

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR (PLANNING & COMMUNITY STRATEGY)
TO THE EXECUTIVE
17 OCTOBER 2008

The Vale's Strategy for Sustainable Communities - 2008 to 2016
(the "Sustainable Community Strategy")

1.0 Introduction & Report Summary

- 1.1 Under the Local Government Act 2000 and Sustainable Communities Act 2007, the Council is responsible for preparing a Sustainable Community Strategy. Government guidance requires the strategy to have regard to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the Vale and to identify key priorities for action which will help secure that well being for the future.
- 1.2 The first community strategy for the District was prepared in 2004 for the period up to 2008. In 2007 the Council and its partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors (the Vale Partnership) began to prepare a new strategy.
- 1.3 This report provides information about the sustainable community strategy for 2008 to 2016 which was approved by the Vale Partnership Board on 2nd October 2008.
- 1.4 The contact officer for this report is Toby Warren, Head of Community Strategy (Tel: 01235 547695 Email toby.warren@whitehorsedc.gov.uk).

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 *Members are requested to note the information contained in this report.*
- 2.2 *Members are requested to recommend the adoption of the Vale's Strategy for Sustainable Communities - 2008 to 2016, by full Council.*
- 2.3 *Members are requested to formally recognise that John Robertson has been appointed Chair of the Vale Partnership Board.*

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

- 3.1 This report supports the Council's Vision and Priorities. It does not conflict with any Council strategy or any Council policy.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 Statutory Guidance on "Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities" states the starting point for improving local well-being is for local partners in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to create a shared vision and shared sense of priorities for a place. The vision will be set out in a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) which will describe how people, who live and work there, want it to change over time. Government sees the Sustainable Community Strategy as the overarching plan for promoting and improving the well-being of the area.

- 4.2 The Guidance states that LSPs provide the forum for collectively reviewing and steering public resources, through identifying priorities in the Sustainable Community Strategy. However LSPs are non-statutory bodies and are therefore not the ultimate decision makers on plans to achieve the priorities. All agreed plans must be formalised through the relevant local authority or through one of the other LSP partners.
- 4.3 The Vale Partnership is the LSP for the Vale of White Horse. The Vale Partnership Board is made up of representatives of the following organisations:
- Vale of White Horse District Council
 - Abingdon and Witney College
 - Age Concern Oxfordshire
 - Diocese of Oxford
 - Environment Agency
 - Learning and Skills Council
 - Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils
 - Oxfordshire County Council
 - Oxfordshire Economic Partnership
 - Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust
 - Oxfordshire Secondary Schools' Head Teachers' Association
 - Thames Valley Police
 - Thames Water
 - United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA)
 - Vale Housing Association
 - Vale Youth Forum
- 4.4 The Chair of the Vale Partnership Board is the Reverend John Robertson who is the Vicar of Grove, representing the Diocese of Oxford on the Board.
- 4.5 The Council's representative on the Board is the Leader of the Council and the Board is supported by the Deputy Director of Planning and Community Strategy, the Head of Community Strategy and the Community Strategy Officer. Other council officers attend meetings or provide advice as and when required.
- 4.6 The Partnership Board recognises that organisations not directly involved in the Partnership can also help to create sustainable communities It hopes that other organisations will use the Sustainable Community Strategy as a guide in developing their plans and in making decisions so that they too contribute to an improved quality of life in the Vale.
- 5.0 Preparing The Vale's Strategy for Sustainable Communities – 2008 to 2016 (the "Sustainable Community Strategy")**
- 5.1 The Vale Partnership produced the first community strategy for the District in 2004 for the period up to 2008. In 2007 the Vale Partnership Board began to look again at how it was going to achieve genuine improvements for local people.
- 5.2 At its meeting on 27th February 2007 the Board received a presentation from the Deputy Director of Planning and Community Strategy about the close relationship between a sustainable community strategy and the core strategy of the local development framework (LDF). The Vale Local Development Framework is the successor to the Vale Local Plan. It goes beyond traditional land use planning to bring

together policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of communities and how they function.

- 5.3 The Board agreed that the revised strategy and the core strategy of the LDF will identify common issues for now and the future but the response to the issues will differ because the community strategy concentrates on 'social' interventions whilst the LDF concentrates on 'physical' interventions.
- 5.4 The issues and priorities set out in a community strategy should inform and direct services in the future. There are many issues but limited resources so it is very important to not only to agree what are the priorities are but to also understand why they are the priorities. At the Board meeting on 22nd May 2007 individual Board members confirmed their service priorities and identified how these service priorities address the key issues that are faced by residents of the Vale. Evidence for the choice of service priorities was also provided and it was agreed that the choices should also be tested through public consultation.
- 5.5 In autumn 2007 the Vale Partnership prepared an 'Issues and Options' report for the revised community strategy and LDF core strategy. The report outlined the issues that the Vale will face in the future and started to consider ways in which they might be addressed. The Partnership then consulted with residents, businesses and the Vale Voice Citizens Panel to learn more about what the issues facing the Vale in the future might be, and how local people and businesses would suggest dealing with them. Several hundred residents and businesses wrote in and attended meetings and this feedback helped with the preparation of the strategy. More information about the issues consulted on is included as an appendix to this report.

6.0 The Vale's Strategy for Sustainable Communities – 2008 to 2016

- 6.1 Underpinning the actions in the strategy is the need for sustainability. This is generally defined as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To make sure that the strategy is sustainable it is based on the following principles:
- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
 - maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment, and
 - effective protection of the environment and wise use of natural resources
- 6.2 The strategy is a commitment by the Council and its partners (the Vale Partnership) to work together with available resources to provide services that will help to improve quality of life and maintain communities where people want to live and work, now and in the future ("sustainable communities").
- 6.3 The Vale Partnership recognises that there will be many changes in the future and a long term strategy covering many years would be unrealistic. The strategy covers an eight year period (from 2008 to 2016) and acts as a starting point in achieving the Partnership's vision. The strategy will be regularly monitored and reviewed and a detailed plan will set out how the Vale Partnership will work together to achieve the priorities. Partners will identify whether existing work supports this strategy. Where there are gaps, partners will work together to fill them.
- 6.4 The Partnership's vision for the future is:

A sustainable Vale;

- With prosperous, inclusive and thriving communities that have good access to a range of housing, jobs and services.
- Where everyone can feel safe and enjoy life.
- Where our needs can be met without compromising the natural and built heritage or the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

6.5 This is a long term vision but because the world is a constantly changing place the Strategy for Sustainable Communities is a strategy for the medium term which will help with progress towards the long term vision.

6.6 Accordingly the Vale Partnership has identified a number of priorities where it will be focussing its activity in the next eight years. At the end of each year the Partnership will monitor the progress in achieving the vision and, periodically, it will review its priorities to make sure that they are still appropriate for the Vale in 2016.

6.7 Priorities for action

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone:

- Healthier communities;
- Improving quality of life for older people;
- Safer communities;
- Fostering a greater sense of community;
- A good understanding of town and parish priorities;
- Involving young people;
- Helping those without cars to access jobs and services;
- Affordable homes;
- Good quality homes; and
- Access to good quality green spaces, sport, cultural and leisure facilities.

- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment:

- Addressing economic weaknesses;
- Building on our economic strengths, and
- Maintaining and enhancing the health and vitality of the Vale's market town centres.

- effective protection of the environment and wise use of natural resources:

- A low carbon Vale;
- Living with extreme weather conditions;
- Using resources wisely;
- Reducing waste and increasing recycling, and
- A high quality natural and historic environment.

7.0 **Public Consultation**

7.1 Public consultation on a draft version sustainable community strategy took place in the spring and summer of 2008. Individuals and organisations listed in the Statement of Community Involvement received a copy of the draft strategy. Public area forum meetings were held at Abingdon, Cumnor, Faringdon and Wantage; as well as a number of meetings with special interest groups and businesses. Details of the consultation were provided on the Council's website and in Vale Views.

- 7.2 A sustainability appraisal panel was convened. Sustainability appraisal is a method of testing and improving the extent to which community strategies (and other plans and policies) contribute to sustainable development. The appraisal process fully reflects the Government's sustainable development strategy and its framework for integrating social, economic and environmental concerns.
- 7.3 The Panel was made up of representatives of the public, private and voluntary sectors who had a good knowledge of the issues faced by the Vale but had not been involved in the preparation of the strategy. More information about the public consultation and the sustainability appraisal is included as an appendix to this report.

8.0 Action Planning and Performance Management

- 8.1 The Partnership Board has noted that many of the actions in the strategy are already being implemented and further planning is not required for these actions. It has agreed that the Board should concentrate on 'filling the gaps' by planning activities to achieve actions which are important for the Vale but for which no plans are currently in place.
- 8.2 The Board has also agreed that it should monitor all actions so that it can confirm that the strategy is progressing. The Board will only intervene if there is evidence of underperformance.
- 8.3 An indicator or indicators help in monitoring performance, as does a baseline and target. Where ever possible the indicator is one for which data is already (or will be) collected for the foreseeable future (e.g. One of the new National Indicators which are used in the Oxfordshire Local Area Agreement 2008-11 [LAA].). Where an appropriate indicator does not already exist an indicator for which data can be (or will be) collected with relative ease is used.
- 8.4 A 'traffic light' performance monitoring system will help the Board to identify underperforming actions. It is intended that performance should be reported to the Board at its quarterly meetings (albeit that data for some of the indicators can only be updated annually). The Council's Performance Officer has proposed that performance should be also reported to the Council's Executive as well as the Board. This sharing of information will encourage partnership working.
- 8.5 The Board has started to prepare the action plan for the new strategy and the target date for completion is 4th December 2008.

9.0 Equality Implications

- 9.1 One of the strategy's three principles is 'social progress which recognises the needs of everyone'. The Sustainability Appraisal Panel was asked to consider if any actions would have a negative impact any particular community of interest. The Panel did not raise any major concerns relating to equality.

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 Under the Local Government Act 2000 and Sustainable Communities Act 2007, the Council is responsible for preparing a Sustainable Community Strategy. Once prepared the Sustainable Community Strategy must be agreed in full Council is

accordance with the Local Authorities (Functions & Responsibilities) Regulations 2000/2853.

10.2 The Vale's Strategy for Sustainable Communities - 2008 to 2016 has been prepared with due regard to statutory guidance so that it can serve as the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy.

11.0 Financial Implications

11.1 The Strategy for Sustainable Communities - 2008 to 2016 has been prepared on the basis that the resources of the Partnership organisations and others are already fully allocated and successful progress is dependent on the best use of existing resources. Therefore the strategy does not have any new financial implications for the Council.

TOBY WARREN
HEAD OF COMMUNITY STRATEGY

RODGER HOOD
DEPUTY DIRECTOR (PLANNING & COMMUNITY STRATEGY)

Background Papers:

1. Details of the Issues and Options and Sustainable Community Strategy Public Consultations and Summary of Responses
2. The Vale's Strategy for Sustainable Communities - 2008 to 2016 (without photographs)

1. Details of the Issues and Options and Sustainable Community Strategy Public Consultations and Summary of Responses

Issues & Options Report Public Consultation

The Issues and Options Report in autumn 2007 was the first stage in preparing the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework. A summary of the issues identified by the Partnership is listed below:

Social Issues

- The Vale has an ageing population. Between 2006 and 2026 the population in the District aged over 75 is estimated to increase by 65%.
- Many residents have reasonable incomes but in 2007 6,000 residents (5% of the Vale's population) were dependent on means tested benefits and around 1,900 children live in low income households.
- It is estimated that 20% of adults in the Vale are obese.
- In terms of reported crime, the Vale is one of the safest districts in South East England, but the fear of crime is a real concern locally.
- Many young people say they do not have things to do in their leisure time.
- In 2006 around 44% of pupils in the Vale's state schools did not achieve five or more A* to C GCSE passes.
- There is a good sense of community in the Vale but many residents acknowledge that they do not have the time to be involved in their local community.
- The average house price in the Vale is nearly nine times higher than the average income.
- The Vale is a rural district and access to services and jobs in many areas is difficult, with many people having to use a car rather than public transport.

Economic Issues

- Traffic congestion, particularly on the A34, will continue to affect the competitiveness of local businesses
- The Vale has six times the national average of research and development jobs but China, India and other emerging economies are investing heavily in the skills needed to compete with our economy.
- Our town centres are not all enjoying the full benefits of the Vale's economic success
- Farming continues to change, with higher grain prices making livestock farming difficult and an increased interest in growing biomass or crops for bio-fuel; both of which have the potential to change the look of the countryside.

Environment Issues

- On 20 July 2007 a record amount of rain caused extensive flooding in the Vale, a sign that flooding and other extreme weather conditions may become more frequent in the future.
- In 2006 every person in the Vale produced an average of a third of a tonne of rubbish.
- There is a substantial body of evidence that the Earth's climate is changing as a result of an increase in greenhouse gases which are trapping more heat at the planet's surface.

- The growing population in the Vale and the South East will place increasing pressure on water supplies; Thames Water is consulting on proposals to build a large reservoir near Abingdon.
- The draft South East Plan proposes that 11,550 new homes should be built in the Vale between 2006 and 2026.

There was a period of public consultation about the Issues and Options report which involved public area forum meetings at Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon and Wantage and a number of meetings with special interest groups and businesses. Individuals and organisations listed in the Statement of Community Involvement received a copy of the report. Details were provided on the Council's website and in Vale Views.

A questionnaire designed to indicate key issues was included in Vale Views. Over 300 questionnaires were returned and the responses were as follows:

Issue	Ticks
Social and Community	
Lack of affordable housing	119
Households on low incomes	34
An ageing population	165
Increasing rates of obesity and low rates of physical activity	43
Fear of crime	93
Difficulties of reaching jobs and services for those without a car	98
Business and Community	
Global competition	12
Skill shortages	42
Maintaining the viability of the Vale's market towns	164
The Environment	
Addressing the causes of climate change	77
Adapting to the effects of climate change	50
Addressing the impacts of increasing traffic	139
Reducing the amount of waste going to landfill	102
Protecting the Vale's heritage	60
New Development	
Deciding the directions of growth at Didcot and Wantage & Grove	92
Identifying broad locations for homes elsewhere in the Vale	40
Identifying where new jobs should be located	8
Creating sustainable and thriving communities	118

The Vale Voice Citizens Panel is made up of a demographically and geographically representative sample of the district's population. The Panel was also asked about the most important issues and possible options. The following table shows the percentage of respondents that thought that certain issues and options were very important:

	Very important
Meeting the needs of an aging population (e.g. helping older people to live in their own homes).	61%
Meeting the needs of young people in the Vale, in terms of education	63%

and play.	
Encouraging healthy lifestyles by ensuring that everyone has access to open space, sports and recreational facilities	44%
Provide support for public transport services.	58%
Improve facilities for cycling and walking.	44%
Encourage employers to provide more opportunities for “on the job” training and apprenticeships and actively help their employees develop.	47%
Encourage communities to purchase locally produce products and buy goods from independent traders.	40%
Prepare action plans designed to improve the retail sector in the town centres and consider establishing Business Improvement Districts for the Vale’s main market town centres	41%
Improve energy efficiency in existing buildings	55%
Improving public transport	50%
Increasing the range and amount of materials that can be recycled	77%
Promoting locally produced food	45%
Review and improve the effectiveness of flood defence measures.	47%

(Source: Vale of White Horse Citizens Panel Questionnaire 7 – Topline Results – 12 June 2008 – 585 Total Responses)

Sustainable Community Strategy Public Consultation

Public consultation on a draft version sustainable community strategy took place in the spring and summer of 2008. Individuals and organisations listed in the Statement of Community Involvement received a copy of the draft strategy. Public area forum meetings were held at Abingdon, Cumnor, Faringdon and Wantage as well as a number of meetings with special interest groups and businesses. Details were provided on the Council’s website and in Vale Views.

Thames Valley Police Authority lent the Council electronic voting pads to use at the area forums to help everyone decide, as a group, what the priorities for action should be. The voting pads have also made the meetings more interesting.

The area forums did attract many local residents, despite details been provided in Vale Views. Attendance averaged about twenty people at each forum. However residents who did attend generally appreciated the opportunity to discuss issues with councillors and officers.

Generally the most important priorities for residents participating in the area forums were:

- A good understanding of town and parish priorities
- Affordable homes
- Maintaining and enhancing the health and vitality of the Vale’s market town centres
- Living with extreme weather conditions
- Using resources wisely
- A high quality natural and historic environment

Response to Public Consultation

Response from Consultees	Response by Head of Community Strategy on behalf of the Vale Partnership Board
General	
<p>The Vale has been developing its strategy at the same time as the Oxfordshire Partnership has been working on its strategy Oxfordshire 2030. There has been considerable collaboration between officers working on both strategies and we are pleased to see that priorities in the two strategies are complementary and the draft Vale strategy clearly references the Oxfordshire Partnership and Local Area Agreement. We are keen to ensure that priorities for action in the strategy are areas where the Vale Partnership can clearly make a difference through delivery of outcomes.(Oxfordshire County Council)</p>	<p>The Partnership is pleased to note that priorities are complimentary.</p>
<p>Objection to Thames Water's involvement in the strategy and partnership</p>	<p>Thames Water is a major utility company that serves all the residents of the Vale. It is proposing the construction of a major reservoir but it understands and appreciates the concerns of residents and other members of the Vale Partnership.</p>
<p>More organisations should be members of the Vale Partnership Board</p>	<p>The Board reviews its membership on a regular basis but it has agreed if it becomes too large it will be difficult to manage meetings so that it acts as a board rather than a forum. All service organisations in the Vale can help to promote and improve the well-being of the Vale. The Foreword refers to the extensive consultation which influenced the strategy and invites all organisations in the Vale to take note of the strategy.</p>
<p>What is a sustainable community strategy?</p>	<p>The title has been amended to 'Working together for a better Vale – A Strategy for Sustainable Communities in the Vale '. The title will hopefully make the document more interesting for the Vale's residents and businesses but still make it clear that the document is the Vale's sustainable community strategy.</p>

Response from Consultees	Response by Head of Community Strategy on behalf of the Vale Partnership Board
What is the purpose of the strategy?	The Foreword has been amended so that it summarises the purpose of the strategy and explains that the strategy is a start to the achievement of a long term vision.
Some of the language used is not clear to a lay reader	<p>A careful check has been made of the language used in the strategy to make sure that it is clear. However it has to be accepted that the strategy is aimed at service providers and as a result some technical language can not be avoided.</p> <p>Two priorities have been reworded to make them clearer: 'A good understanding of local need' has been amended to 'A good understanding of town and parish priorities'. 'Addressing economic need' has been amended to 'Addressing economic weaknesses'. A public summary of the strategy will be produced.</p>
Housing	
The strategy does not refer to extra care housing	The following action under 'Improving quality of life for older people' has been amended to make specific mention of extra care housing because of the likely significance of this type of housing in the future: 'Provide specialist housing suited to the needs of the elderly (e.g. extra care homes), both in the Vale's main towns and where appropriate in some villages.'
Safer Communities	
The wording of some of the community safety actions creates the impression that the Vale suffers from high levels of crime and it should be made clear that the Vale is a safe place	The following has been added to the introduction of the 'Safer Communities section to emphasise that the Vale is already a safe place: 'The Partnership wants to make sure the Vale remains a safe place to live and work.' and an addition action has been added: 'Reduce the fear of crime by making sure that local people are aware that the Vale is a safe place to live and work'.
Helping those without a car to	

Response from Consultees	Response by Head of Community Strategy on behalf of the Vale Partnership Board
access services	
The strategy does not refer to the importance of access to libraries and other community facilities	The following action under 'Helping those without a car to access services' has been amended to make specific mention of community facilities and libraries: 'Make sure that land allocated for new development is located where it can be accessed by as many different travel modes as possible, in particular by public transport, and where it is close to the jobs and services (including community facilities and libraries) that people need for their everyday lives'.
Access to good quality green spaces, sport, cultural and leisure facilities	
There is no reference in the strategy to the importance of rights of ways	The following action under 'Access to good quality green spaces, sport, cultural and leisure facilities' has been amended to make specific mention of public rights of way: 'Make better use of existing assets such as the River Thames, Ridgeway and public rights of way.'
Living with extreme weather	
There is no reference in the strategy to the importance of business continuity plans	The following action under 'Living with extreme weather' has been amended to make specific mention of business continuity plans: 'Promote the use of community response plans and business continuity plans for extreme weather events.'
A high quality natural and historic environment	
It is important that the environment is enhanced as well as protected	The introduction to the section on 'A high quality natural and historic environment' has been amended to include 'enhance' as well as protect the Vale's distinctive natural and historic character.
There is no reference in the strategy to tackling fly-tipping	The following action has been amended to make specific mention of fly tipping: 'Tackle fly tipping and inappropriate or unsightly advertising, lighting and fly posting.'

Sustainability Appraisal Panel

Sustainability appraisal is a method of testing and improving the extent to which community strategies (and other plans and policies) contribute to sustainable development. The appraisal process fully reflects the Government's sustainable development strategy and its framework for integrating social, economic and environmental concerns.

This process of peer review usually produces a number of common sense recommendations which can result in a better, more focused strategy.

The membership of the appraisal panel for the Vale's Strategy for Sustainable Communities was:

- Hilary Burr, Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action
- Meryl Smith, Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
- Val Johnson, Oxford City Council Partnership Manager
- Jean Mitchell, Oxfordshire Economic Partnership
- Lan Jenner, Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust
- Harry Barton, Northmoor Trust
- Chris Freeman, Oxfordshire Sports Partnership
- Patsy Townsend, Thames Valley Partnership
- Tony Hadland, Vale & Downland Museum
- Estella Packwood, Oxon Chinese Community Advice Centre

The panel was facilitated by Lindsey Poole of the Thames Valley Partnership. The panel conclusions were:

Panel Conclusions	Response by Head of Community Strategy on behalf of the Vale Partnership Board
The strategy generally conforms with the stated principles of sustainability	Noted
Liked layout, easy to understand and comprehensive in coverage of issues	Noted
The links to the Local Development Framework are a good idea	Noted
Language needs to be reviewed and more direct and 'doing' words need to be used	Language has been reviewed
The cross-cutting nature of the strategy needs to be emphasised	This will be covered in the action plan
The Partnership must show it is adding value by working together	This will be covered in the action plan
There need to be clearer links between the plan and the intended outcomes	This will be covered in the action plan
The strategy needs a greater sense of local identity	Examples of local partnership working will be included in the published strategy. The action plan will provide more detail about actions that should

	be implemented in specific communities rather than Vale wide
The role of the voluntary sector needs to be strengthened	This will be covered in the action plan
There need to more references to the needs of ethnic minorities and other communities of interest	Additional detail has been included in several sections of the strategy
Sustainability is equally applicable regardless of the size of a community	Noted

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