

Science Vale Area Action Plan Issues and Scope Representations Form



Science Vale is an area in southern Oxfordshire that will see significant change over the next 15 years. It is a focus for job growth primarily because it houses three large, very successful centres for science at Harwell Campus, Milton Park and Culham Science Centre. The research and development activity that takes place in these centres is world renowned, and the area is set to be home to 20,000 additional jobs in the period to 2031.

New homes and facilities will be needed for these people alongside our already growing population. Our existing and/or emerging local plans are proposing development sites, in locations accessible to the jobs, for over 20,000 new homes and the infrastructure needed to support them.

We need to manage the growth planned in Science Vale carefully. We are producing a Science Vale Area Action Plan to help make sure Science Vale grows successfully with the infrastructure it needs. The plan will support the implementation of the strategic policies in our adopted and emerging local plans and look at the specific detail of how these are delivered for Science Vale. Please review our consultation document before completing this response form. The consultation closes **5pm on 17 April 2015!**

Your post code OX11

If you can ensure that you've provided your post code either on this form (if responding by hard copy) or as part of your online registration. We just want to make sure we get a good coverage of respondents from our districts.

Contact information

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The questions

A fundamental issue.

Keep Harwell Rural (KHR) does not accept the SHMA on which the separate district Local Plans are based, and thus much of the detail, so we have a problem in responding to this joint plan. We do not want to support a plan that seeks to deliver items with which we do not agree, although we recognise the sense of the two district councils working together to achieve satisfactory outcomes for this area that crosses the district boundaries.

A further problem is that the Action Plan relies on flowery language without addressing obvious problems. For example, it says nothing about the fact that the largest adjacent housing sites in the entire area – Great Western Park (GWP) and Valley Park (VP) – will be built without being treated as a single place. This is partly a timing issue because GWP is well underway. If treated as a single site with less housing than the initial VP plan is suggesting, and changes are made to the remaining GWP sites, it is still possible to minimise 'separateness' and also secure a significant green area to the west of the site and east of the A34. If not coalescence of Didcot with Harwell will be apparent.

More generally we have severe doubts about whether this new plan will have any significant effect on our key concerns:

- ❖ over building in the whole of Harwell's surrounding area;
- ❖ the absence of any significant enhancement of the A34 in the next 5 years beyond the important relief of congestion at the Milton and Chilton junctions;
- ❖ years of growing problems awaiting infrastructure solutions.

All in all, we fail to see that the Science Vale Area Action Plan has any added value over and above the Local Plans.

However, our response to the questions posed is as follows.

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- 1) Is the proposed Science Vale Area Action Plan boundary appropriate for the development of planning policies to support the economic growth in Science Vale?

No. There are places outside the boundary such as Abingdon, Drayton and even Dorchester that are just as relevant as communities to Science Vale as are places within the boundary such as Wantage. Generally, these different plans with overlapping and arbitrary boundaries merely obfuscate what is really happening to local communities, especially insofar as they confuse matters to ordinary people who cannot be expected to grasp all of the details.

The designated area also includes a large amount of AONB area to the south. This area should be removed from the plan boundaries, apart necessarily from the Harwell Campus land that falls within the AONB.

- 2) What do you think about the issues we have identified at this early stage? Are there any additional issues that we have not covered?

We have problems with the issues (a) in respect of timing and (b) wording unsupported by plans.

(a) Timing. Some actions are needed now (GWP/VP), but the plan confirmation is stated as May 2017. It is not clear what planning resources and funding will be available to apply to these actions when we understand that planning resources are already stretched.

(b) Wording. There are many instances of phrases without real substance. For example:

Issue no 4 – growth – is required to be achieved “without compromising one of its foundations of success - its natural beauty, historic and rural character”;

Vision Point 3 aims to provide excellent places to live in “by developing vibrant neighbourhoods whilst ensuring our villages and countryside maintain their distinctive character”;

Objective 3 in support of this vision is to “Protect the distinctive character and heritage of Science Vale's market towns, villages and countryside”.

This collection of words is worthless unless backed up by actual measures of what will be achieved. The words are especially meaningless as far as Harwell village is concerned, because what is happening is quite the opposite. Harwell is heading for coalescence with Didcot with the development of Valley Park.

The Science Vale Area Action Plan is not able to deliver these aims and is therefore not credible unless it is backed up by Local Plans showing mapped boundaries to keep any land free of development around Harwell village. The SVAAP also somehow has to take account of the substantial windfall sites now being built within Harwell and elsewhere.

- 3) Are some issues more important than others? What might influence their relative importance over time?

Issue 5 – the delivery of infrastructure – is likely to remain the most important followed closely by Issue 4 – growth without compromising foundations of success (i.e. without prejudicing the present rural environment).

- 4) Will our vision and objectives for the Science Vale Area Action Plan help to achieve the economic growth set out in our local plans? If not, what is missing?

The vision and objectives should help to achieve the economic growth set out in district plans, but the Public Examination of district Local Plans has yet to be heard and cleared. We are concerned with their over reliance of what we believe to be a faulty SHMA. This is leading to over-provision of housing sites before the actual growth of jobs and population can be compared with the single upper forecasts on which the plans are based. Too few sites allocated can be adjusted later, too many - as we believe have been planned – will have undesirable consequences.

What is missing? A realistic timescale that explains how the SVAAP meshes with the delivery of companion plans. The validity of the Local Plans and any adjustments that the Inspectors may require will not be known for many months.

- 5) Is the proposed scope of the plan, sufficient to adequately plan for and deliver the growth agenda for Science Vale?

Of course vision and objectives will help, but we understand that both Councils planning resources are already stretched. It is not clear what resources will be available in the 2 years to May 2017 to be able to control and implement the action plan. This is bound to raise doubts about whether the paper schemes and hopes will be realised. The SVAAP in any case cannot itself deliver growth – that depends on developers, businesses and local authorities.

Thank you for completing our response form. If completing a hard copy, these can be returned to Joint Projects, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils, c/o Abbey House, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 3JE or forms can be e-mailed through to science.vale@southandvale.gov.uk. Please bear in mind that all responses received will be available to the public to view. If completing online, you can save a draft of your response before responding.