

CPRE Vale of White Horse: Further comments on the Didcot Garden Town Proposals.

We very much concur with and support the comments sent to you on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire by Mr Richard Harding, Chairman of our South Oxfordshire Committee, on 16th December. This note adds a few remarks that follow from the Vale's specific experience and our own interest in Didcot's future and that of the whole area in general. Some of our comments emphasize the importance of Mr Harding's comments.

Before any agreement to go ahead is made, we would advise that:

1. The **full implications for related infrastructure** in the whole Vale and South Oxfordshire area, including the availability of complete and committed funding, **be thoroughly investigated**, and in particular for highways including river crossings, etc. - any need for new roads across green fields would need careful placement and justification

2. The plans for **development be staggered/phased**, with the aim of achieving organic growth and hence a town that will everywhere be one of human dimensions, attractive to live in: the point here being that one section of the town should become established, with a well-defined character, before the next section is built; **'cherry-picking' by developers** as to the order of development and the type of development (in particular as regards avoidance of affordable housing) should be **outlawed**

3. **Design features should everywhere be tested**, both by regular consultation with the community, with 'stakeholders', and with a range of independent planning and design experts with knowledge of successful such developments in Britain **and abroad**; here a main aim should be **to avoid the uniform, mediocre appearance** of so many recent modern developments (eliminating, for example, repeated, similar house-design in the same brickwork, etc.)

4. In particular, we would hope that the **City Fathers include visits to recent developments of garden towns at home and abroad** (Mr Harding refers to Freiburg; I would mention that at the time of the European Games a few years back, Manchester wholly revised its plans, following a visit to Barcelona, which opened their eyes as to what was possible)

5. It would be important that as **yet unbuilt strategic sites in the Local Plans are designed to fit well into the plans** for the garden town

6. Any new development plans should **protect and enhance** existing community green space

7. **Coalescence** with existing villages, with their own distinctive character, should be **avoided**

Very important is to keep continually in mind the intention to have a **'garden town' rather than just a 'new town'**, and the use, as Mr Harding suggests, of varying densities to achieve the best results. With all this taken into account, there is a real possibility of making appropriate use of a fine opportunity. **Otherwise, the idea might best be moth-balled.**

Peter Collins

Dr P.J. Collins, Chairman, CPRE Vale of White Horse Committee