

Harwell Parish Council

Comments on Vale of White Horse. Local Development Framework. Core Strategy: Preferred Option.

Harwell Parish Council

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Summary

Context

We fundamentally object to the decision taken by the Vale in 2007 to accept a portion of the housing allocation for the expansion of Didcot as defined in the South East Plan. By accepting this allocation, the expansion of Didcot is forced to the west, and pre-empts any decision by SODC for the location of additional housing in Didcot, specifically to the north of the town, where infrastructure such as a ring-road already exists.

Traffic

We welcome recognition in the document that traffic levels in the village will be unacceptable, but seek further assurance that the building of these houses will be totally conditional on the implementation of a traffic solution for Harwell Village. Because Great Western Park will be near completion by the time these additional houses are started, we believe that financing and implementation of the traffic solution must be in place **before** any additional housing is allowed, just as the improvements to the Milton interchange are being done before the development of Great Western Park.

By-pass routes

The Core Strategy, in association with the SCOTS report, defines a Harwell by-pass connecting the A4130 to the A417. This in itself is **insufficient** and **unacceptable** to us, because of the consequent increase in traffic on the A417 Reading Road through Harwell Village. There is mention in the SCOTS report of an A417 link to Chilton (via Hagbourne Hill). We have identified other options for connecting the defined Harwell by-pass to the employment source at Harwell Innovation Centre, and southbound, to the A34. Additionally we have identified options for an alternative by-pass route north of Harwell Village.

We request that these new options are modelled by the consultants for the SCOTS report. This modelling should include traffic levels on the A417 in Harwell Village, in addition to the Grove Road figures used at the moment. More details at the end of this document.

Boundary and integration

With 600 houses in Great Western Park being built in Harwell Parish, there will be administrative problems for the residents and ambiguity about whether they are part of Didcot and SODC, or Harwell and the Vale. 2300 more houses will increase this confusion.

We request that the Core Strategy clarifies the position by proposing a formal boundary change, or an administrative arrangement whereby Didcot West residents are unambiguously part of Didcot/SODC. The Core Strategy should define the terms for that boundary, for example that it should be outside of all new housing, but that a buffer zone east of the A34 should be retained as being within Harwell Parish/Vale with the objective of defining the westerly limit of Didcot expansion.

We would like to see much greater commitment to working with SODC to ensure the proper integration of these new houses into Didcot and Great Western Park. Unless the existing plans for GWP are reviewed there is a risk that Didcot will develop like an onion, with a well defined boundary between GWP and Didcot West housing prohibiting the easy movement of people and traffic into Didcot centre.

At a detailed level we request the provision of land for burial, should these houses remain within the Parish. (see later comments on Page 55, 5.9 Community Facilities)

Environment

We are disappointed at the lack of any imaginative thinking to address the issues of climate change and transport deadlock.

If the need for the houses in Harwell Parish is driven by the forecast increase in jobs at specific locations like Milton Park and the Harwell Innovation centre, then now is the time to propose solutions like dedicated bus roads, cycle and walk ways between the houses and the jobs. Integrate that with routes to schools and shops, supported by public transport, then the projected demand for roads must be significantly reduced.

If it turns out that there is significant demand for routes away from the new houses to other centres of employment – e.g. Oxford, London, Newbury – then these houses are being built in the wrong place.

It must be cheaper to build a dedicated bus road and commit to its operation for, say, 25 years, than it would be to build a road and bear all the other environmental impact costs of the traffic on that road.

Maybe it will be part of the next stage development plans, but we would like to see a requirement that the houses are built to “eco-friendly” standards to reduce their power requirements and heat loss, and a clear statement of an acceptable mix and distribution of housing (flats, 1 / 2 bed, 3 / 4 bed, etc).

Specific points requesting changes to the text

Page 25, 3.8 The Vision and Objectives for the area west of Didcot

We suggest an additional objective such that by 2026 the boundaries between Harwell Parish Council/the Vale and Didcot/SODC have been reviewed and re-aligned to reflect the new housing.

Page 25, 3.8 Objective 7

Add “there shall be a buffer zone between Harwell Village and Didcot, east of the A34, such that no further westward expansion of Didcot is possible”

This objective must also be reflected in Appendix 4a

Page 38, 4.40 and 4.41

4.40 says “the site would only be built in association with a new link road from the A4130 to the A417 to the east of the A34”

Either add “with an extension south to ensure that the additional traffic is kept away from Harwell Village”,

Or, replace with “the site would only be built in association with sufficient new link roads to divert the additional traffic away from the villages of Harwell (and East Hagbourne).”

Page 44, 4.56 Core Strategy – cycling

We agree with the need for measures to improve cycling, walking and public transport, and **urge consideration** (elsewhere in the Core Strategy) be given to:

- Walking and cycling routes between Harwell Village Primary School and Didcot West – so pupils from Didcot west can reach Harwell Primary School, and so village pupils can reach their secondary schools in Didcot
- Walking and cycle routes between Didcot west and the Harwell Innovation centre, to pass through Harwell Village, for the additional benefit of villagers, and so as to draw traffic past the village shops.
- Ensuring that bus routes between Didcot west and the Harwell Innovation centre, also to pass through Harwell Village

Page 54, 5.9 Transport

Please note our comments on **para 4.40**, and apply the same changes to this section about a strategic link road between the A4130 and the A417.

Please note our comments on **para 4.56** and amend this section to recognise the need for the public transport, cycle and walking links between Didcot west housing, Didcot schools, Harwell primary school and the employment centres to pass through Harwell Village.

Page 53, 5.7 Area west of Didcot

Says “the two district councils will work together to produce a high level master plan to integrate the different use proposals”. Please extend this paragraph to commit to a review of the boundaries between the Vale and SODC so that the whole of the Didcot west development is the responsibility of one council.

Page 55, 5.9 Community Facilities

Not sure if this is the right heading (unless it goes under Minerals and waste disposal!) but please add a requirement that sufficient land is set aside and allocated to the appropriate council for a cemetery. At the moment Harwell Parish will be responsible for the burial of the dead from this development and will not have enough burial grounds.

Page 60, 5.16 Rural areas

Figure 5.5 denotes Harwell as a larger village, and hence the plan says that "schemes of up to 15 new homes" will be allowed, plus 500 sq m for business premises. Rowstock is shown as a smaller village, where 5 houses maybe allowed. Hence a further 20 homes could found within Harwell Parish.

Whilst we do not object to this allowance per se, given the imposition of 2300 house in the Parish, we would resist any relaxation of existing guidelines to allow for these 20 houses, and would insist that the village envelope is respected. Hence require that the sentence "Development next to the villages may be allowed..." does not apply to Harwell Parish.

Please also see our comments about the data from the evidence base and assure us that there are no additional plans to include any of the options discussed into the core strategy.

Page 107, Appendix 4b Outline of a policy

We are not convinced that the wording of the first paragraph is a firm commitment that the development of the houses outlined in the plan is totally conditional on the funding and development of the other items listed in the policy. Please rewrite to provide this assurance.

We question why the Preferred Options for the Vale should be considering contributions to Didcot, which is outside the Vale area. Assurance are needed that all benefits accruing from the use of land in Harwell Parish are accessible by Vale residents, on the same basis as SODC residents.

In the section starting "a network of safe and attractive footpaths" please add Harwell Village and Harwell Primary School to the list of places requiring connections.

Replace: "a new link road from the A4130 to the A417" with
"sufficient new link roads to divert the additional traffic away from the villages of Harwell (and East Hagbourne)"

In the section starting "contributions to improved facilities off-site", subclause "bus services linking..." please add Harwell Village to the list.

Page 105, Appendix 4a, Conclusions

Twice uses the phrase "the Vale at Didcot ". We stress yet again that Didcot is not in the Vale. As per 4.40 and 4.41, please amend to say "the Vale at Harwell Parish, next to Didcot".

Questions and Observations

Page 11, 2.16 Transport & Accessibility

"A34 is of national significance... A key issue is to plan development so that it does not worsen the current traffic situation on this key route";

Locally we are concerned that this will limit the options of whichever by-pass option for Harwell/ Rowstock/ Chilton is eventually taken up.

Nationally it makes no sense to place a large development next to a major trunk road which has no current capacity, and no future capacity for additional traffic. It is totally unrealistic to assume that ALL traffic from the new development will be limited to movement to and from a local place of employment.

The traffic modelling must make clear how much additional load will be imposed on the A34, and if the A34 cannot take that load, it must demonstrate how it proposes that traffic will reach its destinations, and predict the impact on all local villages which will suffer from that traffic.

Page 17, 2.52 Didcot population.

The forecast seems to be an underestimate, and is not consistent with the growth plans in the Core Strategy.

Page 31, 4.21 Choices

Looked at... people's responses. Item c mentions building "on the edges of main settlements... west of Didcot".

We note that Didcot is not a main settlement within VWHDC area, and question the validity of any assumptions derived from the Sustainability Appraisal.

Page 34, 4.27 The benefits of concentrating development in the urban areas

Didcot is outside the Vale, and any further development there would be in the interest of a market town OUTSIDE the Vale.

In the same paragraph it says "South East Plan... focus[es] development in urban areas". Since when has Harwell been an urban area?

Page 34, 4.28

This states that "major development at villages would harm their rural character and setting".

Please explain why this policy should not also apply to Harwell Village.

Page 35, 4.29 Housing

"..small open gaps between settlements...to retain their separate identities...".

At present it seems the A34 is the only open gap helping to retain Harwell's separate identity; a specific buffer of open land must be provided.

Page 38, 4.40 and 4.41

We note that para 4.40 says that the SE Plan calls for 2,900 houses to be built "in the Vale at Didcot".

Didcot is not in the Vale! Please amend to "in the Vale at Harwell Parish, next to Didcot".

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We note the comments in 4.40, and stress the need for further work to be done to assess how the site could be developed and what infrastructure would be needed.

We are concerned that improvements to off-site communities should not flow solely to SODC, and request that safeguards are in place to protect communities in the Vale, specifically Harwell Village and the other villages near this development.

In 4.40 a planning date of 2027 is given, rather than 2026. Please explain the reasons for this, and assure us that no further development beyond 2026 is planned.

We note the concern in 4.41 about achieving the build rate in the plan, and suggest that this challenges the whole basis for the core strategy. Why plan for homes if you know that it will be impossible to build them in the timescale of the plan?

Page 42, 4.50

States "The Didcot area provides better links to the A34".

Not only is most of the Didcot area in SODC, this contradicts the statement in para 2.16 of not intending to worsen traffic on the A34.

Page 44, 4.57 Transport Question 21

No, we do not agree with the highway improvements outlined in Figure 4.7.

R6, the Link Road between the A4130 and the A417 is insufficient, because it brings unacceptable levels of additional traffic onto the A417 Reading Road through Harwell Village. The SCOTS report has used the Grove Road as the sole monitoring point in the village. At the very least the modelling should be rerun to include the A417 Reading Road as a modelling point, and we have additional routes which we would like to be considered.

Page 35 fig 4.7 Highway improvements

The District Boundary is incorrectly shown; Didcot looks as though it is in VWHDC area.

5.8 Housing.

Why the planning date of 2027 and not 2026?

Page 64, 5.23 The Upper Thames Reservoir

We accept your position as far as the Core Strategy Document is concerned, but insist that there must be a complete review in the event that the reservoir goes ahead. At the least it will change the outcomes from the SCOTS traffic models, but it will also give an opportunity for a review of the transport network, and especially the possibility of increased capacity on the railway.

Page 68, 6.13 Affordable Housing

We are amazed at the statement that "if all the housing allocated to the Vale in the SE plan was to be affordable housing, this need [for affordable housing in the Vale] would still not be met". This must question the whole basis for the SE plan and the Core Strategy. It would appear that the need for housing in the Vale is NOT being met by this plan, and it must raise the question of what is the housing need that the Core Strategy is trying to address.

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Page 69, 6.17 Affordable Housing

The Core Strategy says that 40% of the new housing will be affordable. We question the viability of this, especially in the current financial climate, asking who will fund this affordable housing. And what are the planning alternatives if this percentage cannot be achieved. We understand that the developers of Great Western Park have already negotiated a reduction to their affordable housing commitment.

Page 77, 6.54 Protecting Natural Resources

We note phrases like "Resist development that would harm the environment...", and "encouraging... development without harming the character... (of) the area" and ask whether these have been taken into consideration regarding further loss of green field within Harwell Parish!

Further in same section it refers to "paragraph 28 of PPS7...development of agricultural land...".

According to earlier studies, most of the proposed land for Didcot west is Grade 2, not low value.

We believe therefore that the plans for the expansion of Didcot contravene your goal of protecting natural resources.

Page 79, 6.61 Built Heritage

Says that known sites (of important archaeological remains) will be listed in an appendix to the Core Strategy. We see no such list.

The Great Western Park plans Appendix 2b, Three sites of "Cultural Heritage" are clearly shown outside the GWP limit, in Harwell parish - why is there no mention of the Core Strategy.

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Evidence Base - Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment

We have reviewed the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, which forms part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy, and have noted:

[Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment - The SHLAA document](#) flags Harwell as one of 6 villages (out of 15) able to sustain developments of more than 200 houses

Appendix 1 - [Details of outstanding permissions](#) page 8 lists 10 houses with planning permission granted, and yet to be built (as at 7 Nov 2008). Suspect, because at least one of these is already complete. It also lists the 600 houses for GWP.

Appendix 6 - [Details of individual sites studied in the village capacity](#) page 15 and map page 16 identifies 2 sites not suitable for development (Tennis and Bowling, and north of Gaveston Road – Little Pippins?). The School, which if it ceases to be a school could yield 53 houses!. And a site suitable for allocation. Land next to Y-Worry (beyond Barrow Lane) 0.78HA, Outside of built up area of the village but with a capacity for 23 houses.

Appendix 7 - [Details on which villages would be able to accommodate up to 200 extra dwellings](#) Page 3 says (our bold):

The land surrounding the village of Harwell is critically constrained in the south by an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There is also a large conservation area that stretches the entire length of the village.

County Council have been consulted for their analysis on whether the village would be able to cope with an additional 200 dwellings. A general comment received was that Harwell Innovation campus is nearby which will be a centre of employment.

Comments received from education have stated that the primary school is fairly full at the moment and the school roll is expected to either stabilise or increase in the near future. Public transport rated this village as good as there are regular busses to Harwell and Didcot as well as an hourly one to Oxford. There is also a very good chance of service enhancement as a consequence of planned housing growth however **there is some threat of buses being rerouted away from village if the bypass is built and traffic calming measures are introduced**. Although the village has good local services and is close to a larger service centre, transport rated the village as amber because additional car trips to the local employment sites could add traffic at the Milton interchange and on the A34. A rating of amber means that further details would need to be seen. They did however note that there is the opportunity to make this site more sustainable.

There is likely to be sufficient land on the edge of Harwell not affected by an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to accommodate 200 homes. However, no detailed survey has been made of other factors that could restrict development including sewage disposal, utility supply, landscape assessment, and local biodiversity factors. Development on the edge of the village would not be permitted under the current policies of the Local Plan.

Please confirm that all this data from the evidence base, is purely information and opinion gathered as part of the development of the plan, and does not form part of the core strategy.

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Traffic Studies

The Core Strategy, in association with the SCOTS report, defines a Harwell by-pass connecting the A4130 to the A417. This in itself is insufficient and unacceptable to us, because of the consequent increase in traffic on the A417 Reading Road through Harwell Village.

There is mention in the SCOTS report of an A417 link to Chilton (via Hagbourne Hill). We have identified two other options for connecting the defined Harwell by-pass to the employment sources at Harwell Innovation Centre, and southbound, to the A34. Additionally we have identified an alternative by-pass route north of Harwell Village.

We request that all options are modelled by the consultants for the SCOTS report. This modelling should include traffic levels on the A417 in Harwell Village, in addition to the Grove Road figures used at the moment.

If modelling has to be limited, we request that consideration is given to our preferred options, which are:

- A Harwell North Road, or
- Link from the A417 south to the Harwell Innovation Centre

A map of the options follows. Notes and comments are:

Harwell By-pass A4130 to A417 (blue)

This is defined in the SCOTS report. The other options are extensions to this.

Harwell North Road, linking to the SCOTS Harwell by-pass (green)

This is our preferred route to bring traffic direct from Great Western Park and the Didcot west development onto the A4130. The route shown on the map is indicative only, and there is flexibility for where it crosses the A34, and where it joins to other roads at its east and west ends.

Although a new/upgraded bridge will be required, it (and other roads) will be shorter than any of the southern extension routes. So it may well be the cheaper option. We urge that it is properly costed and not dismissed as “too expensive because it requires a bridge”.

The route on the map implies a new bridge over the A34, but we would be happy if a route could be found utilising the existing Cow Lane bridge.

Alternatively the route could start from the existing bridge where the B4493 crosses the A34. Like the “Big” Rowstock bypass, this comes very close to existing houses in the village, and so should only be considered if the other north road, or the southern A417 extension to HIC are not viable. It would also need to avoid the recently installed water main.

At the east end it would connect to the Harwell by-pass, which in turn will be shorter because it connects only to the proposed southern perimeter road (if required), and not to the A417.

This route needs early planning to ensure that it is integrated into the road plans for Great Western Park.

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Careful route planning is also needed to minimise the impact on existing dwellings in the B4493 Harwell to Didcot road. The advantage of this North route is that the new road need not follow the A34 and could join the B4493 further east, nearer to Didcot without destroying any existing housing.

The Rowstock junction and/or Featherbed Lane would still need upgrading to resolve the North/South v East/West rush hour traffic conflicts.

A417 to Harwell Innovation Centre (HIC) extension (orange)

This is our preferred southern extension. We recommend that it should follow the line of the A34 for as long as possible to minimise the impact on the AONB.

Routes which we do not support

Possible A417 Chilton extension via Hagbourne Hill (purple)

Also defined in SCOTS report. We share the anticipated concern from Chilton Village that this route passes too many entrances/exits from Chilton Village and other junctions on either side of the A34, and are not in favour of it.

We understand from the exhibition on March 13, that the route joining the existing road (shown in purple on the map) has been rejected partly because the road would be too steep. The new route under consideration follows closer to the A34, straight up to the reservoir. We are not convinced that this would not also be too steep. However, it would still follow the same route through Chilton as shown, and hence the concerns remain.

“Big” Rowstock by-pass (red)

We recognise that this route might find favour with other local councils. However, we feel it passes too close to houses on the southern edge of the village and would have a major impact on the open area south of the village, an AONB much used by residents for walking. This aspect is important because of the potential loss of walking paths to Great Western Park and the Didcot west development, and the inaccessibility of the orchard land north of the village.

Note that this could also be called the “Bag Tree Route” because it would pass over the site of the “Bag Tree” which was famous to Harwell residents for hundreds of years until it fell down in 1975.

It would be a sad memorial to the history of Harwell, if the land where this tree grew was paved over.

*“Dont it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot”*

Map of transport options for modelling and inclusion in the SCOTS process.



Key

Blue: Harwell By-pass A4130 to A417 as defined in the Core Strategy and the SCOTS report

Preferred routes

Green: Harwell North Road, linking to the SCOTS Harwell by-pass

Orange: Southern Extension. A417 to Harwell Innovation Centre (HIC)

Routes not supported

Purple: Possible A417 Chilton extension via Hagbourne Hill

Red: "Big" Rowstock by-pass