

Executive Committee

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Council

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Report of **Head of Planning Services**

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Local development framework: towards a core strategy

Recommendations

The Executive is asked to recommend to council and council is asked to resolve

- 1. The LDF core strategy will not include a major housing site for up to 1500 homes south west of Abingdon as no deliverable solutions have been identified to resolve the traffic problems and*
- 2. Work proceeds on the core strategy on the basis of including a major housing site north east of Wantage.*

The Executive is asked to agree and recommend Council to note

- 3. That consultation is carried out for a six week period on the following*
 - a) the amount and distribution of housing outlined in paragraph 14 below. This includes the preferred strategic sites west of Didcot, south of Park Road at Faringdon and north east of Wantage, and a new strategic housing site in the northern part of the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus*
 - b) a policy seeking affordable housing on all new sites in the district of three or more homes (see paragraphs 15 – 18 below) subject to individual schemes remaining viable*
 - c) a general policy relating to gypsies and travellers covering the matters in paragraph 21 below*
 - d) current expectations on future economic development growth and the amount of land to be identified in the local development framework (paragraphs 23 - 25 below)*

- e) details of potential redevelopment schemes in Abingdon and Faringdon to provide additional retail floorspace (paragraphs 28 – 33 below)*
- f) a proposed new road west of the A34, linking the A417 south west of Didcot with the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus (this replaces a link from the A417 to the A34 Chilton interchange to the east of the A34 outlined in the preferred options report)*
- g) a policy to safeguard land for the Upper Thames reservoir proposed by Thames Water covering the matters in paragraph 37 below.*

4. That the consultation report will propose that the core strategy will not

- a) contain information about the size of new homes, which will be contained in a supplementary planning document*
- b) include detailed policies for the centres of Wantage and Botley, which will be covered in the managing development document to be produced at a later stage*
- c) safeguard land for an Abingdon southern bypass, the Wantage western relief road or the reopening of the A34 slip roads at Drayton, as referred to in the preferred options report, as there is no justification in transport terms for these schemes at the present time. If a need is established through the revised local transport plan (LTP3) land can be safeguarded through the managing development document*
- d) include policies for the Green Belt, which will be covered in the managing development document. However it should be made clear that development is not proposed in the Green Belt*
- e) include detailed policies for the centres of Wantage and Botley, which will be covered in the managing development document to be produced at a later stage.*

The Executive is asked to agree that

- 5. Authority to approve the consultation report is delegated to the shared head of planning in consultation with the planning portfolio holder*
- 6. The revised timetable for preparing the core strategy and managing development document in appendix 6 is used as a basis for revising the local development scheme; and note that the planning portfolio holder will agree the revised draft local development scheme for submission to the government office*
- 7. A joint area action plan is prepared for Didcot with South Oxfordshire District Council, on land up to and including the A34, to cover the matters referred to in paragraph 42 below; and that this is included in the revised local development scheme.*

Purpose of report

- 1. It has not been possible to progress the work preparing the draft core strategy to the original timetable. This was to agree it at council on 9 December and publish it in January. The government office has advised that additional housing sites should be identified to give flexibility to ensure the housing targets for the Vale in 2026 are met. This requires additional consultation before the draft core strategy can be published.
- 2. The purpose of this report is to set out the next steps in the preparation of a draft core strategy.

Summary of content

3. The report sets out
 - the key recommendations of the Strategic and Local Planning Advisory Group so far
 - advises that further consultation be undertaken to assess the reaction of the public and key organisations to revised proposals and
 - a draft timetable for completing the core strategy and revising the local development scheme.

Relationship with corporate plan

4. The report provides information leading to the publication of the draft core strategy that will guide development in the Vale to 2026. The core strategy is a central element of the statutory duty (under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) to prepare a local development framework. It will help meet people's need for housing, support a vibrant local economy and help the council rise to the challenge of climate change.

Background

5. The core strategy preferred options report was published for consultation in January this year. A summary of the responses received is available on the council's web site and the individual responses are available in the development policy team. The Strategic and Local Planning Advisory Group considered all the responses in May 2009 and concluded that additional land should be identified for housing to ensure the targets in the South East Plan to 2026 are met. For the core strategy to be found sound when it is examined by an independent inspector there will have to be consultation on any new policies and proposals it is intended to include that were not raised in the preferred options report. It is also considered that the recommendations of the advisory group on the proposals for a major new housing site either south west of Abingdon or north east of Wantage should be agreed by full council to give clarity to the public on this key decision.

Strategic housing site in south west Abingdon or north east Wantage

6. The preferred options report suggested two alternatives for a major new housing site. The advisory group accepted that the over whelming evidence is that major housing development should not be pursued south west of Abingdon at this time, principally on traffic and air quality grounds.
 - The Highways Agency considers that major development at Abingdon will exacerbate congestion at the Marcham interchange and on the A34.
 - The county council objects to the housing development and the proposed link road south west of Abingdon on transport grounds. While the link road would give some relief to the double mini roundabout at the north end of Drayton Road, the extra housing would add to the highway stresses on the surrounding network, particularly at the A34 Marcham interchange, Marcham Road itself, and also in Steventon, Drayton, Marcham and Milton villages. The road would be unlikely to attract regional or local transport funding and the county council has no intention to consider the need for an Abingdon bypass at this time.
 - The council's environmental protection team consider that additional housing in Abingdon could worsen air quality in the town – the air quality management area for Abingdon town centre has recently been extended to Ock Street and Marcham Road.

- English Heritage is concerned that significant archaeological remains that could be of national importance might exist to the north of the scheduled area and along the line of the road.

7. Although objections and concerns have been expressed about major housing development north east of Wantage, none is as fundamental as the objections to the proposed housing site south west of Abingdon.

- Natural England is concerned about the impact of development on the adjacent area of outstanding natural beauty.
- SEERA and the county council indicate they would need to be satisfied that extra housing (above the 3,400 in the South East Plan) would be sustainable, could be delivered, would not cause problems for the existing community and the transport implications and other infrastructure requirements had been fully examined.

On the other hand the Highways Agency, Oxfordshire County Council and the Primary Care Trust prefer major housing at Wantage and Grove rather than Abingdon.

8. Concerns have been raised to both developments, particularly from the town and parish councils and local residents covering additional matters as flooding, traffic, lack of infrastructure to serve the developments. Objections have been made that additional housing is unnecessary; it would close the open gaps between settlements; result in the loss of good quality farmland and a disproportionate population increase. In the case of Abingdon there are concerns that the town is not identified as a location for major growth in the South East Plan; the proposal is not consistent with the government's planning policy statement (PPS) 12; there is a lack of services nearby, poor links to the town centre and serious traffic congestion. Additional concerns are that housing would be prominent in the landscape; the road would have an adverse effect on the Ock Meadow local nature reserve; the potential conflict with the draw-down channel from the proposed reservoir and the route of the Wilts & Berks canal; and the effect of the nearby sewage works. In Wantage there are particular concerns about the lack of local jobs; poor links to the strategic road network (the A338 and A417); harm to the historic character of Wantage and Charlton village and the need to change parish boundaries. The site is a well used amenity area and is prominent in the landscape where development would harm the skyline and cause light pollution. Many respondents want the north eastern relief road completed before any new development is built.

9. In response to these concerns

- Neither of the sites proposed is in the flood plain or subject to other forms of flooding as shown in the strategic flood risk assessment. Any development would have to establish the site can be drained satisfactorily and would not worsen or cause flooding problems elsewhere
- Major development will be required to provide or contribute to additional services to support the people living in the new homes
- Despite the recession councils are expected to proceed with their LDFs and provide for the housing figures set out in the South East Plan. Additional housing will be needed in the Vale to support the growing population and the local economy. If government changes this approach, it will be considered at that time
- Any development on the edges of towns of the scale required to meet the regional requirement will result in the loss of farmland and reduce the open gaps to the nearby villages
- 1500 homes in Abingdon is about an 11% increase in the number of homes and about a 35% increase in the case of Wantage.
- The county council has established through the Southern Central Oxfordshire Transport Study (SCOTS) that a new road is needed north east of Wantage to serve the development of 3,400 homes at Wantage and Grove. This road is not part of the

bid that has been made to the regional infrastructure fund and additional housing in the area would help fund its provision. No additional road building would be required beyond that already identified in SCOTS if a further 1500 homes are built in Wantage. However additional homes would be expected to contribute to improved bus services to jobs at Milton Park, Harwell, Didcot and Oxford. The county council is currently assessing when the new road should be built, but some development will occur in the area (including on Grove airfield) before it is built.

- Both sites are prominent in the landscape and the agents working on behalf of the landowners north east of Wantage are assessing how this could be mitigated.

The location of housing in Wantage and Grove

10. Other landowners around Wantage and Grove think their land is preferable to north east Wantage including land north of Grove; north of the airfield allocation; north west of Wantage and a variety of sites south of Wantage. Concerns have also been raised about the deliverability of the airfield development. However, discussions with the developers indicate that a planning application will be made in the middle of 2010 for 2,500 homes. A planning application could be determined on the airfield before the core strategy is adopted and this would be in accordance with the local plan.
11. Any development beyond the 3,400 homes in the South East Plan will depend on the construction of the Wantage north eastern link road; the best chance of securing its delivery is by locating housing adjacent to it as new roads will have to be built to serve the new housing and no third party land is involved. All the other sites would be dependent on a road across land over which they have no control and so would effectively be 'ransomed'. Although the land north east of Wantage is attractive and prominent in the wider landscape, it will change with the building of the link road. Additional housing north of Grove is on lower quality farmland and is less attractive and visible in the landscape. However, it would be difficult for the community to absorb as it is already projected to increase by 80% with the airfield development and a further 750 - 1500 homes would more than double its size.
12. The advisory group considers that locating an additional 1500 homes at Wantage and Grove is more sustainable than spreading it around the larger villages and will be better able to deliver new infrastructure and services. It recommends that provision be made for 4,900 homes at Wantage and Grove, and work proceeds on the basis that a new strategic site is identified for up to 1500 homes on land north east of Wantage.

The amount and location of housing land to 2026

13. The advisory group concurs with the officers' view that to give flexibility to ensure the housing targets in the South East Plan are met and ensure the core strategy is found sound by the Planning Inspectorate, additional land should be identified for housing. It is proposed that the local development framework should identify land for an additional two years' supply (ie 10% of the 20 year requirement). This involves land for an additional 1,024 homes in Central Oxfordshire (land for 11,265 homes compared with the SE Plan requirement of 10,240) and 132 homes in the rest of the Vale policy area (land for 1,450 homes compared with a target of 1,320). However, it is unlikely all the housing identified will be built in the plan period and so will contribute to development beyond 2026. The reasons for this approach are
 - Government Office concerns about the significant reliance on four large sites in Central Oxfordshire where development has not yet started (Grove airfield, Great Western Park, additional homes west of Didcot and either south west Abingdon or north east Wantage)

- Planning Policy Statement 3 – ‘Housing’ requires that authorities identify different delivery options in case homes are not built at the expected rate - plans are expected to be sufficiently flexible to respond to a range of circumstances
- The slow rate of building to date compared with the South East Plan target (between April 2006 and 2009 1,300 homes were built compared to a three year pro rata requirement of 1,730). Although there are indications that the housing market is recovering, it will continue to delay development
- The requirement for plans to show a 15 year supply of land for housing at the date of adoption. The core strategy is currently programmed to be adopted in March 2011 which gives no margin for a delay in the timetable. Slippage will occur due to the need for additional consultation.

14. The advisory group recommends the following distribution of housing land. To assess the implications for the additional land that needs to be identified a detailed breakdown of figures is in Appendix 1.

Central Oxfordshire

- 1200 homes in Abingdon
- 4900 in Wantage and Grove
- 2750 at Didcot
- 750 at Botley
- 1665 homes to be found in the rural areas. The additional homes could be provided as follows
 - o Up to 400 homes on the northern part of the Harwell Science and Innovation Camps
 - o About 230 homes in villages, focussing on land within the built up areas and previously developed land on the edges.

The Rest of the Vale

- 1090 homes in Faringdon
- 360 homes in the rural areas focussing on land within the built up areas of villages and previously developed land on the edges.

Affordable housing

15. The local plan establishes that affordable housing will be sought on sites of 15 or more dwellings in urban areas and five dwellings in rural areas. The preferred options report noted the council would like to reduce the size of site where affordable housing is sought to increase the amount of affordable homes built. A viability study has been undertaken which concluded that the threshold at which the affordable housing requirement comes into effect could be lowered to five across the district. However, where sites have a high existing value, such as large houses in grounds, affordable housing may not be viable on sites with less than ten houses due to the higher purchase costs of the land.
16. As the delivery of affordable housing is a corporate priority, the consultants (BNP Paribas) were requested to re-examine the evidence to test whether a threshold of three dwellings was feasible. They consider that with a minimum density of 30 dwellings to the hectare a threshold of three dwellings would be viable at 2007 sale values where the existing use values are low (agricultural, parking, community) or medium (industrial). Tenure is expected to be all social rent on small sites. The consultant states “Providing the policy is applied sensitively, taking full account of site circumstances and development economics, my view is that the evidence provides a reasonable basis for a threshold of three units”.
17. Looking at planning permissions granted since July 2006 a maximum of 94 extra affordable homes could have been delivered if the threshold had been five homes, and

an extra 142 homes if the threshold had been three homes¹. While these are significant, they are theoretical maximums that would in reality be lowered by viability considerations. Housing associations may be resistant to assuming responsibility for a range of very small sites spread across a wide area. There would also be implications for staff and financial resources from the larger number of viability assessments and negotiations with developers that would be needed. The Executive is asked to consider whether it wants a threshold of three homes included in the core strategy. This would be a significant reduction from the current threshold and officers advise this should be a subject of further consultation.

18. Applying the 40 percent affordable housing requirement will not always result in a whole dwelling that can be provided (for example 40 percent of a site of three homes is 1.2). In these cases a proportionate commuted sum should be paid to the council to contribute to affordable homes elsewhere. Following the approach in the council's current supplementary planning guidance on affordable homes this should be based on the principle that the developer should be no better or worse off than they would have been had the affordable housing been provided on site, assuming no grant. This would have to be applied subject to financial viability in the same way as on-site affordable requirements. The consultation should include an indication of how the contribution will be calculated.
19. The preferred options report indicated the core strategy would contain information about the size of new dwellings by bedroom size. The government office considers this is too detailed for the core strategy and would be better in a supplementary planning document that could be reviewed more easily as circumstances change. Officers concur, and the consultation report should state that this is the council's intention.

Gypsies and Travellers

20. Core strategies are required to contain a policy setting out the criteria for the location of gypsy, traveller and travelling showpeople sites to be used to guide the allocation of sites in subsequent documents. These criteria will also be used to meet unexpected demand. As the preferred options document did not set out the preferred option for the required criteria they will need to be set out in a further consultation. The suggested approach is set out below.
21. Sites for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople will be subject to many general policies in the LDF including ensuring the amenity of new and adjacent residents, landscape, nature conservation, access and flood risk. There are, however, special considerations that apply to gypsy, traveller and travelling showpeople sites, as the occupiers often have a need to store equipment and materials on site related to their employment activity. For these reasons sites
 - (i) will be located near to settlements that offer a good range of facilities including education and health facilities or on a bus route that offers good access to such settlements
 - (ii) shall be capable of providing the facilities required by users such as concrete standings, amenity blocks, electrical/sewerage hook-ups and waste disposal facilities. Sites should also include a specifically designated area for children's games and recreation unless it is close to an existing children's recreational area

¹ Calculated as 40% of the total number of affordable homes provided on sites above the threshold.

(iii) will have a suitable access to the highway network which is capable of allowing the safe manoeuvring of large vehicles and trailers and have sufficient space for the parking of all vehicles associated with the occupiers

(iv) within the Green Belt will not be permitted except where it can be demonstrated that there are no other suitable sites available elsewhere

(v) for travelling showpeople will only be permitted for members of the Showmen's Guild and should include sufficient space for the storage and maintenance of equipment separate from residential caravans.

22. The provision of specific sites to meet the requirements of the South East Plan will be a matter for the managing development document. SEERA proposed that land for an additional 12 pitches for gypsies and travellers and four additional pitches for travelling showpeople should be allocated in the Vale by 2016. This will be considered at an examination in public in February 2010 and the Secretary of State will make a decision based on the report of the examination.

Employment

23. The forecasts of employment growth in the Employment Land Review (ELR) were based on pre recession forecasts that could now be regarded as overly optimistic. At Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, for example, expectations are for between 4,000 and 6,500 new jobs by 2026 and at Milton Park for 3,000 to 4,000 new jobs. These increases are achievable on land currently identified in the local plan. The combined range of 7,000 to 10,500 is below the 12,000 jobs referred to in the preferred options report. The forecast in the ELR should therefore be regarded as a high growth forecast which does not match current expectations of growth.
24. The latest county council figures show a rise of 8,438 economically active residents in the Vale by 2026. The Employment Land Review indicates that 56% of employment in the Vale is found within B class types of employment (offices, industry, storage and distribution), with other employment being found in health, retail and education for example. This would mean a need for 4,725 B class jobs. Just on the basis of the two large employment sites, there is expected to be a surplus of B class jobs in relation to the expected rise in economically active in the Vale.
25. Based on the expected increases in Didcot's population there could be need for about 2,000 B class jobs. As there are no suitable sites for B class employment in or around Didcot in South Oxfordshire a significant proportion of this could be met in the Vale. The consultation report should make it clear that the two strategic employment sites in the Vale can accommodate both the new economically active residents in the Vale and Didcot, who will work in B class jobs, without requiring the allocation of additional land. However, there will be scope to allocate additional land for local employment sites to give flexibility and choice, and help improve the self-containment of other settlements.

Retail in Abingdon and Faringdon

26. The retail study shows the need for new floorspace in the district is limited particularly up to 2018. For comparison goods it shows that an additional 7,128 sq metres are needed by 2018 and 28,228 sq m by 2027. For convenience goods an additional 1,287 sq metres are needed by 2018 and 3,160 sq m by 2027. However, following consultation in January this year, people expressed concern that the figures were too cautious and would not help the town centres thrive in the future. Officers are concerned that the study indicates

a need for additional retail floor space that is significantly below that contained in emerging proposals for the town centres. Discussions with Savills who did the study indicates it was on the basis of the towns retaining their existing market share of expenditure, but that this could be increased provided it would not harm the viability of other town centres.

27. Officers suggest that as progress is being made on the details of possible development in Abingdon and Faringdon town centres, these should be subject to further consultation and detailed policies should be included in the core strategy. Waitrose has made a planning application to extend its store in Wantage (an additional 431 sq metres sales area and 177 sq metres for a café), but there has been no progress on the remainder of the area shown in the preferred options report, or on proposals to redevelop West Way shopping precinct in Botley. Detailed policies for these areas will be included in the managing development document to avoid the core strategy being delayed further.

Abingdon town centre

28. The preferred options report proposed that the core strategy should identify the Bury Street Precinct (now known as the Abbey Shopping Centre) and Charter for comprehensive development and environmental improvement including new shops and town centre uses such as restaurants and commercial leisure uses. It could also include a larger library and health centre with offices and new homes above the ground floor.
29. The Planning Inspectorate has advised that if a policy is to be included in the core strategy along these lines it must contain the boundary of the site, the increase in floor space by the different uses, an illustrative masterplan showing how it could be developed, and information about deliverability, phasing and viability. Officers have been in discussion with Scottish Widows (who lease the shopping centre from the council) and New River Capital (the management company) about how the proposals outlined in the preferred options report could be developed in sufficient detail to be included in the core strategy.
30. Discussions are on going and include
 - Phase 1 the immediate refurbishment of the Abbey Shopping Centre to improve its appearance and gradually redevelop and extend the units as they become available. This would not involve significant alteration to the alignment of the current pedestrian thoroughfares, but would include improvements to the appearance of the service area viewed from Queen Street
 - Phase 2a the redevelopment of the former Woolworths and existing Somerfield stores for retail use on the ground floor with the relocated library and health centre on the upper floors. There may also be space for a hotel, residential units or offices
 - Phase 2b the redevelopment of the Charter area for a major new food store (4,645 sq metres sales area) with car parking above it (700 spaces).
31. The second phase could take time to come to fruition depending on the investment market and the need to relocate and find suitable accommodation for the current occupants of the Charter. However, as the core strategy looks ahead to 2026 and major investment is needed to improve the attractiveness of this part of the town centre, the advisory group recommends that these proposals form the basis of consultation. A vacant shop in the precinct could be used to hold an exhibition and a meeting or meetings held with local groups including the town council, the chamber of commerce and the Choose Abingdon Partnership.

Faringdon town centre

32. The preferred options report proposed that part of Faringdon town centre, including Budgen's supermarket and the Southampton Street car park, be identified in the core strategy for comprehensive redevelopment and environmental improvement. This would involve retail and other town centre uses including improved car parking. Since then officers have had a number of discussions which show that
- a) It may be difficult to significantly expand the Budgen's store given the need to provide additional car parking and the other established land uses around the site
 - b) Tesco has indicated it will submit a planning application east of Park Road on the employment site
 - c) Faringdon House Estate has suggested that land it owns north of Gloucester Street car park could be used for additional retail floor space.

A plan of these sites is in Appendix 2 to this report.

33. The advisory group agreed that these should be subject to further consultation along the following lines.
- The expansion of the town centre store (currently operated by Budgen's) is the council's preferred option subject to the satisfactory resolution of car parking and servicing issues, and the impact on the conservation area, listed buildings, other properties and nearby residents being able to be satisfactorily mitigated. Given the historic character of the town centre there are no other sites that could provide a large new retail store in the area defined in the local plan.
 - To strengthen the retail offer of the town and help recapture the expenditure that leaks to other areas (particularly on the edge of Swindon) the council is considering whether a site for a supermarket should be identified out of the town centre. There are two opportunities
 - On land owned by Faringdon House Estate north of the council owned Gloucester Street car park
 - On land owned by Tesco that is currently used by local businesses and protected for employment use in the local plan east of Park Road.

The council's preference is land north of the Gloucester Street car park as it is closer to the town centre and attractive links could be provided that would encourage linked trips to the centre, thus helping to retain its viability. The land at Park Road would involve a longer, less attractive walk to the town centre and would be unlikely to encourage linked visits to the town centre. It could be argued that it would be likely to draw trade away from the town centre. Although the site is closer to the new housing areas, most trips to the supermarket will be by car, and the benefits of shorter journeys to the store would be offset by greater harm to the town centre and the loss of an existing well-located employment site.

Transport

34. The preferred options report stated that the core strategy would set out the key highway improvements made necessary by development and safeguard land for them and other road schemes - including those identified in the local transport plan and the council's longer term aspirations. Officers consider these schemes should be retained in the core strategy with the exception of the Abingdon southern bypass, the Wantage western relief road and the reopening of the A34 slip roads at Drayton as the county council says there is no justification in transport terms for these schemes at the present time. The Abingdon bypass and the Wantage western relief road will be considered through the county council's review of the local transport plan (referred to as LTP3). Should a need for them

be established they could be included in the managing development document or through the review of the core strategy. The intention not to safeguard land for these schemes should be referred to in the consultation report.

35. At its cabinet meeting in September the county council agreed the key strategic infrastructure in the emerging Southern Central Oxfordshire Transport Strategy (SCOTS). This includes revised proposals for solving traffic congestion at Rowstock roundabout, which involves a new road west of the A34 linking the A417 with the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus. Officers consider land for this important new link should be safeguarded through the core strategy and should therefore be subject to consultation.

The Upper Thames Reservoir

36. Thames Water is promoting an upper Thames reservoir in the Vale to help meet the needs of customers up to 2035. The need for the reservoir will be established through a public examination of their Water Resources Management Plan. Policy NRM3 of the South East Plan refers to this reservoir and states that land for it and other such schemes should be allocated or safeguarded in local development frameworks in case a need is established. Thames Water's preferred location is between the settlements of Marcham, East Hanney, Steventon and Drayton. The reservoir would store 100 million cubic metres of water and have surrounding embankments of between 15m (50 ft) and 25 m (82 ft) high.
37. In the preferred options report the council stated that the policy in the local plan would be sufficient and that no policy would be included in the core strategy. Since then the timetable for the reservoir has been postponed and officers consider it is no longer reasonable to rely on the policy in the local plan. Given the policy in the South East Plan the advisory group recommends that there should be consultation on the outline of a policy to safeguard a site and mitigate any adverse effects along the following lines.

Land will be safeguarded for a reservoir and ancillary works within the area shown in appendix 3. To be permitted any proposal for a reservoir must

- a) be the best practicable environmental option to meet a clearly identified need, having regard to alternative options
- b) be in accordance with a comprehensive planning and development brief, including a masterplan and design statements that:
 - i) mitigates the impact of construction on local people, the environment and roads,
 - ii) minimises the effects on the landscape of an embankment reservoir through its design, general configuration and the use of hard and soft landscaping
 - iii) optimises the creation of wildlife habitats and biodiversity
 - iv) promotes the recreational and tourism potential of the reservoir
 - v) includes a new route for the diverted Hanney to Steventon road, to include provision for an off-road cycle path
 - vi) makes provision for a viable new route of the Wilts and Berks canal
 - vii) includes measures to avoid and mitigate any other significant impacts identified through the environmental impact assessment of the proposal, including on the local and wider highway networks and on surface water and fluvial flooding.

Until the government makes a decision on the reservoir, development that might prejudice its implementation will be refused.

The Oxford Green Belt

38. The Planning Inspectorate has advised that as no major changes are proposed to the Oxford Green Belt in the Vale, the detailed policies for the Green Belt should all be dealt

with in the managing development document. This is a change from the preferred options report which stated that the major developed sites should be named. Officers agree with the inspector and consider this should be made clear in the consultation report.

Consultation

39. It is proposed that consultation will be carried out between 18 December 2009 and 29 January 2010 on documents agreed by the planning portfolio holder. The consultation has to be in accordance with the council's Statement of Community Involvement. Officers will assess the most effective way of doing this with limited financial resources.

Revised timetable for preparing the core strategy

40. The need for additional consultation will delay the production of the core strategy by about six months and the Local Development Scheme (LDS) will need to be revised. The LDS indicates there will be consultation on the managing development document in January 2010, but the Planning Inspectorate has advised that major work on this document should not start until the core strategy is largely complete. Appendix 4 to this report sets out revised key milestones for both documents, which will form the basis for revisions to the LDS. It is proposed that the revised LDS be agreed by the planning portfolio holder and then submitted to the government office for approval.
41. South Oxfordshire District Council is also revising its LDS and as before is including a reference to an area action plan for Didcot. Officers from South Oxfordshire have raised the question whether this should be a joint area action plan. The Vale's core strategy will identify land and have detailed policies covering
- Harwell Science and Innovation centre - mainly for employment purposes and some housing
 - Milton Park - for employment
 - an area west of Great Western Park - for 2,150 homes and
 - the major road infrastructure that SCOTS has identified as necessary to support development.

Background information will be prepared for proposals including a joint background paper with South Oxfordshire showing how the proposals in the two core strategies will work together to provide a well functioning, sustainable community where people will want to live and work.

42. A joint area action plan is appropriate in areas of major change and development, such as at Didcot. It is important to set aside the administrative boundaries and plan for the community as a whole. An area action plan will include the development of the high level vision set out in both core strategies, and develop the physical, social, economic and cultural revival of the town and its neighbourhoods. It will address localised issues such as areas of deprivation, leisure provision, the development of the town centre, opportunities around the railway station, improving physical links and access between parts of the town including new housing to the west, Milton Park and the potential learning park, and improvements to access corridors (e.g. Hitchcock Way and the A4130 from Milton interchange). The action plan will set out opportunities in Didcot, in the context of other housing growth areas, such as at Wantage/Grove in supporting the economic development and prosperity of the area, known as Science Vale UK (SVUK). Such proposals will help with investment streams to deliver economic growth and infrastructure to the benefit of the whole community. This work will link with the New Growth Points (NGP) initiative and support from SEEDA. It is expected that the western boundary of a joint area action plan will be up to and include the A34. Both councils need to work together on this, hence the need for a joint area action plan, which needs to

be reflected in the changes to each council's LDSs. A timetable for preparing the area action plan is also included in appendix 4.

Financial, legal and any other implications

43. Consultation must and will be in accordance with the council's statement of community involvement, which is also a requirement of the land use planning system. Due to the changes in the timetable revisions will have to be made to the local development scheme which is a statutory requirement set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
44. The consultation and the area action plan could be funded from the existing budgets. The area action plan will be funded by the new growth point budget held by South Oxfordshire District Council.