

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)
TO THE STRATEGIC AND LOCAL PLAN ADVISORY GROUP
31 AUGUST 2005

**Joint Inspectors' Report Relating to the Major Housing Development West of
Didcot**

1.0 Introductions and Summary

- 1.1 Members will recall that as part of the Vale's local plan applies to the proposed major development area west of Didcot which is also covered by the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, a joint local plan inquiry was held into objections to this development at the end of 2004. The joint Inspectors' Report was published in May 2005. Copies are available in the Members Lounge in Abingdon and can be viewed via the Council's web site.
- 1.2 The Inspectors' recommendations relate mainly to the housing development west of Didcot. Appendix 1 to this report lists the Inspectors' recommendations, Appendix 2 contains the officers' comments and recommendations, Appendix 3 is a list of the draft proposed modifications arising as a result of considering the Inspectors' report and Appendix 4 shows the proposed modifications incorporated into the text of the housing chapter in the local plan.
- 1.3 The normal process following the Council's consideration of the Inspectors' recommendations would be to publish proposed modifications to the plan for further comment. However, this cannot take place until the Council has received and considered the recommendations in the Inspector's Report on the main part of the Local Plan. The Inspector has indicated that he expects his report to be with the Planning Inspectorate by the end of the year. Rather than not progressing the Inspectors' recommendations for Didcot at all at this stage, it is considered that in view of the planning applications for Didcot West, it would be useful for the Council to consider the Inspector's recommendations on the joint inquiry for Didcot and publish 'draft proposed modifications'. These will be formally published with the local plan next year.
- 1.4 The contact officers for this report are Nick Burroughs, Principal Planning Officer, extension 496, and Katie Barrett, Section Head (Planning Strategy) tel no 01235 640339.

2.0 Recommendation.

- 2.1 *That the Advisory Group recommends the Executive to i) agree the officer's observations and recommendations in Appendix 2 and paragraph 4.5 below; and ii) that the recommended changes to the draft plan, as set out in Appendices 3 and 4 be posted as draft proposed modifications to the plan on the Council's web site pending the publication of the proposed modifications to the local plan next year.*

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

- 3.1 This report supports strands A, B, D, F and G of the Council's Vision Statement and does not conflict with any existing Council policies or strategies.

4.0 The Inspectors' Recommendations

4.1 The main recommendations made in the Joint Inspectors' Report are:

- a) the boundary of the housing development west of Didcot should be as shown on Fig 8.1 in the Vale's local plan (recommendation no 4)
- b) the land developed for housing should be 80 hectares at an average net density of 40 dwellings a hectare as in the Vale Local Plan (recommendation no.6)
- c) the two Councils and the County Council should consider detailed options for an A4130 to A417 link road, to include a Harwell by-pass. For the section between the A4130 and the B4493, this link should not require additional land outside the boundary of the major development area (recommendation no.13);
- d) policy TR3 relating to pedestrian and cycle routes, which had been deleted at second deposit stage, be replaced with a new policy TR3 as follows:

“ The needs of pedestrians and cyclists will be taken into account in determining proposals for development, and in the design and implementation of highway and traffic management schemes, by seeking the provision of safe and convenient facilities and secure and covered cycle parking.” (recommendation no.14)

- 4.2 With regard to the detailed options for an A4130 to A417 link, see c) above, it should be noted that a Harwell bypass is not a proposal in either the Vale or South Oxfordshire draft local plans. The Inspectors indicated their disappointment that very little in the way of approved transport proposals were put before the inquiry (para. 11.2.143) and considered they did not have sufficient information to make any firm recommendations regarding the wording of a proposal for a principal distributor road which could incorporate an eastern bypass for Harwell (para. 20.1.1). For this reason their recommendation number 13 urges urgent consideration of detailed options for a link between the A4130 and the A417 to include a Harwell bypass. Your officers consider that reference could be made to this in paragraph 8.51 of the Local Plan (see Appendix 2, officer's recommendation on Inspectors' recommendation 13, and Appendix 3 to this report).
- 4.3 The Inspectors' Report also considered objections that were made at the Didcot Joint Inquiry to the Vale's local plan policies GS1-development in existing settlements, DC11-agricultural land, DC14-flood risk & water run-off, TR2-implications of integrated transport and land use strategies for new development, TR7-transport assessments and travel plans, NE10-urban fringes and countryside gaps and H1-the managed release of sites. As the Inspectors' recommendation in each case was that there should be no change, no further comment is made on these recommendations.
- 4.4 An issue on which objection had been made to the Vale's local plan as well as South Oxfordshire's local plan, but which is not addressed in the Joint Inspectors' Report, concerns whether the local plan should refer to a specific period of time for the payment of commuted sums to cover maintenance costs. In summary, the period shown in the first deposit draft Vale plan was 10 years (paragraph 4.20), but at second deposit this was increased to 25 years for facilities provided in association with major development at Didcot, Grove and Faringdon (paragraphs 4.20 and 8.50) in line with South Oxfordshire's local plan.
- 4.5 The Inspector's recommendation on this matter contained in the report on the main part of South Oxfordshire's local plan inquiry refers to "a commuted sum equivalent to at least 10 years' maintenance costs to be provided by the developer may also be sought" (Section 5.23, paras. 5.23.1 – 5.23.9). Since the Inspector's report was received the Government has issued revised guidance on planning obligations in Circular 05/2005. This states at paragraph B18 that it may be appropriate to require developers to provide for the subsequent maintenance of facilities in perpetuity. It is understood that South Oxfordshire's officers are recommending their cabinet to change the lower case text of the local plan to refer to provision being made for

the maintenance of outdoor playing space which may be required in perpetuity. Your officers consider that it would not be logical for this Council to have a different approach to what is, in effect, the same development. It is, therefore, proposed that, subject to South Oxfordshire District Council's decision the final sentence of paragraph 8.50 should be changed to refer to maintenance of outdoor play space in perpetuity.

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ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)

Background Papers :