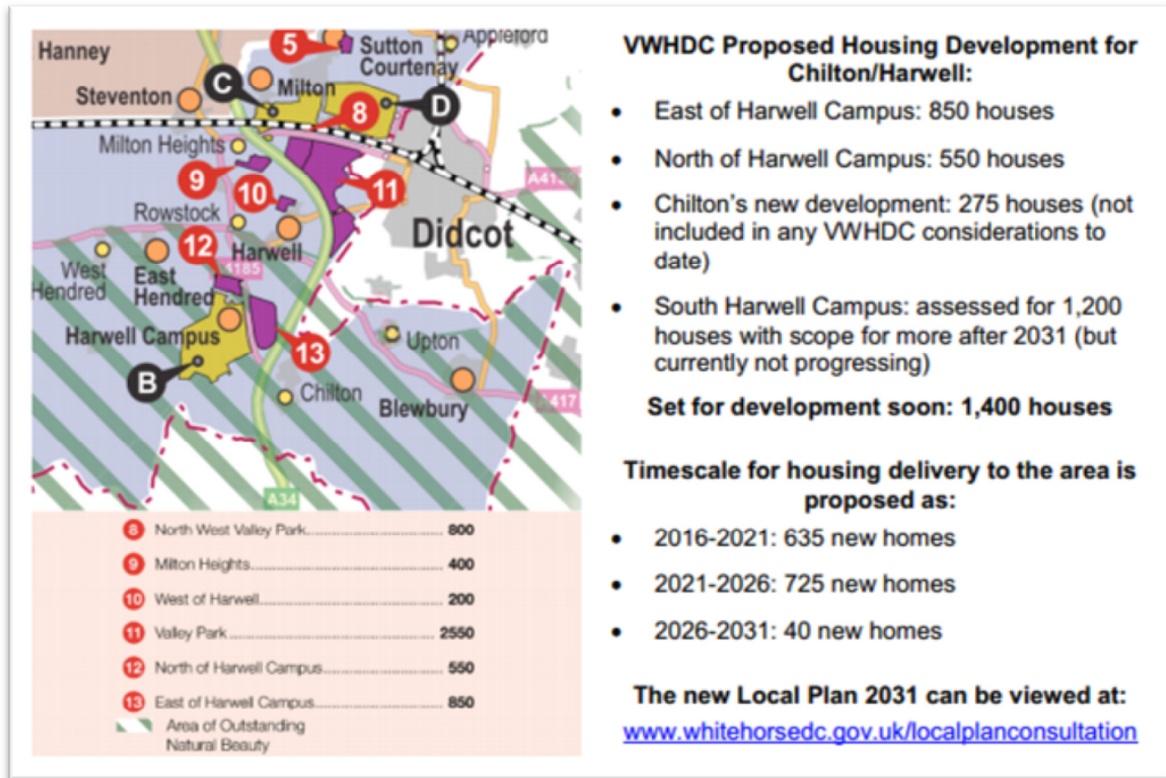


Chronicle Special Edition: 1,400 new houses near Chilton Village – “what this means and how you can make your views known”



We live in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which is a legally protected landscape

Residents of Chilton are privileged to live in The North Wessex Downs Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). We enjoy outstanding views and are surrounded by open countryside. There are many wild orchids around the village, an abundance of birds including skylarks, and deer and other wild mammals are numerous.

The North Wessex Downs AONB covers 668 sq miles between Reading and Swindon to the East and North, and Andover and Devizes to the South and West. Chilton village and the Harwell Oxford Campus both reside entirely within the North Wessex Downs AONB (<http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/>).

Like National Parks, AONBs are protected by law from developments that could damage their natural beauty and character.

- The creation of AONBs was enabled by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and the North Wessex Downs AONB was set up in 1972. The status and responsibilities for protection of AONBs was further clarified by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000
- Public bodies from a Parish Council to the County Council are responsible for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of an AONB.
- The North Wessex Downs AONB has many villages like Chilton within it and their character contributes to the beauty of the area.
- To ensure that National Parks, The Norfolk Broads and AONBs aren't spoiled by development the National Planning Policy Framework makes specific provision for National Parks and AONBs in order to protect the landscape.
- National Parks have their own Planning Authorities who understand their responsibilities and are diligent in their execution. However AONBs are in a far weaker position as their area is covered by numerous Planning Authorities with other priorities!

The North Wessex Downs AONB is now threatened by The Vale Of White Horse Housing plans which will could change its beauty and character forever.

The Vale of White Horse District Council has to produce a Local Plan showing where they think houses should be built over the next 20 years. A leaflet which attempted to summarise the Plan was sent to all Householders. This Plan contains two sites for new houses that are in entirely within the North Wessex Downs AONB beside the Harwell Campus near Chilton. An important feature of the Plan is to get houses built quickly and VOWH is trying to get **635 built near Chilton within 5 years.**

The Save Chilton AONB Action Group has been formed to oppose these plans and, in agreement with the North Wessex Downs AONB Board, it ...

- **Opposes the entire allocation of 850 homes at the Harwell East Campus.**
- **Opposes the additional allocation of 150 homes at the North West Harwell Campus.**
- **Supports the growth of the Harwell Oxford Campus, including provision of up to 400 new homes at the North West Harwell Campus, provided that all development is contained within the perimeter of the Harwell Oxford Campus.**

The Action Group also requests that:

- **The 850 homes allocated to the Harwell East Campus and the additional 150 houses allocated to the North West Harwell Campus (1,000 houses in total) should be reallocated to other sites already identified by the Vale of White Horse, for example:**
 - **Valley Park (which has already been assessed as having additional capacity for up to a further 1,600 homes), or**
 - **Didcot A (capacity for 425 houses), or**
 - **Rowstock (capacity for 515 houses), or**
 - **Land West of Steventon (capacity for 350 houses), or**

- Distributed throughout the West Vale in order to encourage and support economic growth and prosperity more equally across the district.
- The AONB is removed entirely from the Science Vale “Ringfence” in order to protect it from future speculative development should the Science Vale fall behind in delivery of its housing targets.

Of course it’s unrealistic simply to oppose all development in our area and smaller scale development within an existing developed area primarily on Brown Field sites can be carried out without damaging the beauty of the AONB.

However The Vale of White Horse is now proposing the building of a Large Village (small-town!) with around 1400 houses in the AONB.

The intention to create a new settlement based on the Harwell Campus is NOT mentioned in the VOWH leaflet, which incorrectly states that the number of houses proposed for the AONB has been reduced. In fact, the number of houses allocated within the AONB is the same as published in the draft Plan earlier this year; VOWH has simply allocated them over two, rather than a single, site. You have to look at the full Plan and read as far as the Appendices before you discover the intention to build a new self-sufficient and sustainable community based on the Harwell Campus.

This scale of development, with the majority of it in open countryside on Green Field sites ,is without precedent for an AONB or National Park and if permitted could have serious implications for the rest of the country. The VOWH appears to be in clear breach of their legal duties by proposing it.

But what can we do to stop it?

The VOWH Local Plan has now been approved by the District Council so further objections to them are pointless. BUT, for the next stage, it goes to a Housing Inspector who will consider all objections that are submitted and has the power to change things.

How to Object or, to use the formal terminology, “Make representations”

The VOWH Local Plan will now go to an independent Planning Inspector appointed by the government, who will undertake a public examination of the plan and consider certain representations that are submitted by individuals and interested organisations prior to **Friday 19 December 2014 at 4.30 pm.**

The **only factors** that will be considered relevant by the Inspector are whether the VOWH Local Plan:

- has been prepared in accordance with all legal requirements and VOWH has followed correct consultation procedures; and
- is “sound” (achievable and justified).

The Vale of White Horse has issued guidance on how to make representations and it can be found on their website: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/new-local-plan>. They encourage use of their special Consultation Website, which requires prior registration, where you can submit an online form. You can also download and print a form, which you can fill in and post. Representations can also be made by email to planning.policy@whitehorsedc.gov.uk headed “Comments on Local Plan”.

At this stage, representations must be made in respect of specific paragraphs and policies of the Local Plan, and you must say why you consider that paragraph is not legally compliant or is unsound or fails to comply with the duty to co-operate.

This may sound difficult but on Friday 5th December from 2-8pm at the Village Hall there is an informal drop-in session for residents who want more information on how to respond to the Local Plan.

We recognise that not every villager will oppose the Local Plan, and all responses can be made as described above, but if you do object and wish to make a representation there appears to be a number of valid reasons on which to do so.

The Parish Council objects to the Local Plan and will also be making its own representation.

Representations you could consider making if you wish to oppose the Plan.

We suggest that a good basis for objection is non-compliance with the following legislation:

National Planning Policy Framework

Paragraph 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that: ***“Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.”***

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that: ***“Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:***

- ***the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;***

- *the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- *any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.”*

Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act 2000)

Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a general duty on public bodies to:

“ In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty...A relevant authority for the purposes of this section includes any (a) Minister of the Crown;(b) any public body (c) any statutory undertaker. 3(a) Any public body includes a county council, borough council, district council (c) a joint committee appointed under section 102 (1) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.”

To meet the requirements of Section 85 of the CRoW Act, South East Regional Assembly is statutorily obliged to take into account the objectives and purposes of AONBs in its policy formulation and decision-including the South East Plan submission draft.

Other Material Considerations

- Employment Numbers: The numbers used in the Plan are inconsistent and should not be used to phase housing delivery. This applies to the allocations in the AONB making them unsound.
- Science Vale Requirements: The Plan makes numerous references to the needs of Science Vale BUT without supporting evidence. This is particularly true of the Harwell Oxford Campus where the Plan is making allocations to meet unattributed assertions of need making it unsound and failing in a duty to consult.

These points show a failure to demonstrate exceptional need in a sound manner as required by NPPF paragraph 116.

Where can I get further information?

The Save Chilton AONB Action Group is producing some example responses that you can consider using in any response you choose to make. We hope this will help villagers to make their views known to the Inspector. **EVERY RESPONSE COUNTS.** At the previous consultation VOWH chose to count the village’s petition of 361 signatures as only one objection, therefore every response now is important. Please email savechiltonaonb@gmail.com for example responses, or if you would like further guidance.

The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) have some very useful information on their website at <http://www.cpreoxon.org.uk/news/item/2407-vale-local-plan-consultation>