 storeys (12.1m).
- 6.161 The amended landscape buffer proposed for the northern side of the B4493 would

also ensure no built development would be constructed directly to either side elevations of these dwellings. This is a significant enhancement to these properties which will ensure the design principles will be able to be adopted.

- 6.162 Similarly, Alma Barn to the south of the B4493 would be bordered by the application site to the west and south. A landscape buffer to the south of the B4493 would be provided, and development alongside this property would be low density and two storey in height.
- 6.163 The relationship of the development to the properties already constructed and currently being constructed at Great Western Park is also a key consideration. However, the Great Western Park site includes a significant landscape buffer along its western boundary and again the proposed dwellings on Valley Park will be able to adhere to the requirements of the design guide to ensure no harmful impacts arise for the dwellings on Great Western Park.
- 6.164 Therefore, officers consider that the proposal will be able to deliver a detailed layout which is able to adhere to all of the local plan and design guide principles to ensure that the amenities of all neighbouring properties are protected. Internal layouts will also be expected to meet the necessary policy requirements.
- 6.165 During the construction phase of the development, which would be over a number of years due to the scale of the development, there is the potential for adverse impacts to occur on existing and new residents in terms of disturbance from the construction. Conditions requiring a construction traffic management plan, and limiting times periods of construction as well as specific environmental conditions relating to dust emission management are recommended in order to mitigate these impacts.
- 6.166 The proposal is therefore considered to comply with local plan policy DC9, the NPPF, NPPG and the design guide 2015.
- 6.167 **13. Historic environment and archaeology**

Historic environment

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires a local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Considerable importance and weight should be given to this requirement.

- 6.168 Paragraph 132 of the NPPF confirms that “*When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be*”. The NPPF adds at paragraph 133 that proposals causing substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset should be refused unless the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm or loss. Paragraph 134 of the NPPF explains that less than substantial harm to the significance of the heritage asset should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Policy HE4 of the adopted local plan seeks to protect the setting of listed buildings.
- 6.169 Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that special attention should be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. In this case considerable importance and weight is given to the desirability of protecting or

enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area.

- 6.170 The site itself does not contain any designated heritage assets, although there are listed buildings and conservation areas in the wider locality, most notably Harwell Village to the west. However it is not considered that given the distance from the village and the separation created by the A34 that there would be any harmful impact on their setting.
- 6.171 **Archaeology**
Policy HE10 of the adopted Local Plan states that development will not be permitted if it would cause damage to the site or setting of nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not.
- 6.172 The application site has been subject to an archaeological evaluation including a field walking exercise, limited trial trenches and a geophysical survey across the site. These have revealed some limited finds within 3 areas. A substantial polygonal double ditched enclosure was revealed. Within this was a ring ditch, circular enclosures, postholes and pits. The dating suggests a relatively long period of occupation and activity from the Later Bronze Age to the second century AD. Two Romano British sites were also revealed. One appears to be a small settlement site that includes ditches, pits and post holes within a boundary ditch. The site appears to be predominantly of first and second century date. A second Romano British site was also identified. This comprised of a rectangular enclosure with internal features and external ditches. Roman pottery was also found in the trenches and appeared to form part of an extensive field system supporting small settlements of farmsteads.
- 6.173 The County Archaeologist has raised no objections subject to conditions. Given the above, and the known finds within the adjacent Great Western Park (GWP) site including a Roman farmstead, it is considered reasonable and necessary to require a further phased programme of archaeological work by condition. This would ensure any further finds are recorded and if necessary acknowledged in some way within the development such as through the onsite public art as was achieved within GWP.
- 6.174 The proposal is therefore considered to comply with local plan policies HE1, HE4 and HE10 of the adopted local plan, the NPPF and NPPG.
- 6.175 **14. Environmental impacts**
- Noise**
Paragraph 123 of the NPPF confirms that planning decisions should aim to avoid noise from giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life as a result of a new development. Decisions should also aim to mitigate and reduce to a minimum other adverse impacts on health and quality of life arising from noise from new development, including through the use of conditions. Local Plan Policy DC10 states that development will not be permitted if it is likely to be adversely affected by existing or potential sources of noise.
- 6.176 The principal constraint for the site will be the noise from the A34, which runs along the western boundary. In addition, the site may also be affected by road and rail noise from the northern boundary. The baseline noise conditions have been assessed and a noise assessment submitted which concludes that the site is suitable for residential development. It is expected that to achieve the appropriate noise environment, an acoustic bund will be required alongside the A34 and that some dwellings closest to the A34 would require window specifications to a higher standard

than normal double-glazing.

- 6.177 The council's environmental health officer has reviewed all of the information submitted and raises no objections to the principal of the development, subject to conditions relating to noise mitigation for the site to ensure that internal noise levels and the noise levels in the external amenity areas of dwellings do not exceed the "good" standard laid out in BS8233:2014. The detailed design layouts of dwellings will also be addressed in subsequent each reserved matters phase to comply with this requirement.
- 6.178 Therefore, conditions can adequately mitigate any noise impact arising from the development and the proposal complies with the NPPF, NPPG and local plan policy DC10.
- 6.179 **Air quality**
The NPPF and NPPG both assert that planning policies and decision should take into account Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) and contribute towards EU limit values or national objectives for pollutants. Local Plan Policy DC9 states that development will not be permitted if it would unacceptably harm the amenities of neighbouring properties and the wider environment in terms of dust or other emissions and pollution. Policy DC10 confirms that development will not be permitted if it is likely to be adversely affected by existing or potential sources of gases or other emissions.
- 6.180 The application site does not fall within an AQMA, however given its scale does raise adverse impacts in terms of both the construction and operational phases of the development on air quality. In terms of the construction phase, the principle impacts relate to dust emissions and the council's environmental health officer considered this can be appropriately mitigated by condition.
- 6.181 With regards to the operational phase, modelling submitted by the developers indicates that level of nitrogen dioxide will increase due to emissions from traffic. The environmental health officer considers that the impact on air quality will be adverse and suitable mitigation needs to be considered for the site and the wider locality. A full air quality assessment should be carried out to inform the mitigation measures, specifically in relation to the amended plans and five arm roundabout proposed for the B4493 which would be in close proximity to existing properties. This again is able to be covered by way of planning condition and details submitted at the reserved matters stage.
- 6.182 Therefore, conditions can adequately mitigate any air quality impact arising from the development and the proposal complies with the NPPF, NPPG and local plan policy DC9.
- 6.183 **Contaminated land**
The NPPF, at paragraph 121 confirms that planning decisions should ensure that the site is suitable for its new use taking account of ground conditions including from former activities or pollution arising from previous uses and any proposals for mitigation. Local Plan Policy DC10 states that development will not be permitted if it is likely to be adversely affected by existing or potential sources of pollution or contamination.
- 6.184 The Geo-Environmental Phase 1 Desk Study Report submitted within the Environmental Statement has not identified the presence of any potentially contaminative sources on site that would preclude the redevelopment of the site. It

does however highlight that prior to the commencement of development that an intrusive investigation is undertaken to establish conditions on the site.

6.185 The council's contaminated land officer is satisfied with this approach and therefore raises no objections to the application, subject to conditions. Therefore, conditions can adequately mitigate any air quality impact arising from the development and the proposal complies with the NPPF, NPPG and local plan policy DC9.

6.186 **15. Viability and developer contributions**

The NPPF advises that planning obligations should only be sought where they meet all of the following tests (paragraph 204):

- Necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- Directly related to the development; and
- Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

6.187 The NPPG provides further guidance on how to apply the tests mentioned above and notes the following:

1. Planning obligations assist in mitigating the impact of development which benefits local communities and supports the provision of local infrastructure.
2. Planning obligations should not be sought where they are clearly not necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms.
3. Planning obligations must be fully justified and evidenced. Where affordable housing contributions are being sought, planning obligations should not prevent development from going forward.

6.188 Policy DC8 of the Adopted Local Plan provides that development will only be permitted where the necessary physical infrastructure and service requirements to support the development can be secured.

6.189 Regard also needs to be had to the restrictions of pooling of any financial contributions to no more than 5 schemes.

6.190 ***Affordable housing***

Policy H17 of the adopted Local Plan requires the development to provide 40% affordable housing. However, given that we currently have no five year housing supply this policy is considered out of date particularly given that more up to date evidence prepared as part of the emerging local plan supports a reduced requirement of 35% to ensure sites are viable and therefore delivered. Refusal on the grounds of this reduced level of affordable housing could not therefore be justified. The application proposes 35% affordable housing. This would include the extra care provision required by the County Council. Details of the distribution within each phase of the development would be considered at the reserved matters stage.

6.191 **Highways and transport**

The application would lead to increased pressure on the local road network. As a result the County Council have requested contributions to facilitate improvements and increased capacity. These include contributions towards the new Science Bridge, widening the A4130, and the new Harwell Link Road in addition to mitigation towards three junctions identified in the TA statement referenced above.

6.192 In addition contributions are sought towards new bus stop infrastructure, public rights of way provision and improvements, and travel plan monitoring. The County Council have provided a detailed breakdown of works required to 12 rights away in the vicinity of the site to improve pedestrian links to the wider network which justify the requests. Contributions towards these improvements are considered justified and necessary and the amount sought is proportionate to the proposal.

6.193 The developers are also required to pump prime new bus services however this would be an agreement directly with the bus service providers rather than the County Council, but the mechanism to facilitate this would need to be included in the S106 Agreement.

6.194 **Ecology**

As identified in the report above, the proposal will have some impact on biodiversity on the site particularly the loss of some important grass land and culverting an existing watercourse to accommodate the agreed Science Bridge road configuration. It is therefore intended that this impact would be offset by a contribution facilitating biodiversity elsewhere. The required contribution is considered proportionate to the development and therefore justified.

6.195 Contributions were initially sought towards farmland bird mitigation, however this is no longer requested given it does not meet the tests and other onsite biodiversity improvements are proposed within the landscape corridors and SUDS ponds.

6.196 **Education**

The application includes the provision of two new primary schools within the site and a special needs school. Land to facilitate these will be provided by the development and contributions sought towards their delivery. Costs involved in the provision of the land are yet to be agreed and the required contributions would take account of this. Alternatively, direct delivery of the schools by the developer is an acceptable option to both parties. This would be a matter for inclusion within the S106 the detailed terms of which have yet to be agreed.

6.197 Contributions are also sought towards secondary education for the new school within Great Western Park. It is considered that these contributions are fair and proportionate and therefore justified.

6.198 **OCC Property**

Contributions have been requested towards Didcot Library to increase book stock, and Oxford Central Library remodelling. In addition money is sought towards Adult Day Care facilities currently proposed within Great Western Park. The County have confirmed that these contributions comply with the pooling requirements therefore Officers consider they are justified.

6.199 **Leisure and open space**

The application includes provision on site for the required football pitch provision and associated pavilion, a cricket pitch and associated pavilion, an artificial grass pitch, 6 floodlit tennis courts, 2 floodlit multi-use games areas (MUGAs), a youth sport facility

such as skate park or parkour, an outdoor gym/fitness trail, and new sports hall with four courts and 57 gym stations and associated facilities including bar area. It is also intended that the sports hall would include a new community centre.

- 6.200 Off-site contributions have been requested towards new rugby pitch provision if a site can be identified or improvements to existing facilities such as floodlighting if not, swimming pool provision or improvements to Didcot Wave, and indoor bowls in Harwell village or new facility.
- 6.201 The site also includes area of open space and local equipped play areas, the details of which would be determined through the reserved matters.
- 6.202 These requirements are considered reasonable and justified although confirmation on the status of Harwell indoor bowls club is awaited from the Council infrastructure officer and an update will be provided.
- 6.203 It is intended that these facilities would be managed and maintained by a management company.
- 6.204 ***Other District Council requirements***
Contributions are also being sought towards the provision of waste and recycling bins for the proposed dwellings, public art provision, and the delivery of street naming and numbering infrastructure. These are actual costs towards onsite provision directly related to the development and are therefore considered reasonable and justified.
- 6.205 ***Other community requests***
Contributions have been requested from Thames Valley Police towards staff, new vehicles, mobile IT equipment, radio capacity, number plate recognition camera's, additional premises in the area, and a police office on site. The majority of these requests are not considered to meet the relevant tests particularly given the police benefit from funding elsewhere. Some on site office space may be feasible within the community centre although there is provision within the proposed Great Western Park community centre to the east of the site. This would be a matter for the detailed wording of the S106 when the specification of the community centre is determined.
- 6.206 NHS England have been consulted on the application. An initial response was received providing 3 options; i) financial contributions towards the proposed new surgery on GWP to the east of the site; ii) provision of a new facility on site; or iii) contributions towards other local facilities in the area. Further information was requested from officers to justify these requests in order to meet the relevant tests. Since then nothing has been received in terms of defining the level of contributions and the specific beneficiary. On this basis a request to the developers cannot be made.
- 6.207 ***Parish Council requests***
Harwell Parish Council have made a number of requests in relation to local facilities including sports and community facilities in the village, land for a new cemetery or contributions towards land purchase within the village, contributions towards a new faith facility and some additional highway improvements within the village.
- 6.208 In terms of sports and community facilities, the majority of these are being provided on site or contributions towards facilities in Didcot therefore it is unlikely that residents on the site would utilise these facilities in the village. In addition no detailed projects with costs have been provided to justify such requests.

Vale of White Horse District Council – Planning Committee - 20 April 2016

- 6.209 In relation to cemetery land or contributions, again there is no specific land identified or a scheme to which contributions could be allocated. In addition there is no policy basis on which to require on site provision. This request is therefore not justified.
- 6.210 There may be scope to include some faith provision within the community centre specification, however again there is no policy basis for such a request.
- 6.211 In relation to highway improvements within the village, these have not been specifically requested by Oxfordshire County Council and would have to be necessary to mitigate the impact of the development in order to be justified. The proposal includes significant off site highway works or contributions towards delivering these, including a new link road south of Wantage Road which is intended to ease the level of traffic travelling through the village. Any further highway works are not therefore considered justified.
- 6.212 The following table illustrates the contributions which are considered fair and proportionate to the development and therefore justified. The table does not include on site provision which is set out above.

Oxfordshire County Council	<i>Proposed Contributions</i>
Science Bridge	£2,608,944
A4130 Widening	£7, 826,832
Harwell Link Road	£1,841,268
Bus Stop Infrastructure	£198,000
Public Transport Services	Direct Procurement
Public Rights of Way	£250,000
Travel Plan Monitoring	£7,800
Provision of 2 New Primary Schools	£18,988,744
Secondary School additional capacity	£14,994,000
Special Needs Education	£1,232,500
Didcot Library	£949,130
Central Oxford Library	£191,473
Adult Day Care	£158,483
Biodiversity Off-setting	£150,000
Monitoring	£21,700
Total	£49,418,874
Vale of White Horse District Council	<i>Proposed Contributions</i>
Football pitches	On site
Pavilion for football pitches	On site
Cricket pitch and pavilion	On site
Rugby pitches	£76,923
Artificial grass pitch (AGP)	On site
Indoor Bowls	£258,678
Tennis Courts x6	On site
Youth Sport – 2 MUGA's	On site
Youth Sport – Parkour or skate park	On site
Outdoor Gym fitness trail	On site

Sports Hall	On site
Swimming Pool	£1,881,831
Health and Fitness – gym within sports hall	On site
Community Centre	On site
Waste and recycling bin provision (£170 per unit)	£723,180
Public Art	£1,281,200
Street Naming	£48,671
Monitoring	TBC
Total	£4,270,483
Overall Total	£53,689,357
Total per Dwelling	£12,620.091

6.213 **Phasing and delivery**

It is intended that the site would be delivered in phases and a condition requiring a phasing plan is recommended. This is to ensure that key infrastructure is delivered when required including the schools, and key highway infrastructure. The S106 would need to specify the triggers for the delivery of this infrastructure based on the occupation of a specified number of units thereby triggering the need. More detailed phasing information will therefore be necessary in order to inform these triggers and this is under discussion as part of the S106 negotiations.

6.214 The applicants are currently intending to begin development towards the north western end of the site and deliver in the region of 250 units per year, although this is very much dependant on the economic conditions at the time given the size of the site.

6.215 Therefore on balance, the proposal is considered to comply with local plan policy DC8, the NPPF and the NPPG.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

7.1 In view of the council's housing land supply shortfall, the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies and permission should be granted unless "any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole" (NPPF paragraph 14). Paragraph 7 of NPPF identifies three mutually dependant dimensions to sustainable development; it should fulfil an economic role, a social role and an environmental role.

7.2 The proposed development would perform an economic role, at least in the short to medium term, in that it would provide employment during the construction phase, which would be a considerable period given the scale of the development. It would also create investment in the local and wider economy through the construction stage and new residents and their spending. This could help secure local facilities or make them more robust. Through increasing the housing stock, it would contribute to an expansion of the local housing market and could potentially improve the affordability of open market housing.

7.3 The scheme would have a social role as it will provide a significant amount of

additional housing that the District needs together with much needed affordable housing. The proposal can provide infrastructure improvements such as an improved bus service and connections, recreation and sporting facilities and new schools.

- 7.4 The proposal has an environmental role including providing housing in a highly accessible location, provision of public open spaces, and new landscape and tree planting. Set against this are moderate to minor landscape and visual impacts including altering the character of the rural landscape to urban of which views would be appreciated from vantage points particularly towards the south of the site and from the AONB, extension of the existing built development up to the A34 and closer to Harwell, loss of some trees and parts of hedgerows and potential minor negative impacts on the way that the local bat population uses the stream corridor.
- 7.5 The Council does not have a five year housing land supply. It is in the public interest that housing is provided to meet need acknowledged in the District. The economic and social roles of this development are in the public interest and these wider benefits are considered to outweigh the environmental harm identified above. All other technical aspects of the proposal have been adequately addressed.
- 7.6 The impacts of the proposal are not considered unreasonably adverse and officers consider that the harm does not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the NPPF as a whole. Consequently, the application is recommended for approval subject to conditions and a legal agreement to secure affordable housing and developer contributions.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 **It is recommended that authority to grant planning permission is delegated to the head of planning subject to:**

8.2 **1: A S106 agreement being entered into with the district council in order to secure contributions towards local infrastructure and to secure affordable housing and public open space, and;**

2: Headline conditions as follows (wording to be agreed):

1	Approved plans and document list
2	Approved land uses (as per land use budget plan)
3	Commencement time limit
4	Time limit for submission of first reserved matters
5	Time limit for submission of remaining reserved matters
6	Submission of a site-wide Development Delivery Strategy
7	Submission of a Housing Delivery Document
8	Submission of a site-wide masterplan
9	Submission of reserved matters prior to each phase or sub-phase
10	Maximum number of dwellings on site 4,254
11	All reserved matters applications to contain not less than 50 dwellings
12	Development briefs to be submitted for key areas (local centres, leisure/community building etc.)
13	Details of extra care housing scheme to be submitted
14	Detailed Design Code to be submitted
15	Reserved matters application to include design statement compliant with design code
16	Submission of a site-wide phasing plan

17	Submission of Construction Environment Management Plan
18	No development within the B4493 green buffer shown on submitted plans
19	Hours of construction
20	Hard and soft landscaping scheme
21	Replacement planting if damaged/destroyed in five years
22	Tree protection scheme
23	Landscape management and maintenance plan
24	Noise impact assessment and mitigation measures for non-residential
25	Noise impact assessment and mitigation measures for residential
26	Hours of operation to be submitted for non-residential uses
27	Landscape and ecology management plan to be submitted
28	Written scheme of archaeological investigation to be submitted
29	Staged program of archaeological mitigation in accordance with WSI
30	Intrusive investigation for contamination to be carried out
31	Details of lighting to be submitted
32	Means of enclosure required before occupation
33	Roads/footpaths to each non-residential unit to be completed before use
34	Roads/footpaths to each residential unit to be completed before use
35	Highways England conditions
36	No materials to be deposited on any public right of way (PROW)
37	No construction vehicles to use any PROW
38	No residential or commercial access along any PROW
39	No gates access open across any PROW
40	Broadland strategy to be submitted
41	Submission of a drainage strategy for on and off site works
42	Studies of water supply infrastructure to be carried out
43	Surface water drainage scheme to be submitted
44	No built development in flood zones 2 and 3
45	8m buffer zone either side of watercourses
46	Construction environment management plan: biodiversity to be submitted
47	Details of watercourse crossings to be submitted
48	No infiltration drainage of surface water to ground
49	Air quality assessment and mitigation scheme to be submitted
50	Dust mitigation carried out in accordance with IAQM guidance
51	Submission of an employment and skills plan
52	Details of playing pitches and their delivery/management

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