

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

Response from the Keep Harwell Rural Campaign

Contact:

Dr A E Hughes

Chairman: Keep Harwell Rural Campaign (KHR)

Kingswood

2 King’s Lane

Harwell

Didcot

OX11 0EJ

Tel: (01235) 835301

Fax: (01235) 832667

E mail:

a.hughes09@btinternet.com

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.

The Keep Harwell Rural Campaign (KHR) objects to this amended application on several grounds. However, we believe that our key concern – to ensure that there is an adequate rural gap between Harwell village and Didcot – can be remedied. We propose how this could be achieved and are very willing to discuss this proposal with the developers, their agents and planning officers.

1. The Rural Gap

It seems to be assumed that the A34 represents an adequate barrier to protect the rural environment of Harwell. Since Harwell houses extend up the A34 bridge from the west, what happens on the eastern side of the A34 does have a key influence on whether a proper rural gap exists and is perceived or not. On leaving or entering Harwell now on the eastern side of the A34, a belt of trees, through which fields can be seen on both sides of the road, gives a clear sense of country. In winter especially, the space behind the trees maintains the rural aspect. Permitting housing close to the B4493 along this stretch of

road between the A34 bridge and Zulu Farm will forever end the clear separate identity of Harwell, especially since some of this space is needed for the junction of the Harwell Link Road.

Our representations on the publication version of the VWH Local Plan 2031 include a proposed modification to the site template for Valley Park by the provision of a 'green corridor' along this road to prevent the coalescence of Harwell and Didcot. This has not yet been considered by the Inspector. The arguments made in that representation also apply to this planning application and a vestige of rural gap can be achieved without great changes to the layout of Valley Park.

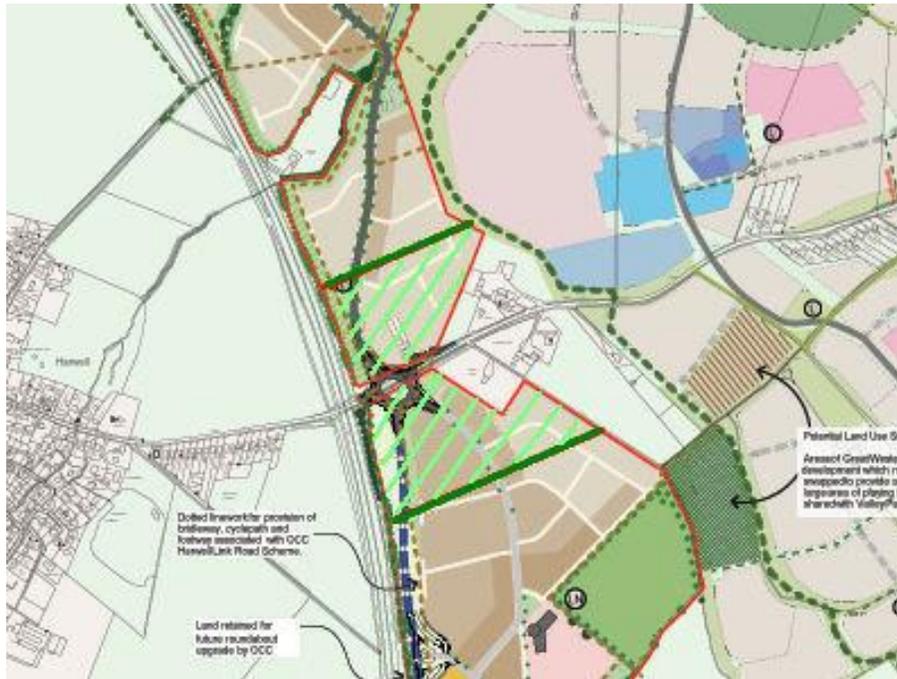
In the context of the aims and policies of the Local Plan 2031 a green corridor would fulfil several aims that are otherwise not met:

- Saved policy NE10 says *"In the urban fringes and important open gaps between settlements developments which would harm their essentially open or rural character will not be permitted."*
- Core Policy 44: Landscape includes: *"The key features that contribute to the nature and quality of the Vale of White Horse District's landscape will be protected from harmful development and where possible enhanced, in particular: (i) features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and water bodies; (ii) important landscape settings of settlements."*
- Section 5.57 says that: *"The countryside and villages will have maintained their distinctive character. The Larger Villages will have retained their separate identities....."*
- The requirements for Valley Park set out in Appendix A of the Local Plan 2031 include *"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."*

The map shows how our proposed green corridor would map onto the developers' Illustrative Masterplan for Valley Park. It would enable the retention of all the natural trees and open space along the B4493 at the expense of about 5.5 hectares allocated to low and medium density housing on the Masterplan. As the average net density is 40 per hectare this would only be about 200 houses.

There could be other ways of contributing to the provision of the green corridor. The planning application has 24.86 hectares allocated to public open space – 23.4% of the housing area. Re-locating some of this provision, e.g. land for allotments and buffers at the northern and southern extremities of the site, could be a satisfactory solution or part of one. Regardless of how it is achieved, a proper rural gap that prevents coalescence of Harwell and Valley Park should have visible rural aspects on both sides of the B4493.

This small change to the plans would make an enormous difference to *"careful treatment in order to protect the separate identities of Valley Park and Harwell"*.



2. 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 approve this planning application now would therefore be premature, especially concerning submissions that could involve significant changes. In particular, the proposal above to prevent coalescence by protecting a ‘green corridor’ along the B4493 has not yet been considered. To ignore submissions still not considered is to pre-empt any decision which the Inspector might make. In the interests of making a sound decision about such a large and important development as Valley Park, VWH must take into account those submissions and make adjustments or conditions as appropriate.

3. Transport

More houses than proposed in the VWH Local Plan 2031 are bound to add to the traffic inputs. It appears that the traffic mitigation measures outlined in the Local Plan cannot yet provide total assurance that they will be effective at coping with the scale of housing development proposed in the Local Plan around Harwell and Didcot, let alone the larger number of dwellings in the planning application. There should be no acceptance of plans for more housing without a demonstration from traffic modelling that the road infrastructure can cope. If it cannot, reductions to the loads on the infrastructure must be made.

4. Housing numbers and density

Although the developers have reduced the proposed number of dwellings from 4,450 to 4,254 they are still considerably higher than the Local Plan proposal of 'at least 2,550' and the timing of building on this larger scale is unclear. The proposed number of houses at Valley Park has doubled (even more if Valley Park North is included) since first conceived. This would be a very large housing development at relatively average high density in what is basically urban fringe in a rural area, and it should be no surprise that there is a great deal of local concern about its impacts.

We have to formally object to any granting of outline planning permission for Valley Park before the outcome of the Examination in Public of the Vale Local Plan.

The Keep Harwell Rural Campaign

27 October 2015