

THE VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN PART 2 CONSULTATION

Wootton Parish Council has the following comments on the Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan Part 2 -

The Green Belt

Wootton Parish Council attaches considerable importance to the integrity of the Green Belt both in its role as preventing the coalescence of the City of Oxford and the market town of Abingdon and in maintaining the rural character of the village of Wootton and the large hamlet of Whitecross. This character will be seriously compromised if there is encroachment into the countryside.

Whitecross

Whitecross is a large hamlet of some 140 residential properties with almost 300 people on the electoral roll. The hamlet has its own character and a strong sense of identity and community. It is rural in nature being within the Green Belt and surrounded by countryside. It was this rural nature that motivated many of the residents to choose it as their home. The proposal to remove Whitecross from the Green Belt including several green fields would seriously damage this community and is in conflict with a number of rules governing the Green Belt. Land should only be removed from the Green Belt if there are exceptional reasons for doing so. As it has been accepted that Whitecross and its neighbouring green land (defined as Development Parcel 2 in the Hankinson Duckett Associates Green Belt study dated February 2017) is not required in the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 for the development of the Dalton Barracks site there are no exceptional reasons for removing it. Removing Whitecross from the Green Belt conflicts with Purpose 3 of the Green Belt to prevent encroachment into the countryside. Although Whitecross does not play a major part in preventing Oxford from coalescing with Abingdon the fields between Dalton Barracks and Whitecross do prevent the Garden Village from coalescing with Whitecross. This would certainly contravene the Purpose 1 of the Green Belt to prevent unrestricted sprawl of built up areas as well as the requirement that the garden village must be a discrete new development. The 2014 Green Belt Review recognises that Whitecross is vulnerable to erosion. The green land in Parcel 2 carries out a recreational purpose as it is extensively used by dog walkers and horse riding and has been for many years and provides an important habitat for wildlife.

Shippon

Shippon is not in Wootton Parish, but Wootton Parish Council recognises the importance of the Green Belt between Shippon and Abingdon and fully supports the comments in this respect of St Helen Without Parish Council. The argument deployed by the District Council that under the National Planning Framework infilling development can still take place if Shippon is not removed from the Green Belt so it does not matter if it is removed, means that the converse is also true that there is no need to remove it from the Green Belt; this clearly conflicts with the NPF requirement that land should only be removed if there are exceptional reasons for doing so.

The Garden Village

Wootton Parish Council has no objection to the proposal to develop a Garden Village at Dalton Barracks, but fully supports the argumentation set out by the Wootton and St Helen Without Joint Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee in its letter from Dr Janet Banfield dated 3rd May to the Planning Policy Team. This points out that there is no need to remove any land from the Green Belt as the Dalton Barracks site can be redeveloped under existing Local Plan policies using the previously developed land. Paragraph 14 of the paper dated March 2016 setting out the criteria for Garden

Villages “Community-led Garden Villages, Towns and Cities” states that “the garden village must be a new discrete settlement, and not an extension of an existing town or village. This does not exclude proposals where there are already a few existing homes”; the hamlet of Whitecross should not, therefore, be allowed to coalesce with the Garden Village.

The Supporting Infrastructure

Providing adequate infrastructure is key to the successful development of the Garden Village at Dalton Barracks without destroying the character of the surrounding villages. Traffic already poses a problem in a number of roads adjacent to or close to the proposed development. The B4017 which traverses Wootton and Whitecross and links Oxford with Abingdon is already reaching its capacity. It is understood that the detailed planning for the infrastructure has not yet been completed and will not be available to the District Council until October 2017. It is vitally important that the relevant studies and proposals are made available for public consultation as soon as they are available. There are also concerns whether adequate resources are available to provide appropriate infrastructure before development of the site commences; providing adequate infrastructure can clearly not wait until developer funding is available.

Community Engagement

A public consultation organised by St Helen Without Parish Council and supported by Wootton Parish Council was held in Shippon on the 23rd April; Wootton residents were invited to attend and Whitecross residents were leafleted. The event was very well attended, mainly from residents of Shippon and Whitecross. Residents were invited to comment on feedback forms and an analysis of the responses from Whitecross residents revealed a high degree of consensus.

- Some 60% agreed that there was a need for new and affordable housing.
- 70% accepted that some future development of Dalton Barracks, but limited in the areas for development. More than three quarters, however, considered that the overall impact on the area would be negative.
- There was unanimity that the Garden Village should not be allowed to merge with Whitecross.
- 58% did not want any land removed from the Green Belt; 42% were prepared for brownfield land to be removed from the Greenbelt. There was consensus, however, on the view that development should only take place within the previously developed area in Dalton Barracks.
- There was unanimity that Whitecross should not be taken out of the Green Belt.
- There was strong concern that the character and identity of the Whitecross community would be seriously damaged if coalescence with the Garden Village or the land between removed from the Green Belt were allowed to happen.
- Traffic was a major concern, the current infrastructure was already under heavy strain.
- The need for appropriate infrastructure to be installed before development began was emphasized.
- The rural nature of Whitecross was highly valued including its ability to provide recreational facilities and a habitat for wildlife

In addition Wootton and St Helen Without residents were invited to attend an exhibition and presentation organised by the District Council on 14th March in the Wootton and Dry Sandford Community Centre and have been kept informed of developments in the community newsletter and website.

Conclusion

Wootton Parish Council recognises that there is a need to provide new housing in the Vale of White Horse. It accepts, in principle, that the Dalton Barracks site can contribute to meeting this need if the land is released by the Ministry of Defence. The site contains a large area of previously developed land and this should be more than adequate to meet the target of 1,200 defined in the VWHDC Local Plan Part 2. The Parish Council considers, therefore, that there is no need to remove any green land from the Green Belt. The proposal to remove the green fields between Dalton Barracks and Whitecross (Parcel No 2) from the Green Belt is completely unacceptable. To do so would seriously damage the character, rural nature and identity of Whitecross and would be in contravention of both the rules governing the Green Belt and the guidelines for Garden Villages.

Providing appropriate and adequate infrastructure to support the proposed development is vital. Detailed proposals for this will not be available before October 2017 and once released should be subject to public scrutiny and consultation. Resources must be identified in advance to provide suitable and adequate infrastructure for the development.

The Local Plan Part 2 should not include any catch-all clauses reserving rights to change or alter the policy without further consultation.

Wootton Parish Council

3 May 2017