

**Planning Application P14/V2873/O– Land to the West of Great Western Park development  
Didcot (in the parishes of Harwell and Milton)- ‘Valley Park’**

**Response from the Keep Harwell Rural Campaign**

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*Keep Harwell Rural (KHR) is a residents’ group independent of any statutory body. It was formed in 1998 to enable residents to express their views about changes that may affect Harwell, in ways that could augment and complement the views expressed by the Harwell Parish Council. KHR has inputs from a cross-section of villagers concerned about education, traffic and road safety, sustainability, the amenities provided by our nearest town, Didcot, and the preservation of the character of a village with a thousand year history.*

*KHR has responded to planning documents since 1998 and has taken part in Structure Plan and Local Plan Public Enquiries.*

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The Keep Harwell Rural Campaign (KHR) objects strongly to this Planning Application on the following grounds.

Prematurity. The VWH Local Plan 2031 and the representations made about the housing proposals therein have not yet been scrutinised in a Public Examination and the Plan is some distance from adoption. To consider this application now would therefore be premature and perverse.

Housing Numbers and Density. The number of dwellings proposed - 4,450 - considerably exceeds even the VWH figure for Valley Park of ‘at least 2,550’, which itself has been challenged. The gross housing density for the whole site of 178 ha is 25/ha, considerably higher than the VWH figure of 14.1/ha. The equivalent gross density for Great Western Park is 20/ha. The average net density of ca. 40/ha, similar to GWP, is only achieved because the ratio of housing area (110.93 ha) to the total is 62.3%, much higher than GWP at 45.6%. This shows that the proposed overall housing density is much too high for the area and the neighbouring environments, with a lack particularly of enough public open space.

Coalescence. The attempt to follow the VWH stricture: *'The boundary between the development areas and Harwell village must be carefully treated in order to protect the separate identities of Valley Park and Harwell'* is totally inadequate. *'A woodland edge buffer will be established between the A34 and residential development to enhance the levels of screening provided by the existing vegetation and reduce the impression of amalgamation for residents of Harwell'* would do next to nothing for that impression; what Harwell wants and needs is a green corridor along the B4493 east of the A34 and protection for the whole area west of the A34. What is required is a clear boundary, clearly shown on any map or plan of the development, within which there must be no new building.

Such a green corridor has been proposed by KHR and the Harwell Parish Council in representations made on the VWH Local Plan 2031. Specifically: *An open area resembling the current countryside should extend at least 200m on both the north and south sides of the B4493 to maintain a sense of rural landscape along this road and to preserve a rural gap between Harwell and Didcot.*

This proposal has not yet been considered, amplifying the prematurity of the application. This green corridor would involve less than 10% of the land area of Valley Park and would be a small change to the plans that would make an enormous difference to *'careful treatment in order to protect the separate identities of Valley Park and Harwell'*.

Transport. More houses than proposed in the Local Plan are bound to add to the traffic inputs. It appears that the traffic mitigation measures outlined in the Local Plan 2013 cannot yet provide absolute assurance that they will be effective at coping with the scale of housing development proposed in the Plan around Harwell and Didcot. There should certainly be no acceptance of plans for even more housing without a demonstration from traffic modelling that the road infrastructure can cope.

Design. There are a number of detailed aspects of the Masterplan layout which beg questions, for example:

- The junction just east of the A34 totally ignores the scheme for and the position of the roundabout for the Harwell Link Road designed by the County Council.
- Housing goes right up to the A34 and Link Road, whereas there are green spaces further east, notably that on the western edge of GWP, which then becomes rather redundant as a green buffer, instead perhaps becoming a barrier to integration of Valley Park, GWP and Didcot.
- There are high housing density areas and extended road works along the B4493, completely contrary to what is needed to retain some impression of separate identity of Valley Park and Harwell.

Lack of Integration. The degree of integration with Great Western Park, and particularly with the rest of Didcot, appears to be very limited. The effect of the green spaces on the western

edge of Great Western Park, and lack of permeability into Great Western Park, suggests that Valley Park will be a rather isolated housing estate, blighting the separate identity of Harwell Village, but not effectively linked to Didcot.

Infrastructure. There should be careful scrutiny of how such a large development will satisfy the requirements for infrastructure e.g. water supply, sewage, delivering schools and other facilities on time. The Section 106 headings in Section 4 do not give great hope that the needs of other local communities impacted by Valley Park will be entertained.

Local Impact. We would accept that eventually some satisfactory plan for Valley Park will have to be approved. In this process it is essential that local knowledge, rather than just the aspirations of developers and the formality of the planning process, be exploited to achieve the best possible results. There is little evidence in the present planning application that the developers appreciate local heritages and concerns.

*The Keep Harwell Rural Campaign*

*10 March 2015*