

Harwell Parish Council response to consultation on Vale Local Plan Part 2

Summary

Parish Council is opposed to the allocation of 100 houses to the site west of Harwell village, and request that this allocation is removed.

Parish council is not opposed to the provision of housing on the Campus to support employment on the site, provided that such an exceptional need can be demonstrated, and provided that the allocation excludes the provision of market housing not associated with Campus employment.

Para 2.77

Justifies the replacement allocation of the 1,400 houses that were excised from Part 1 of the plan by the inspector. It assumes that the housing numbers in the SHMA are still correct. Rather than restore the allocations, it would be better to challenge the SHMA, which is an overstatement of housing demand. Given the slow rate of building (which is driven by market demand) in the first few years of the plan period, and the possible loss of a five year housing supply, it would be better to review the overall requirement and define a more achievable target.

Para 2.82

The first sentence is impossible to understand by a lay person. Please rephrase. "Development at the sustainable Larger Village of Harwell helps to ensure the plan makes provision for an appropriate range of sites that are both larger and smaller in size, which is important to ensure housing delivery is maintained throughout the plan period."

Core Policy 15a SE Vale allocations

There is no justification for the Part 2 allocation of 100 houses in West Harwell Village. The number is so small that it would be better removed completely, or added as a windfall allocation.

This allocation is also contrary to the footnote on page 123, which says:

“Development in open countryside will not be appropriate unless specifically supported by other relevant policies as set out in the Development Plan or national policy, as stated in Core Policy 4: Meeting our Housing Needs in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1.”

Harwell Campus Comprehensive Design Framework

Para 2.89

Para 2.89 asserts the need for a work-live-play community, but no evidence is presented to overcome inspectors statement

- *“the need for a “work-live-play” community at Harwell ... has not been demonstrated”* Inspector Report #118

Para 2.95

Para 2.95 asserts that ‘exceptional circumstances’ exist to justify development within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

No evidence is presented to counter the inspector’s statement

- *“at this point in time I consider it unlikely that the exceptional circumstances necessary to approve such an application would reasonably be considered to exist”* Inspector Report #121

Para 2.98

The arguments presented in para 2.98 repeat the arguments that were made in Part 1, and which were rejected by the inspector, and concludes:

- The Campus is compiling a suite of further evidence to demonstrate the need for and ‘exceptional circumstances’ for delivering residential development at Harwell Campus. This will be published at the next stage of preparing the Local Plan.

Justification for the allocation of 1,000 houses on Campus land will have to depend on this further suite of evidence.

Para 2.100

Para 2.100 says: “The Council will work with Harwell Campus Partnership and other key stakeholders, to prepare a comprehensive development framework for the campus, which will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). A Local Development Order (LDO) will also be prepared to facilitate the effective and accelerated planning of proposals coming forward on the Campus.”

There is no timescale laid down for the provision of this Framework, nor any conditionality, i.e. no application will be considered until the Framework is in place.

The list of items to be include in the Framework must be extended to include justification for the support of the work-live-play community, and what housing mix will be allowed. All housing on the site should support Campus employment, and there should be specific provision to exclude market housing which is not linked to Campus employment. The wording in the plan and the subsequent frameworks must be strong enough to ensure that this site never becomes a commuter ghetto. (see comments on CP15b)

Will the prosed Local Development Order (LDO) realign the boundaries of the Enterprise Zone (EZ), because unless that happens the proposed allocation of housing is significantly within the existing Enterprise Zone, and hence presumably subverting the objective of providing employment within an EZ.

Core Policy 15b

- It's not enough to say that all new development will be guided by a comprehensive development framework, when that framework does not yet exist. Either the framework needs to be developed and published as part of the Part 2 proposals, or the Part 2 plan needs to be strengthened to define what is, and what is not, allowed as part of the "Innovation Village".
- Does *exemplar* have any formal planning meaning, and if not what is it trying to say. It's no good saying that housing must be provided to an *exemplar* (or even a *high*) standard, without defining how that standard can be measured.
- Policy refers to relevant stakeholders. Please confirm (and amend the plan to say so) that Chilton, E. Hendred and Harwell parish councils are all relevant stakeholders.
- The wording in Core Policy 15b, and in para 2.100 is similar (and hence is repetitious) but in some areas differs. i.e. 2.100 refers to key stakeholder, whereas CP15a refers to relevant stakeholders. Please revise and be consistent. Why is a LDO proposed in 2.100 but omitted in CP15b
- CP15b says "and reflect a tailored mix of dwellings to help meet the needs of the organisations located at the Campus." As noted before under 2.100 this clause needs strengthening to make sure that no open market housing is included. Maybe:
"and reflect a tailored mix of dwellings to **exclusively** help meet the needs of the organisations located at the Campus."
- "Sufficient land is also made available at Harwell Campus for research, innovation and economic development to accommodate at least 5,400 'net' additional jobs in the plan period up to 2031 within the designated Enterprise Zone."
This is silent about whether or not the EZ needs to be redefined. It should be clearer that the Campus development plan must include allocation of land for housing or for employment that is consistent with any EZ designation.
- Correspondence between Ben Davis and representative of Chilton Parish Council (26th April) says "I can confirm that the employment zone does

now include land proposed for a housing allocation within the draft Local Plan 2031 Part 2.”

If this statement is correct, then it represents a significant change from the area allocated in the proposals map approved as Part 1 of the plan. This is a change being made by stealth, and is totally inappropriate to make the change without an explicit statement to that effect in the Part 2 proposals.

- “Proposals for development within the Campus must demonstrate how they contribute towards a comprehensive approach to development.”
Rather than say this sentence is meaningless, lets just say that any meaning there might be is impossible to find. It’s a tautology: development must contribute to development. Please clarify and re-write.

Didcot Garden Town, paras 2.101 onward

How is it possible to define the Garden Town Masterplan principles when the Garden Town team have not yet published their final report?

What is unique about the 6 principles that don't apply to all development within the Vale?

Para 2.106

Please include Harwell Village in this sentence

“The important separation between the surrounding villages, including for example Sutton Courtenay **and Harwell**, will continue to be protected from development.”

And where the sentence is repeated as a caption to Figure 2.8

Core Policy 18a: Safeguarding of Land for Strategic Highway Improvements within the South-East Vale Sub-Area

As well as safeguarding (land) for this scheme:

“provision for a new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the A34 at Milton Heights.”

Please safeguard land for the provision for a new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the A34 connecting the Harwell Village, at the Driftway, to the Valley Park development

Settlement Character and Gaps

Para 3.211 – 3.217

DP 28 replaces saved policy NE10 from the Local Plan 2011, which provided specific protection for the rural gap between Didcot and Harwell. This gap has already been reduced by Great Western Park and the Valley Park permissions, so a firmer policy is needed to protect land to the east of Harwell village. The policy needs to recognise the threat posed by cumulative applications, so that the gaps that exist now are protected. Need to be convinced that the wording “the physical joining or the unacceptable narrowing of a countryside gap between two separate settlements” is adequate.

The need for a rural gap is supported by the Green Infrastructure assessment, which says (p124)

Green Infrastructure Opportunities

- Retain, enhance and manage the existing green infrastructure assets in and around the village.
- Create and maintain new accessible natural greenspace, for example, between Harwell and Didcot to address deficits in provision of 20 to 100ha sites.
- Create and maintain new accessible natural greenspaces to meet the needs of the communities in planned new developments to the east and north-west of the village, for example alongside rights of way and incorporating existing features such as hedgerows and trees.
- Develop and enhance recreational access links between existing and new green infrastructure assets, including from new planned developments, for example enhancement of the Driftway east of the village and link(s) to NCN Route 544 to the south.
- Planned new development should include landscape planting, for example along boundaries, to integrate the development into the wider landscape and to soften its visual impact.

3.265

- Typo: useable instead of usable.

Development Policy 32: Open Space

- Should not the policy spell out the requirement of 3.270 that “15% of proposed residential development schemes should be provided as public open space” (even if it is part of Appendix F)

Site Development Templates (Appendix A)

Site 1. Harwell Campus

- PC supports the key objective: To provide a tailored mix and tenure of housing to meet the identified needs of the Campus in accordance with Core Policy 15b.
- Urban Design Principles: find a better, more quantifiable word, than exemplar, and add the qualification requested earlier:
“resulting in an **exemplar** scheme that provides **exclusively** for the specific needs of the campus, as a whole.”
- Change
Contribute towards improvements of NCN route 544 (Icknield Way).
To
Contribute towards **protection and** improvements of NCN route 544 (Icknield Way) **between the A34 and E.Hendred.**
- Change
Contribute towards the need for additional secondary school places in Didcot
To
Contribute towards the need for additional secondary school places in Didcot **and Wantage**

Site 5. West of Harwell Village (Grove Rd)

- Key Objective “To deliver a high quality, sustainable, urban extension to Harwell village, which is integrated with Harwell so residents can access existing facilities.” Cannot be met.
Harwell is a village, and not a town, or suburb, and hence the concept of an *urban* extension is inappropriate. The site certainly extends the village, but only by distorting the village envelope such that this site does not sit well with the rest of the settlement, and it risks encouraging additional development.
- This risk is compounded by the proposed quantum of development. The site has a capacity for 196 houses. Allocating only 100 houses is misleading and mischievous. Once the site is allocated what power exists to limit the number of houses built to 100.
- “is integrated with Harwell so residents can access existing facilities.” Will be very difficult to achieve because the proposed site is adjacent to the Grove Road north site which is under construction at the moment, and has not been designed to allow for any expansion on its western edge, or any footpaths allowing residents easy access to existing facilities. Without major change to the already approved plans, integration will be nigh on impossible and residents will have to use Grove Road to access the village. This will be dangerous for pedestrians, to the extent that it should not be allowed. Hence the proposed site risks become an isolated carbuncle stuck on the edge of the village.
- Key Objective: “To contribute towards infrastructure in the Science Vale Area Strategy, as set out in the Oxfordshire Transport Plan.” How will this be achieved, and what infrastructure is envisaged.
- Urban design: “Retain historic field patterns”. If the field patterns really are historic, no development should be contemplated. (Development Policy 35)
- Urban design: “An appropriate settlement edge and gateway feature should be incorporated into the design for the western boundary”. The western boundary is farmland. What is meant by a gateway feature? At the moment the western edge is formed by a massive mound of top-soil removed from the Talbot Close development. There is no viable opportunity for access, or a gateway feature on the western edge of the

development. Statements like this make one wonder if the site has been visited by the author of these requirements.

- Access: “Access can be taken from Grove Road but this and its junction with A4130 will need to be improved (Grove Road has a width restriction).” Sic – missing bracket.
- Not only is Grove Road very narrow, but on the edge of the site it is bendy and hilly. Without destroying the boundary trees (see urban design principle: Retain, where possible, mature rows of trees), or extensive improvement and widening of the Grove Road, it is not clear that safe access can be achieved.