



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## **West Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan: Proposed Modifications**

### **Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Further Addendum Report Non-Technical Summary**

**October 2017**

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## **This is the NTS of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Further Addendum Report**

1. This is the Non-Technical Summary of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Further Addendum Report documenting the processes of SA incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The NTS outlines the SA process, how the assessment was carried out, and the findings of the SA. This SA Further Addendum Report provides clarification and further information on the SA Addendum Report published in October 2016 and accompanying the West Oxfordshire Local Plan Proposed Modifications on consultation.

## **The West Oxfordshire Local Plan**

2. West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) is preparing a new Local Plan to guide future development in the District during the period up to 2031. In accordance with legislative and policy requirements, the Council must carry out an SA incorporating SEA of its Local Plan. The SA/SEA of the Local Plan has been on-going since 2007 and is being undertaken alongside the preparation of the plan. The Local Plan, together with its accompanying SA Report and other evidence, was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in July 2015 for independent examination.
3. In order to address concerns raised by the Inspector in his preliminary findings, the Council undertook further work. The proposed changes to the Local Plan 2031 are primarily associated with an increase in the overall number of homes from 10,500 to 15,950. Most of this (13,200 homes; 660 per year) is to meet West Oxfordshire's housing needs but a proportion (2,750 homes during the period 2021-2031) are proposed to assist neighbouring Oxford City Council with its 'unmet' housing need under the duty to cooperate. The proposed Main Modifications to the plan were subject to SA/SEA and the findings presented in the SA Addendum Report (October 2016) published for consultation in November 2016 alongside the proposed Main Modifications. The examination was resumed in May and July 2017.

## **Sustainability Appraisal (SA) & Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**

4. The purpose of Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is to promote sustainable development through the integration of environmental, social and economic considerations in the preparation of Local Plans. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a European Union (EU) requirement that seeks to provide a high level of protection of the environment. SA and SEA are tools to inform plan-making and are used to assess the likely effects of a plan when judged against reasonable alternatives. SA is an ongoing and iterative process with assessments occurring over various stages of plan-making.
5. The SA Addendum (October 2016) addressed the proposed modifications to the submitted Local Plan – and mostly concerned with the uplift in housing identified. As a result of the resumed examination in May and July 2017, further SA work was agreed as follows:
  - SA of other 'non-strategic' housing site options not already assessed (the "Grey Sites");

- Reconsideration and assessment of reasonable alternatives to the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village;
- Reconsideration and assessment of reasonable alternatives to the West Eynsham SDA;
- Reappraisal of the Woodstock & AONB non-strategic site allocations taking into account additional heritage & landscape assessments; and
- A comparative assessment of the sustainability of all strategic sites at the Three Main Centres

This SA Further Addendum Report (October 2017) explains the further assessment and findings.

## **Characteristics of the West Oxfordshire District**

6. West Oxfordshire is a largely rural district to the west of Oxford with some 40% of residents living in the two largest towns of Witney and Carterton. Oxford City to the east is the regional hub, a designated growth point, and the focus for the District's main transport connections. A large number of people commute out of West Oxfordshire to work, particularly to Oxford, and commuting creates congestion on major routes and in towns. There is a considerable need for more affordable housing in West Oxfordshire. The local economy is diverse and performs relatively well and employment is generally focussed in the main towns. The area has a high-quality environment with a rich variety of habitats and important conservation sites; also, a rich archaeological and architectural heritage, including the internationally designated Blenheim Palace a World Heritage Site (WHS). One third of the countryside is also recognised nationally for its landscape quality falling within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Flooding is a key issue with large parts of West Oxfordshire in floodplains.

## **Key Sustainability Issues, Problems & Opportunities**

7. The key sustainability issues may be summarised as follows:
  - Rising levels of housing need with an ageing population and requirement to help provide some of Oxford City's unmet housing need
  - Outside of the main towns public transport accessibility is generally poor
  - Travelling by car has increased with several areas of congestion and associated areas of poor air quality in Witney and Chipping Norton
  - The network of relatively isolated sites of particular importance for biodiversity would benefit from expansion and linkage to provide more sustainable biodiversity management units
  - A high-quality landscape with the AONB
  - A rich archaeological and architectural heritage, including the Blenheim Palace WHS
  - Maintain high levels of economic activity with low unemployment

### How have the assessments been undertaken?

8. The SA Framework of Objectives is the same as used to test the emerging elements of the new Local Plan and as reported in the SA Reports (2015 and the Addendum 2016); as follows:

SA No	SA Objective
1	Ensure everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent, sustainably constructed affordable home
2	Improve health and well-being and reduce inequalities
3	Promote thriving and inclusive communities
4	Improve education and training
5	Maintain a low level of crime and fear of crime
6	Improve accessibility to all services and facilities
7	Improve the efficiency of land use
8	Reduce waste generation and disposal
9	Reduce air pollution and improve air quality
10	Address the causes of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and be prepared for its impacts
11	Protect and improve soil and water resources
12	Reduce the risk from all sources of flooding
13	Conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity
14	Conserve and enhance landscape character and the historic environment
15	Maintain high and stable levels of employment
16	Promote sustainable economic growth and competitiveness

9. The draft plan was assessed against the SA Objectives, using baseline information and professional judgment, and the likely significant effects recorded. The SA considered the nature of the likely effects (including positive/negative, duration (short, medium or long term), permanent/temporary, secondary, cumulative and synergistic) and according to categories of significance – major/minor, positive/negative, neutral, and uncertain. The SA made suggestions for mitigating significant negative effects, where possible, and possibilities for enhancement, where relevant.

### What reasonable alternatives have been considered & addressed?

10. This SA Further Addendum Report covers further work agreed between the Council and the Inspector, including a reconsideration of reasonable alternatives to the Oxfordshire Cotswold Garden Village; and to the West Eynsham Strategic Development Area (SDA); and other non-strategic housing options not previously assessed (Grey Sites).

### What are the likely significant effects of the Local Plan?

11. The SA findings (2016) for the implementation of the Proposed Modifications to the Local Plan 2031 align with the SA findings (2015) reported in the Submission SA Report. Those findings are still relevant and the reasons for progressing some strategic options and not others also remain valid. This SA Further Addendum Report has checked the accuracy and consistency of

previous findings, especially with regard to objectives for soil resources and landscape quality.

12. **Refreshed SA of Strategic Directions of Growth** at Witney, Carterton & Chipping Norton: Minor amendments were made as a result of updated evidence and rechecking. Land West of Downs Road, Witney – effects on transport changed from neutral to minor negative (with some uncertainty). Land South of A40, Witney – effects on landscape changed from major negative to major negative (with some uncertainty) and on the historic environment from major to minor negative (with some uncertainty). Land north of Witney changed from minor positive (with some uncertainty) to minor positive. For Tank Farm, Chipping Norton – effects on transport/highways changed from neutral to uncertain minor positive in light of potential traffic reduction in the town centre, although air quality changed from neutral to minor negative with some uncertainty for the precise effects of increased traffic and the new relief road; effects on soils changed from major to minor negative as soils not the higher quality Grade 1-3a. The minor changes identified in this SA Further Addendum Report do not affect the reasoning for progression or rejection of strategic site alternatives; these remain the same as reported in the previous SA Addendum Report.
13. **Alternatives to Oxfordshire Cotswold Garden Village:** Two additional options – Barnard Gate Garden Village, near South Leigh & Land North of the A40 at Barnard Gate - were tested by full SA with comparative assessment with the OCGV. The SA of the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village remains the same as that reported in October 2016 except for likely effects on the historic environment that have changed from neutral to minor negative, recognising the historic assets in the north of the site. All the options are likely to have positive effects on SA Objectives for housing, health/equality, supporting services and facilities, education, and employment. Neutral effects are predicted for all options on SA Objectives for crime, waste, water, and biodiversity/geodiversity. None of the options will make efficient use of land since all are greenfield and thus with minor negative effects.
14. Minor negative effects are indicated for all options on climate change mitigation, and air quality due to some uncertainty of the cumulative effects with increased traffic. Land north of Barnard Gate includes some Grade 3a agricultural land with major negative effects indicated for loss of best quality soils but some uncertainty of significance; minor negative effects for the other two options. Land North of Barnard Gate is adjacent to the A40 with likely negative effects compared to the other options due to lack of currently proposed mitigation; the OCGV includes mitigation measures by provision of a Park & Ride and the site promoters of the Barnard Gate Garden Village have suggested they would also deliver strategic transport improvements. All options are likely to have minor negative effects for landscape and the historic environment with uncertainty of effectiveness of mitigation; Land North of Barnard Gate is likely to have major negative effects due to potential impact on the Eynsham Hall Registered Park and Garden and two listed buildings. The outline key reasons for progressing the OCGV option compared to the other alternatives are outlined and include a stronger spatial relationship to Oxford City, good links to proposed strategic transport

improvements including Park and Ride and bus priority and 'in principle' support from Government through the locally-led garden village programme and also through the submission draft Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan.

15. **Alternatives to the West Eynsham SDA** (1000 new homes): The Council agreed to consider two other alternatives -

- Land adjacent to Hanborough Station (900 new homes) – new SA
- Split allocation with 550 homes at the West Eynsham SDA and 450 homes at land adjacent to Hanborough Station – new SA

All options are likely to have positive effects for housing, employment and community objectives. The options for 900 homes adjacent to Hanborough Station is likely to have major positive effects for transport/accessibility due to the proximity of the railway station and good sustainable access into Oxford City. The likely positive effects are reduced for the reduced capacity of around 500 homes. The land west of Eynsham includes some Grade 3a soils so some minor negative effects for loss of best and most versatile agricultural land compared to the site at Long Hanborough that has no high-quality soils.

16. Both land west of Eynsham and land adjacent to Hanborough Station are in areas of some landscape and historic sensitivity with likely minor negative effects – and these would be reduced through a reduction in the number of homes. Generally, reducing the proposed development from 1000 to 450 or 550 homes will reduce the likely negative effects identified. However, it may also reduce key positive effects, for example, the relief road associated with the west of Eynsham option is likely to be less deliverable/not required to support this reduced level of development. The outline key reasons for progressing West Eynsham compared to the other two options are outlined and include the fact that the size of development is sufficient to be associated with the relief road and help to resolve an existing problem in Eynsham, but not so big that there would be problems of integrating with existing communities. Furthermore, the proximity of the West Eynsham option to the existing village will assist with its integration into the existing community, compared to other options which are less well related to other settlements.

17. **Comparative SA of Strategic Sites** (Inter-Settlement): For completeness and in order to address concerns and provide further clarification, a comparative assessment has now been presented of all strategic options at Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton in the same table.

18. **Non-Strategic Site Options:** The Council acknowledged the need to also assess a number of additional 'grey sites' - identified as being potentially suitable for development within the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) 2016 but that were not allocated in the Local Plan Main Modifications (November 2016) for various reasons, such as lack of certainty over delivery and site size. Thirteen additional grey sites have been assessed against the SA framework with the results presented accordingly, together with reasons for non-selection. A refreshed SA has also been undertaken of the 15 allocated non-strategic sites and this found only minor changes due to updated evidence in particular, the additional

landscape and heritage appraisal commissioned by the Council in relation to seven of the 15 proposed non-strategic allocations. The four sites located within the Cotswold AONB had been considered to have major negative effects on landscape; however, the new studies suggest that certain numbers of dwellings at each site could be accommodated without significant effects, thus reducing the SA findings to minor negative (with some uncertainty).

19. Three of the options are likely to have minor negative effects on the setting of Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, with some uncertainty about the cumulative effects on the WHS. The outline reasons for selection of these site options remains as reported in the SA Addendum Report (October 2016) - they offer the most sustainable likely delivery of development focused primarily on the District's larger towns and villages, with the least impacts on the important assets of the District. The further study suggests mitigation measures for negative effects in relation to landscape and heritage.
20. **Housing Requirement – uniform & stepped:** Overall, the SA found little difference between the options for a uniform and a stepped approach to delivery of the overall housing requirement. With the longer lead-in time for strategic sites including the new garden village development, there is likely to be less uncertainty for delivery with the stepped approach and major positive effects confirmed for housing, communities and employment.

### **How could negative effects be mitigated? Were there any difficulties encountered?**

21. Possibilities for mitigation measures have been considered throughout the SA, including changes to precise location to avoid sensitive receptors and housing numbers. There were no significant technical difficulties encountered during the preparation of this SA and any data gaps or uncertainties about the effectiveness of mitigation measures were recorded.

### **How has the SA influenced the development of the Local Plan?**

22. The SA has described likely effects and made suggestions, where possible, to mitigate negative effects and enhance potential positive effects.

### **Monitoring Proposals**

23. The Local Plan and the SA will be monitored as part of the Authority's comprehensive Monitoring Report, as required by Government. No additional proposed monitoring that might be required as part of the SA process was indicated from the findings of the SA.

### **Next Steps**

24. This SA Further Addendum Report will be submitted to the Inspector and then published for public consultation in due course. The consultation responses received will be considered by the Inspector in determining the most appropriate way forward for the Local Plan.