

David Marsh

From: David Marsh [david@digitalsafaris.com]
Sent: 28 October 2010 16:03
To: 'planning.policy@southoxon.gov.uk'
Cc: 'clerk@harwellparish.co.uk'
Subject: SODC Core strategy consultation - comments from Harwell Parish council

Response from Harwell Parish Council.

Our main concern is the expansion of Didcot, and its incursion into Harwell parish.

As such, it is not our place to comment on matters in SODC which do not directly affect us, and will not be responding to Q2, Q3 or Q4.

In Q1 you ask: **What do you think about us working to the South East Plan numbers?**

The SE Plan had an allocation of 8750 houses for Didcot (6000 SODC, 2750 Vale). Of the 8750 house approximately 4500 are already committed. (GWP etc), and the remainder are split roughly 50/50 between SODC (2030) and the Vale (2150).

We continue to question these figures, and specifically the figures for the Vale houses in Harwell Parish, because:

- The doubling in the size of Didcot, without supporting infrastructure, will have severe implications for Didcot itself, and for the surrounding villages, specifically in terms of traffic. The infrastructure resulting from the existing plans (GWP etc) does little to solve the problems anticipated in the villages, and it doesn't seem right that the only way we might get funds for solutions is to build yet more houses.
- The expansion of Didcot towards the surrounding villages puts pressure on the rural gap between the town and the villages. The westward expansion threatens Harwell, any southern expansion threatens the Hagbournes, and the northern expansion creeps towards Long Wittenham and Appleford.
- The split of the 1500 Growth Point Houses 50/50 between the Vale and SODC seemed arbitrary, and it forced the development of Didcot to the west for 750 of these houses. We urge a reconsideration of this split, and the allocation of all the Growth Point numbers to the SODC.

The evidence base supporting the numbers is now several years out of date, and there are good reasons for putting that evidence into question and requesting a review of the housing numbers:

- Build rates in the last few years have failed to deliver on the plans. GWP is running years late and the first house has yet to be built, and there is no sign of any development on any of the other committed sites. Clearly the demand forecast took no account of the recession.
- The recession is not yet over, and there must be doubts about the future of employment growth in the area. Although the Government's major spending review has protected science funding, it is not clear to us that the forecast housing demand is properly supported by the growth of employment in SVUK. In fact we are concerned that the skills gap in the area (reported to the Didcot Communities Forum as being one of the largest in the country) will not be addressed by building large estates of market houses (albeit with a percentage of affordable homes)
- There is a lot of uncertainty about the impact of decisions being made by the Government – Local Government funding, Localism Bill, New Homes Bonus, Growth Point funding, affordable homes financing and targets etc that it seems premature, and even foolish, to commit to a plan with a 15 year outlook.

We would have liked to propose a pause of between one and five years in these plans for the expansion of Didcot. It seems to us that with 4500 committed houses, yet to be built, there is a more than adequate flow of real houses for Didcot for the near future. As well as giving time to review the evidence base. pausing would give time to examine the impact of this planned growth on Didcot Town Centre, the transport infrastructure and the traffic impact on the surrounding villages.

However, we understand that delay to the Core Strategy is not be possible because of the need to plan for SODC as a whole. But we would still urge that if there is way to slow down the expansion of Didcot, it should be investigated and adopted.

Finally, we would like to repeat the observation which we made at the consultation workshops, that presenting a figure of 2330 houses for the expansion of Didcot is very misleading because it ignores the committed housing not yet built, and all the housing planned by the Vale. We urge you to continue your co-operation with the Vale, and see if there is any way you can work together more coherently in the planning of the expansion of Didcot so that you avoid presenting only the SODC half of the story, and people see a more honest presentation of the plans for the expansion of Didcot being developed by the two Districts.

David

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