

5 January 2016

working locally and nationally to  
protect and enhance a beautiful,  
thriving countryside for everyone to  
value and enjoy

## Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 - Part 1 - Examination

### **RESPONSE ON MATTER 7: Supporting Infrastructure and Services (CP7, CP12, CP17 - CP19, CP21, CP33 - 36)**

The certain **lack of infrastructure** is one of the bigger elephants in the room and at once challenges the viability and deliverability, effectiveness and hence soundness of the Plan. It is clear that national grants and county-wide policies and plans will not meet the highways need. We have already seen, for example in respect of the long-awaited building on Grove Airfield, that the cost of infrastructure to developers is holding development back.

The delivery of improvements to the A34, A338, A415, A417 and A420, often already at full capacity, is essential **before development on strategic housing sites is completed and houses are occupied**. Otherwise, it will be impossible to comply with the NPPF which states that Local Plans should identify and co-ordinate infrastructure requirements. What we find in the Local Plan is 'support', but more often 'seek to support' (see, for example, paragraph 6.59). House-building should be timed to happen alongside the necessary and co-ordinated road improvements.

An example makes the highways point clearly. The A338 is already often at full capacity, yet all that the County's proposals for its LTP4, on which the Local Plan relies, suggest is that a study review be undertaken in 2025. In the meantime, the Local Plan foresees a number of major developments of housing on strategic sites in the Wantage/Grove area, and the County has announced at a consultation meeting that it envisages use of the private car, rather than public transport, becoming the transport staple in the area. Just when the north-eastern and north-western link roads around Wantage, associated with the Crab Hill and Grove Airfield sites, respectively, will be built, to save grid-lock in Wantage, seems to be anyone's guess. Already traffic in Wantage produces many unfortunate and dangerous rat-runs in the villages around the town. Where is the Core Policy to deal with these?

The Hindhaugh report makes similar well-researched and established points about the A420, and much the same can be said of the A415 and A417. The major artery in the Vale, Highways England's A34, like the A40 with which it connects, will only have the funds for sticking-plaster temporary aid, where major cures are needed. Yes, the County does have proposals for a further crossing of the Thames and some initial thoughts on a new major highway to the east, linking the A34 to the A40 (which would in any case face strong resistance from those who care about the

countryside), and the re-opening of Grove Station is a dear wish, but we cannot see their happening any time soon, if ever.

Further, in order to ensure that the current problems with over-capacity on the roads, or the lack of primary school places, is not further exacerbated, a condition in the Plan should be that **no houses on a development site, in particular a strategic site, be occupied until the roads and schools associated with a planning approval are completed: it being important to specify precisely what 'delivery of infrastructure within appropriate timescales' (Local Plan, paragraph 4.44) should mean. It is not satisfactory - see CP7 (ii) - to 'use an (unspecified) appropriate mechanism to defer part of the developer contributions to a later date'**. What we see at present, and must not happen after a new Local plan is put in place, is that some houses on a large estate are built and occupied before the associated primary school for the children living in the houses is provided, putting yet greater pressure on schooling where classes are already full, and building of the remaining houses is held back for the time being to avoid the cost of providing a school. Concerning roads, and put another way and in terms of what we commented on above, residents in the Vale should not have to wait until the County's promise to prepare a study of the A338 in 2025 to have the terrible congestion they experience relieved.

One solution is simple: **much reduce the number of houses to be built, and monitor infrastructure provision closely, to keep building and the provision of infrastructure in line.**

We have concentrated here on roads and, to a lesser extent on schools. In respect of other services, including health facilities, and social and emergency services, please see our earlier representation.

END