

Vale Consultations January 2010: Response from Harwell Parish Council

10 Feb 2010

Introduction

You say

In January 2009 we published our Core Strategy Preferred Options for consultation. As a result of your comments we have done further work and are now asking for your comments on some additional matters before we finalise the draft core strategy.

We wish first to highlight the difficulty of responding to this consultation, and our concerns that the timetable for consultation does not follow advice laid down by the Vale:

1. We have no idea whether our detailed comments to the Jan 2009 Core Strategy draft have been accepted or rejected, and in what way the Jan 2009 document will be amended.
2. There is no specific document to which to respond, instead there is a collection of sources for comment, which we assume to be:
 - a. A web page
 - b. The report that went to the council's executive on 9 December 2009. (Agenda Item 10, pages 48-60)
 - c. A "Your Vale Your Future" leaflet, available on the website, but not widely distributed until the exhibition in Harwell (28 Jan)
 - d. Consultation direct with Harwell Parish Council at our December meeting, when we were provided with an outline map of the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus development, and a map of main changes. This map was also used to inform an article in our Parish Newsletter. This map contains items which are not included in the map in the leaflet, so we are unsure whether they reflect a change in the core strategy or not. Items concerned are: Rowstock bypass and utilisation of land south of Harwell-Didcot road for housing.
 - e. As of 18 Jan (midway through the consultation period) there is a Consultation Database
 - f. As of 15 Jan we have been provided with a document "Didcot 2996-Valley Park conceptual masterplan v4a 2009-10-29_standard quality.pdf" which is relevant to the utilisation of land south of Harwell-Didcot road for housing. This plan was also displayed at the Harwell exhibition.
 - g. The consultation event planned in Harwell for Jan 7 was delayed by adverse weather to Jan 28. However, (Jan 14) we have been given a PDF copy of the display boards, which we assume also to be part of the consultation.
3. The Christmas holidays are included within the response time, despite the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) review draft 2009 dated May 2009, where section 5.8 says (our bold):

*Consultation will last for six weeks for development plan documents and four to six weeks for Supplementary Planning Documents. During the consultation period the public will be able to make comments and representations. The Council will wherever practicable produce standard forms to help members of the public make their representations and comments. Where practicable **the Council will attempt to avoid public holidays** and the summer vacation period when holding public consultation exercises.*

Given the lack of a coherent document to respond to, the consultation event in Harwell Parish takes on an extra significance in providing information to parishioners to enable an informed response. Even when it was first planned for Jan 7, it was exactly half way through the process, leaving only three weeks to prepare a response.

Surely the spirit of the Vale's SCI is that the consultation event should be at the start of the six week consultation window, giving the public say five weeks to consult locally and prepare a response.

Whilst we understand the reason for the timing, and recognise that the publication of the core strategy is already delayed, we wish to note our concern that the Vale has ignored their own policy for consultation.

References

- a) Web page http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/Planning/Planning_policy/DetailPage-6980.asp
- b) Executive report
[http://whitehorsedc.moderngov.co.uk/Published/C00000104/M00001041/AI00012522/\\$ExecTowardsacorestrategy23NovwithsomeofTTandallpreagendacomments.docA.ps.pdf](http://whitehorsedc.moderngov.co.uk/Published/C00000104/M00001041/AI00012522/$ExecTowardsacorestrategy23NovwithsomeofTTandallpreagendacomments.docA.ps.pdf)
- c) Leaflet http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/Images/finish%20vale%20leaflet_tcm4-6986.pdf
- d) Database <http://ldfweb.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/ldf/php/Index.php>

Plus 3 SCI http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/Images/SCI%20review%20draft%202009_tcm4-5862.pdf)

Comments

We will use the main headings in the report that went to the council's executive on 9 December 2009.

Housing (para 13 and 14): The amount and location of housing land to 2026

This section is about finding sufficient land to meet the demand and the requirements from the South East Plan. These numbers are very dependant of the allocation of targets from the South East Plan between the Vale and SODC.

We repeat our objection to the plans for additional housing west of Didcot, based in the Parish of Harwell.

We understand that Didcot/SODC is no longer receiving Growth Point Funding with an implied loss of some funding for infrastructure improvements. The Vale and SODC had agreed a 50/50 split of the overall target housing numbers. If Growth Point Funding is not being received then it appears to us that the Vale is carrying a disproportionate share of the expansion of Didcot. As a result Didcot is being forced to expand to the west, regardless of alternative (and better) options for expansion to the north.

It is not appropriate to say that the Vale has to accept this because it is what is in the South East Plan. It's only split in the SE Plan because the Vale and SODC provided the split. As far as the SE Plan is concerned, it's only worried about the total number of houses allocated to Didcot, and not about how they are split between the Vale and SODC.

We urge that the 50/50 split is renegotiated so that Didcot takes a greater share of its own expansion.

Because the Vale now has an inflated target, and because it has been asked to add contingency numbers, this forces it into the proposal to build 400 houses north of the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus (HSIC).

Our objection to the overall housing targets for the Vale (including these additional 400 houses) is that they are based on a split of targets from the South East Plan between the Vale and SODC, and if Didcot no longer receives Growth Point funding this split should be renegotiated to reduce the inevitability of the westward spread of Didcot into Harwell Parish and the Vale.

Housing: utilisation of land south of the B4493

The exhibition display panel (page 12 of the PDF) says "Recent work with the lead developer indicates that to provide all these facilities and create a quality environment, it may be necessary to use about 7 hectares of land south of the B4493."

At issue, we are told, is the "Learning Park", which is still up in the air at the moment, but it may come down to earth and require 7 hectares in Valley Park, and not Great Western Park as originally planned – hence the squeeze to use space south of the B4493.

We are opposed to development south of the B4493 because it puts additional new houses directly between Didcot and Harwell Village, reducing further the green space between, and the demarcation of, the two communities.

Our objection is also based on discussions during the initial consultation on the core strategy when we were assured that with the planned housing numbers and density, all the development would be concentrated in the north of the site, leaving large amounts of green field nearer the B4493.

A look at the Conceptual Master Plan V4 for “Valley Park” shows large areas (about 6ha perhaps) at the north side of the site, and marked as the A4130/Railway buffer.

About half of this is south of the Meadow Lane Track. Here, the area north of the track already provides a buffer. We see no reason for an additional buffer, and suggest that housing could be placed right up to the Meadow Lane Track.

The total amount of land allocated to housing north of the B4493 in the Conceptual Master Plan V4 sums to 47.4 ha, only 37% of the available land. (At 40 houses/ha = 1900 houses)

The original draft core strategy marked an area of 128ha as Site A and its preferred option (Appendix 4a, page 104) for housing west of Didcot, and in its conclusions (page 105) rejected the use of land south of the B4493 (site B). It also indicated that the site had a capacity for 3800 houses, at a density of 30/ha.

We suggest that there is plenty of capacity within Site A, north of the B4493, even with a Learning Park, and we are totally opposed to further development south of the B4493.



Housing (para 14): 400 homes on the northern part of the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus

- 1665 homes to be found in the rural areas. The additional homes could be provided as follows

- *Up to 400 homes on the northern part of the Harwell Science and Innovation Camps*
- *About 230 homes in villages, focussing on land within the built up areas and previously developed land on the edges.*

Our first objection, described in the previous section, is that the need for these houses is the result of an iniquitous split of housing targets between the Vale and SODC. There is no need for these houses, and the demand is better met by renegotiating the targets and using land allocated for the 1500 Growth Point houses.

We share the concerns of the existing residents of some 75 houses in North Drive about the impact of 400 new houses on open fields right next to them. Rather than offer outright opposition to the proposal, we seek to ensure that this development brings benefits to those residents, along with the rest of the residents of Harwell Parish.

We appreciate that at the moment the consultation is only over the principle of building houses on this site, and many of the issues we raise will be more relevant should outline planning permission be applied for. However, we think that at least items 1 and 2 below (shown also in bold) should be in the Core Strategy as conditions for this development.

We request that

- 1. No development to start until commitment of funding for the Harwell Link Road, the Harwell Field Link Road and the Rowstock Western Link road.**
- 2. Work is done to ensure that this site really can support 400 homes at an acceptable density, and that the design criteria must include a high proportion of affordable houses, and low rise or single storey units, in keeping with the housing already on the site.**
3. All appropriate trees to be preserved. The site must be reviewed and tree preservation orders must be put in place as soon as possible. Any orders already in place must be adhered to.
4. Any tree which has to be removed must be replaced by equivalent or better planting.
5. As much as possible the open spaces near to the existing houses must be preserved as an open community area. These open spaces, which are used by children, are critical to the success of the existing community, and is one of the reasons why there are so many young families living there. Therefore any further development should compliment what is already in use.
6. Open community areas must provide play areas, and provision must be made for their long term maintenance.
7. Existing residents (assuming they wish it) must receive equity of services, comparable to those of new residents. Specifically, existing roads must be adopted, and any relevant maintenance charges borne by the current residents must be shared with all the new residents.

8. Studies must also be done before development to ensure that it doesn't affect the drainage, sewage and soak-away systems from the existing houses which might extend into the proposed development site.
9. Satisfactory transition planning is in place to ensure that existing open spaces which are maintained (e.g. grass cut) are not neglected between the handover of the land to the builders and work starting on specific areas.
10. Traffic studies must be undertaken to make sure that traffic from this development can enter and exit the site at peak hours. We understand that there are often queues of traffic on the road from Rowstock approaching the Harwell Campus and it can already take some time to get out of North Drive. We also understand that as traffic to the Harwell Campus has increased, so have the number of accidents. We need to be assured that traffic from this new development will have a safe and feasible way out onto the main road.
11. The integrated transport plan for the area must ensure the provision of bus services to the development, and these services must connect through Harwell Village so that the residents of the new development are not isolated from their nearest village.
12. Appropriate enhancements to local schools (Harwell and Chilton primary schools, and relevant secondary schools), together with provision for nursery and pre-school places, must be agreed before planning permission is granted.
13. Appropriate community facilities in term of meeting rooms and halls etc. either on site or in Harwell Village, or both, must be agreed before planning permission is granted.
14. Access to the sports facilities in the proposed new hotel, adjacent to the site, must be negotiated together with the provision of additional sports facilities in the village. If that development has not started then alternative sports facilities should be negotiated.
15. Appropriate healthcare facilities must be available to the new residents. This needs to be planned in conjunction with the Chilton Field development and the Didcot West /Harwell East expansion.
16. Adequate and appropriate access to shops, post office and other services must be planned and provided in conjunction with the Chilton Field development, and the development plans for the Harwell Campus site.
17. Appropriate transport infrastructure (e.g. refurbishment of the Winnaway which connects the site with Harwell Village) must be agreed before planning permission is granted.
18. Easy and environmentally friendly routes and access methods must be provided between the houses in the new development, and Harwell Campus as a place of work, so as to discourage the use of cars for this local commute.
19. Existing rights of way, such as the Icknield Way, must be maintained with no interruption or inappropriate diversion during any building work.
20. Appropriate environmental surveys must be been conducted to make sure that no rare or protected species will be unlawfully affected by the development.
21. Appropriate surveys must be conducted to ensure there is no contamination, health or other risk to existing and new residents from building on land previously used for sewage/waste, and that there are no other hazards as a result of once being part of a nuclear site. All remedial work must be done before any building is started.
22. Note must be taken that the site is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and any developments must take account of this.

23. We understand that the land is currently allocated for employment, so appropriate steps must be taken to zone it for residential development, with proper and not token justification.
24. Recognizing the history of the area, both in wartime and during the development of the Harwell Campus, funding must be provided for some kind of work of art to commemorate this history.
25. This is not an exhaustive list, and there will be many additional issues to be resolved if the proposal moves ahead.

Housing (para 15-19): Affordable housing

We consider the threshold of three units too low, and will inhibit the development of any small site with affordable housing.

The Economy/Employment (para 23-25)

We share your concerns that the forecast in the Employment Land Review is too high and does not match current expectations of growth.

Transport (para 35)

We see that you have only noted that the County Council have agreed to the key elements of the SCOTS report and "*proposals for solving traffic congestion at Rowstock roundabout which involves a new road west of the A34 linking the A417 with the Harwell... Campus. Officers consider land for this important new link should be safeguarded through the core strategy and therefore be subject to consultation.*"

We think that this means that you are in favour of this link road. So are we, and we would like any new development west of Didcot, or the proposed 400 houses north of the Harwell Campus to be linked to these roads, such that planning permission cannot be granted until the roads are funded.

We also insist that steps are taken to preserve the Icknield Way and the Holloway (Harwell to Chilton Bridleway) for example by installing bridges or underpasses appropriate to their existing use.

Similarly, we support the proposed Rowstock Western Link in principle, provided that

1. The concerns of residents (who are not in Harwell Parish) are fully taken into account and that steps are taken to preserve existing Rights of Way. Concerns that have already been raised, and which we share, include the incursion of the road into an AONB, and the potential isolation of the existing houses within a triangle of roads.
2. The route is kept as short as possible, and is used only to alleviate traffic problems at Rowstock, and is not extended in any direction, least of all east towards the Harwell Link roads.
3. Further traffic modelling is conducted to ensure that the scheme really is justified. The need for this road is based on the housing expansions at Didcot and Wantage, and the employment growth at Harwell, over which there is much uncertainty about timing. Furthermore, the traffic demand will also be dependent on when the Harwell Link roads are built and the effectiveness of the Featherbed Lane improvements. It would seem that there are far too many variables at the moment to be able to justify this road.