



The Planning
Inspectorate

Report to South Oxfordshire District Council

by **Roy Foster MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

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PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004

SECTION 20

REPORT ON THE EXAMINATION OF THE SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE CORE STRATEGY

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Abbreviations Used in this Report

AA	Appropriate Assessment
AHVA	Affordable Housing Viability Assessment
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BR	Building Regulations
COSR	Central Oxfordshire Sub-Region
CS	Core Strategy
CSH	Code for Sustainable Homes
DNE	Didcot North East
DPD	Development Plan Document
EUV	Established Use Value
FPC	Further Proposed Change
GB	Green Belt
HMA	Housing Market Area
IDP	Infrastructure Delivery Plan
LDS	Local Development Scheme
LP	Local Plan
LTP	Local Transport Plan
MM	Main Modification
NGP	New Growth Point
NP	Neighbourhood Plan
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
PC	Proposed Change
PIC	Proposed Inspector Change
PO	Preferred Options
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
RS	Regional Strategy
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SADPD	Site Allocations Development Plan Document
SCI	Statement of Community Involvement
SCOTS	South Central Oxfordshire Transport Study
SCS	Sustainable Community Strategy
SEP	South East Plan
SFRA	Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
SHLAA	Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
SHMA	Strategic Housing Market Assessment
SODC	South Oxfordshire District Council
SVUK	Science Vale UK
TNP	Thame Neighbourhood Plan
TTC	Thame Town Council
VoWH	Vale of White Horse District Council

Non-Technical Summary

This report concludes that, subject to a number of main modifications (MMs), the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (CS) provides an appropriate basis for the planning of the District over the next 15 years.

The Council has specifically requested that I recommend any such MMs as may be necessary to enable them to adopt the plan. These modifications can be summarised as follows:

- Increases in the numbers of allocations to be made at Thame, Wallingford and the Larger Villages;
- Other housing-related changes to include (a) an explanation of the housing distribution strategy, (b) reference to housing for 'affordable rent', (c) a more welcoming approach to a wider range of models of 'specialist accommodation', (d) more flexibility on density, and (e) deletion of inappropriate text from paras 3.14 and 7.16;
- Changes regarding references to the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area (SOSDA) and revocation of the South East Plan (SEP);
- Changes resolving some soundness issues concerning Didcot and Henley;
- Changes concerning Thame to (a) delete the strategic allocation and devolve all housing allocations to the Thame Neighbourhood Plan and (b) resolve some other soundness matters;
- Changes to provide the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (SADPD) with an appropriate clearer brief on the distribution of housing allocations among the Larger Villages;
- Changes concerning transport and the economy to avoid inappropriate site-specific references to issues which have yet to be determined in the Vale of White Horse CS, together with resolution of some other soundness matters;
- Changes to delete the proposal for a Green Belt review at Wheatley;
- Changes to insert (a) reference to the presumption in favour of sustainable development in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and (b) a new policy concerning the historic environment.

Most, but not all, of the MMs recommended in this report are based on proposals put forward by the Council in response to points raised and suggestions discussed during the public examination. The recommended changes do not alter the overall thrust of the Council's strategy.

Introduction

1. This report assesses the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (CS) in terms of S20(5) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended. It considers whether or not the plan is 'sound' and complies with the legal requirements. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) indicates that a sound plan will have been positively prepared and be justified, effective, and consistent with national policy. The statutory 'duty to co-operate' introduced by S33A of the 2004 Act does not apply in this case as the CS was submitted well before the date (15 November 2011) when the duty came into effect.
2. The starting point for the examination is the assumption that the local authority has submitted what it considers to be a sound plan. The basis for my examination is the submitted draft CS dated March 2011. This is the same as the version published for consultation in December 2010, save for a set of minor changes and corrections made between those two dates.
3. In accordance with S20 (7C) of the 2004 Act, the District Council (SODC) requested me to recommend any main modifications necessary to make the plan sound. These are referenced in bold in the text (**MM**) and set out in the schedule annexed as Appendix A to this report.
4. It may be helpful to summarise the origins of the MMs. Following some initial soundness concerns which I expressed at the Exploratory Meeting held in May 2011, the District Council (SODC) resolved to make some Proposed Changes (PC). These were advertised for public consultation in July-August 2011 and gave rise to a number of new and revised representations. Following on from the July and November hearing sessions, SODC put forward a second tranche of changes – the Further Proposed Changes (FPC). These were consulted upon in February-March 2012 along with some Proposed Inspector Changes (PIC). Representations arising from the FPC/PIC were discussed at hearing sessions in May 2012, and an additional hearing session took place in June 2012 to discuss the implications of the changed background presented by the NPPF. The May/June sessions gave rise to another small set of changes which were advertised for comment in July/August 2012. Where these three sets of changes to the submitted CS are taken forward as MMs in this report, they are set out in the consolidated schedule forming Appendix A.

Assessment of Soundness

Main Issues

1. Taking account of all the representations made in writing and at the hearings, together with the evidence base, the soundness of the plan can be addressed under 13 main issues.

Issue 1 – Is sound overall provision made for housing?

Total quantity of housing planned for

2. The CS plans to meet the South East Plan (SEP) housing total for the District, extended by an additional year at the annual average rate in order to ensure that the strategy has a 15-year horizon. The total provision for 2006-27 is

therefore 11,487. The SEP housing total was heavily informed by the inputs to the regional planning process made by the Oxfordshire Local Authorities acting as 'Section 4(4) authorities' and SODC considers that the District's total remains robust and credible. [This excludes the 4,000 homes allocated to the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area (SOSDA) but no longer provided for reasons discussed under Issue 2 below.] About 55% (6,300) of the SODC total planned growth covers long-standing aspirations for the expansion of Didcot. Originating in the Structure Plan, this aim has been taken forward and subsequently reinforced by a number of factors - the SEP, the designation of Didcot as a New Growth Point (NGP) and the town's centrality to 'Science Vale UK', recently declared an Enterprise Zone.

3. There has been considerable coalescence around the idea that 11,487 is an appropriate target for South Oxfordshire. Suggestions for increased numbers mainly hinge around factors such as (a) SEP's indication that its provisions do not meet household forecasts and that local planning authorities are free to test higher numbers, (b) more recent (higher) household-based projections for the South East region, (c) the high levels of need revealed by the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and by studies of need for affordable housing, and (d) the requirement of the NPPF for planning authorities to use the evidence base to ensure that full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the Housing Market Area are met as far as consistent with the other policies of the Framework. Conversely, there has been criticism that the SEP/CS figure is excessive in relation to current housing demand in the present economic climate.
4. No clear evidence to justify any particular level of higher provision emerged from the examination, nor is there any comprehensive assessment of any such figure against environmental constraints. However, the county authorities are said to be moving towards commissioning an updated SHMA for Oxfordshire in late 2012 and the output from that work will bring greater clarity about whether or not early reviews of Local Plans in the county need to be commenced.
5. Meanwhile, the strong demographic factors underlying the housing provision sought by the SEP have not been shown to be significantly weakened, albeit their effective expression is likely to have been suppressed by the economic situation and the difficulty of access to mortgage funds. Pending the revised SHMA it would not be appropriate to defer adopting plans capable of meeting the District (non-SOSDA) need recognised in the SEP even if delivery takes place over a longer timescale than suggested in the CS, especially as the role of house-building in economic recovery has been recognised in recent budget statements. Overall, therefore, I conclude that the overall housing provision of the CS is soundly based.

Affordable Housing

6. Policy CSH3 seeks 40% provision of affordable housing (AH) on all sites with a net gain of 3 or more dwellings, subject to individual scheme viability. The policy was tested by viability studies undertaken first in October 2009 and then again in October 2011. The latter modelled the twin impacts of a 'nil-grant scenario' and the introduction of the new national approach to 'affordable rent' tenure.

7. The costs/income inputs to the model used for the purpose of the studies show a small increase in AH viability in 2011 compared with 2009, while adoption of a 75% affordable rent/25% shared ownership split also enhances viability compared with 75% social rent/25% shared ownership. Consequently, at low existing use values (EUV) 40% AH is generally viable throughout the District at 75% affordable rent/25% shared ownership provided, importantly, that the level of S106 contributions is not set too high. In low EUV situations this generally continues to be the case for small sites down to the threshold of 3. Since the allocations in the CS are mainly on green-field agricultural sites, as is also likely for many of those to be made through the Site Allocations DPD (SADPD), this is good evidence that the sites primarily relied upon to meet the CS housing provision would generally be viable at 40% AH.
8. At medium EUVs 40% AH becomes, at best, marginal at Didcot, Thame and Wallingford, although it is still viable in Henley and some of the larger villages, mainly in the south of the District. AH becomes unviable at high EUVs except at Henley and an even smaller number of the villages. The individual site viability testing provided by policy CSH3 would usually need to come into operation in such circumstances. However, in the circumstances of South Oxfordshire, medium and high EUV sites would normally be windfalls rather than figuring much among the planned, largely green-field, site allocations upon which the CS relies, so the policy is generally sound and viable.
9. Following the second study SODC put forward changes to the supporting text to policy CSH3 (**MM41, 42a & 43-44**). These indicate the role of affordable rent in achieving viability (as compared with social rent) and the circumstances in which the former may substitute for the latter. Subject to these changes, policy CSH3 is sound.

Meeting housing needs

10. Policy CSH4 deals with aspects of 'meeting housing needs' by providing for a mix of types and sizes of dwellings. Soundness issues arise concerning the unclear meaning of bullet point 3 and the restriction of provision under bullet point 4 to 'extra care' housing. The latter is unjustified because it imposes a single model of specialist care: less prescription is required so that developers can present the market with a wider choice of types and tenures of specialist accommodation, fulfilling the aims of para 50 of the NPPF. Consequently **MM45-50** delete bullet point 3, reword CSH4 to refer to the wider concept of 'specialist accommodation', and mention various other acceptable models in paras 7.38-39 while still retaining (but within the explanatory paragraph) the OCC and SODC corporate preferences for 'extra care'. Subject to those changes the CS is sound on these issues.
11. It is unnecessary to make other changes to the CS concerning whether or not particular types of accommodation fall into Use Class C2 or C3 (and therefore count, or not, towards the identified general and affordable housing needs) or affect the CS/SADPD allocations processes. The Use Class categorisation of any element of an individual scheme will need to be judged on its particular facts. The CS should avoid premature judgements about whether or not various potential models of 'extra care' or other specialist forms of provision fall into class C2 or C3. However, care will need to be taken that the inclusion of a C2 element on an allocated site does not compromise overall provision of

the planned number of C3 dwellings.

Gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople

12. The CS broadly complies with new Government policy on such sites, dated March 2012. It quantifies need in the period to 2016 and commits to updating this for post-2016 by joint-working with other Oxfordshire authorities. It also indicates the way in which needs will be met, including not only criteria-based policy but also commitment to identifying new sites through the SADPD and the Didcot AAP. First priority is to be given to including pitches at the urban extension at Didcot. From the evidence presented, there is no reason to conclude that this approach cannot be effective.

Density

13. Policy CSH2 sets quite narrow fixed density ranges, one for town centre sites and another for other locations. However, since there is no longer a national minimum indicative density, SODC proposed **MM39a & 40**. These provide more flexibility by removing reference to what some perceive as a 'maximum' density range while also setting a minimum of 25 dph unless the character of the area would be undermined. Para 7.24 would retain the aim of promoting the efficient use of land while requiring CSH2 to be read in conjunction with CSQ3 which, in turn, relates to the SODC Design Guide. The latter confirms that higher density can be a key ingredient of good design in appropriate locations. Subject to these MMs, the CS is sound on the issue of density and does not need further change.

Issue 2 – Is new housing provision distributed soundly across the District?

South of Oxford Strategic Development Area (SOSDA)

14. The SEP proposed 4,000 homes in South Oxon adjoining the City of Oxford, primarily to serve the City's needs. However, SOSDA attracted a successful legal challenge on the grounds that there had been inadequate sustainability appraisal (SA) of possible alternative ways of meeting those needs. The submission stage SA therefore recorded SOSDA's removal from the CS.
15. The CS does not need to resurrect and test a SOSDA-style concept as a 'reasonable' stand-alone alternative means of meeting the District's own internal housing requirements because there is no evidence that they exist on this scale or at that location. If the allocations to Didcot, the 3 other towns and the larger villages were to be reduced by a commensurate amount this would also grossly unbalance the overall planned distribution and fail to meet the identified needs of those towns.
16. Surveys indicate high levels of need in the City, but the adopted Oxford CS states only that 'some needs that cannot be met within the City may be met elsewhere within the Central Oxfordshire sub-region'. It is planned to update the Oxfordshire Housing Market Assessment (HMA) after the 2011 Census results become available and SODC indicates that if joint work were then to be initiated to address how the study findings should be evaluated and met it would fulfil its statutory duty to co-operate in partnership with all the necessary participating authorities. This would necessarily include the City and its four neighbouring authorities. To provide clarity, and to reflect the

'duty to co-operate' which would exist in relation to the future update of the HMA, the CS should very briefly record the demise of SOSDA and the need for joint working on assessing the wider needs of Oxford and any required options for meeting them. **MM25a** achieves soundness in these respects.

Didcot

17. As indicated, the long-standing plans for major expansion at Didcot originated in the Structure Plan and received added scale and impetus from the SEP and the New Growth Points (NGP) initiative. The announcement of Enterprise Zone status for 'Science Vale UK' (SVUK) now adds further emphasis to Didcot's role. The SEP-derived proposals for Didcot include land within Vale of White Horse District (VoWH) as well as South Oxon. The former is allocated 2,750, while 6,000 are directed to the SODC area. With supply extended to 2027 to provide the CS with a 15-year time horizon, the latter increases to 6,300. This is 55% of SODC's total growth to 2027. There has been debate in some contexts about whether or not the SEP figure for Didcot is, or should be, 'ring-fenced', but I consider it appropriate to treat it as such. Success in the long-held aspiration for comprehensive transformation of Didcot will continue to need long-term certainty, determination and commitment, all of which would be undermined if some part of the growth were to be siphoned off elsewhere.

The rest of the District

18. SEP allocates the SODC housing provision outside Didcot between specific figures for (a) the District's portion of the Central Oxfordshire Sub-Region (COSR) and (b) the rest of the non-Didcot part of the District. However, the submitted CS assumed revocation of the SEP and combined (a) and (b) into one overall 'Rest of District' figure. Since it later became clear that the revocation was unlawful **MM23 & 24** delete these references.
19. As for whether or not the substance of the CS is in general conformity with SEP, the precise outcome of the strategy's proposed distribution will remain unknown until the SADPD has distributed the CS total of 1,154 dwellings among the 12 identified Larger Villages (LVs) and Bayswater Farm. The Council's pre-hearing statement on the Overall Strategy indicates (table C2) that on the then current 2011 base the LVs within SODC's portion of the COSR would need to provide a minimum of 468 homes to maintain the SEP 'rest of CO' requirement within a 10% variance. It would be therefore be reasonable for the CS to direct at least a minimum total of 500 allocations to these villages since all are generally better connected to the transport network than some of those outside COSR. The latter tend to be at greater distance from the towns and some are deeply embedded within the AONB. Moreover, of the COSR villages, Berinsfield is to have a Green Belt review and Crowmarsh Gifford has very close links with Wallingford. A minimum total of 500 allocations in the COSR would provide at least 2,149 homes in South Oxon's part of the sub-region, compared with the SEP target (extended to 2027) of 2,352. In that case any shortfall could not be more than 200 or so (8-9%) and, depending upon the actual distribution among the LVs settled through the SADPD, this small shortfall may be reduced or even turned into a modest level of 'surplus'. This amounts to general conformity. **MM38a** secures this change by adding an appropriate footnote to table 7.3.

Windfalls and under-delivery buffers

20. Following soundness concerns raised at the Exploratory Meeting in May 2011, SODC advertised a package of PCs removing reliance on unallocated windfall sites as a source of some 1,060 homes during the plan period and distributing larger numbers of allocations to Thame, Wallingford and the 12 LVs, but not to Henley. The soundness of this distribution among the towns is considered further later.
21. The NPPF (para 48) now reintroduces the concept of allowances for windfalls in certain circumstances. The recent exercise undertaken by SODC appears reasonable and realistic both in relation to the circumstances set out in the NPPF and in the scale and timing of the allowances assumed in the most recent revised version of table 18.1. However, the windfalls now assumed in revised table 18.1 do not call for revision of the increased site specific allocations made in the earlier PCs but rather (a) provide a degree of contingency against any delayed delivery of the proposed allocations and (b) would contribute (via annual updating of the housing land supply data) towards meeting the 'buffers' which SODC reasonably suggests would be appropriate to meet the requirement of NPPF para 47 (20% at Didcot and 5% in the Rest of the District).

The urban/rural split

22. The Proposed Changes published after the Exploratory Meeting distribute the residual total of the required allocations in the Rest of the District at a ratio of 60% (1,730) to the 3 towns and 40% (1,154) to the 12 LVs & Bayswater Farm. This split is arguably open to criticism on the basis that there is no specific evidence to support (i) the choice of 60:40, as opposed to any other ratio, or (ii) the conclusion that this amount of growth will actually result in the retention of services in rural centres.
23. Currently South Oxfordshire is a strongly rural District in which a majority of residents (60%) live outside the main towns of Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford. While the distribution of growth in the CS appropriately reflects the urban focus sought by SEP, especially when growth at Didcot is taken into consideration, an important aim of the strategy is to support the retention of a strong network of settlements. The 12 LVs were therefore selected with the policy objective of (a) ensuring that all parts of South Oxon are within about 5km of a town or larger village centre and (b) providing housing growth to support the maintenance of services and facilities at these key centres.
24. The SA for the CS assessed that an 80:20 urban/rural split would be more sustainable in terms of improving accessibility to services and facilities and reducing harm to the environment and minimising pollution, while a 60:40 split would result in more rural housing and more positive effects in relation to maintaining the viability of village services. The decision to opt for the latter rather than the former (or any other split) appears to be based more on intuitive judgement than a strict sifting of objective evidence, but this is not necessarily a reason to find the choice unsound. In any case, the factors affecting the viability or otherwise of the range of services in a particular

village will be many and complex, and very difficult to isolate or predict. There is unlikely to be any fully objective way of measuring precisely how much new housing would make a material difference to the powerful factors that have led to the decline of many rural services. However, it is not unsound to conclude that some 1,154 additional allocations distributed among the LVs, as the selected key service centres, will be a counterbalancing factor to the falling household sizes and other demographic trends which can otherwise result in village populations declining or remaining generally static and vulnerable to losses of services.

The inter-urban split

25. Turning to the distribution of the 60% share of the 'Rest of District' allocation among the 3 'other' towns, the starting point for the CS was to spread the required residual balance in proportion to the relative numbers of dwellings in each town at the plan's base date in 2006 (ie Henley 40%, Thame 35% and Wallingford 25%). In principle this approach is reasonable as it would permit all the towns to more than cater for the effects of falling household size and retain their market positions. However, Henley's growth is capped at 400 for reasons discussed (and found sound) under issue 4 below. As a result the town's 'under-provided' share of the increased number of dwellings resulting from the PCs is diverted proportionately to Thame and Wallingford. The allocation at Thame increases from 574 to 775 and that at Wallingford from 400 to 555. SODC24 indicates that these allocations would result in a modest population increase at Henley (some 4% between 2006 & 2027), whereas Thame and Wallingford would both increase by about 13%.

The Larger Villages

26. As for the 12 LVs and Bayswater Farm, after making allowance for completions made in 2010/11 the PCs amended the share allocated to these centres from 740 allocations & 501 windfalls to 1,154 allocations. Despite suggestions of a 'lack of evidence' to demonstrate the potential for the SADPD to choose from a sufficient stock of constraints-free sites, the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) identifies a very large amount of land (284ha) as 'suitable in principle and available' at these villages. In addition, the Council estimates that the total capacity of land not affected by flooding or AONB constraints could be some 6,257 homes, or 4,560 if only greenfield sites in single ownership are counted. There is a lack of full correlation between the SHLAA's terminology and that used in the NPPF, but this is still robust evidence with a wide margin for error and gives confidence that appropriate sites for the proposed number of dwellings can be identified at the LVs.
27. It is unnecessary for the CS to provide any further numerical or site-specific guidance about how the 1,154 homes should be distributed amongst the 12 villages and Bayswater Farm. There is no present body of evidence, or history of SA or consultation for this to be done and the matter is appropriately devolved to the SADPD. However, the question of guidance with regard to 'proportionality' is returned to later in this report under Issue 7.
28. Concluding on all of the above sub-issues under issue 2, a number of MMs are required to reflect the changed numbers and distribution of homes brought about by the PCs and subsequent changes. These are **MM2-5, 29a, 30, 31a,**

32a, 37a, 73, 75-76, 81, 98, 108-109 & 114.

29. In addition, some additional explanatory text is required in order to avoid future doubt or confusion of the kind sometimes experienced at the hearings about the basis of the plan's distribution of new homes. **MM26-28** ensure that the CS contains within itself a brief explanation of this crucial matter.

Other matter

30. On an unrelated point, paras 3.14 and 7.16 do not reflect the certainty which a plan-led system of development management should confer for all parties' benefit. Once a plan has been adopted it would be inappropriate to withhold planning permission for an allocated strategic site in the circumstances described. The Council accepts this logic but has been reluctant to 'lose' the perceived protection given by the sentence pre-adoption. However, the adopted CS must address the situation prevailing at and after that point, so **MM1 & 33** delete the relevant sentences from paras 3.14 and 7.16.

Issue 3 – Are sound proposals made for a strategic allocation at Didcot?

31. The long-standing plans for major expansion at Didcot have already been referred to. Recent phases of growth have been slow to take off for various reasons, including national economic conditions. Consequently the NGP timetable under which SODC and VoWHDC would have accepted additional growth pre-2016 is being renegotiated. **MM55-57** reflect this. However, major infrastructure work is now taking place at the large-scale development of Great Western Park (GWP) and housing delivery is picking up.
32. The CS makes an additional strategic allocation of 2,030 homes at Didcot North East (DNE) in furtherance of the growth distributed to the town by SEP. About 300 are also proposed in the Town Centre. These allocations make a substantial addition to the large existing commitments at GWP, Ladygrove East and Vauxhall Barracks. The promoters of DNE have prepared a concept master-plan indicating their intention to provide a range of facilities including a secondary school, two primary schools, a community centre/local centre, an area of mixed uses, a leisure/sports centre, and 24ha of open space. **MM58** includes important amendments to this mix within policy CSDID3.
33. Several options for urban extension(s) around the northern, eastern and western perimeters of the town were assessed during the preparation of the CS, while the VoWH CS is considering other areas to the west of the town to accommodate that District's share of the Didcot-related growth. By Preferred Option (PO) stage SODC considered DNE (site A) the best option for allocating most of its allocation of new homes. However, site E to the south-west of the town was also considered to have some advantages so the PO consultation included the option of using that site for the balance of provision as an alternative to directing all the housing to DNE. By submission stage it had been decided to locate all the development at DNE. The process by which this option was selected is summarised in the Didcot Background Paper.
34. The allocated site at DNE is predominantly flat farmland, mostly of grade 3b quality. To the south is the town, to the west is the floodplain of Moor Ditch (and beyond that more fields and then Didcot Power Station) and to the east are the slopes of Down Hill. Some parts of the site (especially in the south-

east corner) retain higher landscape quality and intactness with fields defined by well-developed hedgerows, some with trees. However, vegetated field boundaries are more vestigial or absent across most of the rest of the site. Near the floodplain a copse forms a distinctive feature. The overall landscape quality of the site tends to be generally low, but the concept master plan indicates scope for conserving the best of the site's individual features. It also shows that built development would be limited to land outside the extent of the floodplain determined by the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), with only amenity areas and playing fields situated within it.

35. DNE would represent a substantial advancement of the urban area into open countryside, readily perceived from the surrounding roads (A4130 and B4016) and from the footpath descending Down Hill from the AONB. However, new development at DNE would be seen from the latter partly against the backdrop of whatever development succeeds the power station in future. Overall, replacement of these fields with development corresponding to the concept master plan would not have an adverse effect on the landscape setting or natural beauty of the AONB. Further back into the plateau, away from the down-slope, development at DNE would not be visible.
36. Perhaps the main disadvantage of DNE is its location to the north of the A4130 'perimeter road', a 50mph inter-urban bypass to Didcot for west-east traffic. Consequently a fundamental requirement of the detailed master-planning for DNE will be to ensure that its residential areas and principal destinations are served by an adequate number of well-located, high quality, carefully designed cycling and pedestrian links across the A4130, joined up with the established networks serving the Ladygrove Estate. The importance of this is emphasised by the proposed mix of development at DNE which includes a new secondary school, considered to assist better distribution of secondary provision through the town as a whole. The facilities at DNE will therefore attract residents from other parts of Didcot, making daily movements to this area a two-way flow, not just one-way 'out and back'. This design requirement will be a challenge, but is capable of being met if appropriate consideration and priority is given to it. To the south of Ladygrove Estate there are limited options for crossing the railway line by vehicle or on foot, and it will be appropriate for development at DNE to contribute to improving these. However, I am not convinced that this is an issue which should prevent development taking place here.
37. DNE lies at an eastern extremity of the growing SVUK area, so it is important to 'soundness' that development here is capable of being firmly bound into the LTP area transport plan for SVUK, rather than becoming a comparatively less-connected outpost in transport terms, situated beyond normal walking distances to the town centre and station. The LTP sees east-west corridors in the SVUK as '*currently characterised by slow, infrequent services which divert from the direct route to serve various communities*'. Ultimately it aims to provide more direct services on 3 alignments, two of which end at Didcot (ie, Wantage-Grove-Milton Park-Didcot, and Harwell-Didcot). According to the LTP new residential areas such as Valley Park, GWP and DNE would be served by 'additional routes', linking them to key destinations.
38. Bearing in mind the number of future residents at DNE and the facilities to be provided, including the secondary school and sports facilities, development here should be capable of creating significant demand for public transport links

which would complement and help to reinforce the flows necessary achieve the aims of the LTP and the route frequencies sought by the County Council.

39. The CS itself does not refer to DNE's dependence on delivery of the SCOTS transport infrastructure albeit that this is stated in the Didcot Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). Nor does the CS indicate that, although development of DNE could start in advance of the highway schemes, this large allocation must make appropriate contributions to the SCOTS package and that, without its delivery, the principle of this level of growth at Didcot would have to be reviewed. **MM60** inserts necessary appropriate references to this effect.
40. Turning to delivery of housing at DNE, the current uncertain economic climate may make it difficult to achieve completion to the timescale anticipated in the CS, although house buyers will have a substantial range of market choices because of the number of house-builders expected to be working there. In practice the housing trajectory for Didcot may be smoother than indicated in table 18.1. However, DNE is controlled by three parties, all of whom support the allocation and the scheme should be 'effective' in terms of being prepared and brought forward for an early start to development. Although National Grid has an 18m wide easement strip across the site, the overall effect of this has not been shown likely to present a major inhibition to the layout or development potential of this large area.
41. The land at site E, considered as a partial alternative to DNE at PO stage, lies to the south of the area being developed as GWP and would in time adjoin it. As indicated in the Didcot Background Paper, this land has its own advantages and disadvantages. This is flat grade 2 farmland with very few hedgerows or other features. If development here were limited to the area shown in the Machin Bate report it would be possible to provide a structural landscape belt around the development area and a further undeveloped area to the south of that, thereby retaining an undeveloped (albeit much reduced) gap between Didcot and West Hagbourne. Although this site currently offers higher levels of public transport accessibility to various facilities, much of it is further away from Didcot Town Centre than the most distant parts of DNE so that in the longer term the differences on this account are likely to reduce.
42. In effect, site E would form a significant extension to the substantial development at GWP, which is still in its very initial stages. Given the shortcomings of Park Road as an access, arrangements would need to be made for access via the proposed spine road through the southern section of GWP. Further development in this area would also bring forward pressures for the delivery of road schemes within the SCOTS package. Overall, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that an early start at site E would make that development appear to be an artificial and isolated element for quite some time ahead. Moreover, dividing the CS Didcot allocation between site E and DNE would erode the opportunity for the latter to build up sufficient critical mass and infrastructure to allow it to become a truly sustainable urban extension. Although claims have been made for the allocation of land east of Park Road, there is no particular advantage in developing smaller parcels of land in that area because this would also erode the potential afforded by the allocation of DNE which has been demonstrated to be the most appropriate option when considered against the reasonable alternatives.

43. Turning finally to 'Didcot A Power Station', the hearing was told that operation of this facility is to cease by end-2015, with closure followed by about 3 years of decommissioning and demolition including the 6 dominant cooling towers. This major change will create a 40ha brownfield site and possibly bring into play an area of greenfield land between DNE, the remaining power station land and Southmead Industrial Estate. However, these two areas are in VoWH District and their future has to be considered in the context of that District's CS. This strategy cannot anticipate or prescribe the outcome of that process.
44. This cross-border issue, alongside others including (a) the processes followed by the two Councils, pre-SEP adoption, to arrive at the housing split between VoWH and SODC, (b) the potential contributions of other sites in VoWH/SODC and (c) the future way in which the SCOTS transport infrastructure package will be progressed, all exemplify concerns expressed by Didcot Town Council, local Parish Councils and others about the difficulties they have perceived in being able to achieve meaningful engagement in a holistic planning process for Didcot and SVUK. I understand these concerns. However, since the Councils have chosen to prepare separate CSs (albeit with some staff-sharing) before they embark on a joint Didcot Area Action Plan, these issues are beyond the scope of this report; I do not consider that they undermine the soundness of DNE as such.

Issue 4 – Are sound proposals made for Henley?

45. A strict proportional approach to the distribution of housing allocations among Henley, Thame and Wallingford would result in Henley receiving the largest share. However, the town is subject to strong constraints posed by the Thames floodplain and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Consequently SODC judges it impossible for the CS to identify suitable land for a strategic allocation on the scale proposed at the other two towns. Provision at Henley is therefore capped at 400, with the identification of sites devolved to the SADPD.
46. The justification for the cap, and its size, was tested by a more detailed study of the development potential and capacity of 6 sites identified by SODC as the most likely possible candidates for allocation in the SADPD. This study was carried out for and during the examination in September 2011. Under some scenarios these sites could accommodate comfortably more than 400 homes without harmful impact on the AONB. However, provision could also struggle to reach that level if one or more of the sites (especially the larger ones) do not come forward and/or if site HEN5 proves incapable of accommodating more development than OCC and SODC have so far assessed as acceptable in traffic terms. Overall, the study shows a reasonably reliable prospect that the SADPD will be able to identify sites for 400 homes. However, the margin of contingency around that figure is too limited and uncertain to justify any definite increase in the cap. It is therefore sound to require the SADPD to identify sites for 400 homes rather than making a strategic allocation(s).
47. However, SODC's analysis shows that Henley is the most sustainable town in the District and also has high levels of housing need. There is no evidence to justify raising the cap now but it would be unsound for the CS to appear to fetter the scope for the SADPD to explore any opportunities for limited easing of the cap if suitable sites, free of constraints, were to emerge at the time of

its preparation. **MM61a** therefore makes a 'permissive' change to para 10.9 'requiring' sites for only 400 houses to be identified, but providing the SADPD with scope to extend this by a further 50 if, at the time of its preparation, this proves to be possible. It would be inappropriate to exceed 450 because sustainability appraisal has not been undertaken during the preparation of the CS for any greater number. **MM61b** also deletes the final two sentences of para 10.16 since these are inappropriately site-specific in relation to the policies of the continuing Local Plan.

48. Towards the end of the examination Henley Town Council expressed its intention to begin preparing a Neighbourhood Plan (NP), although one adjoining Parish Council appears to have decided to opt out of the process. If allocations are to be made through an NP rather than the SADPD it is currently unclear how far the boundaries available to the plan would allow it scope to meet the National Planning Policy Framework's requirement (para 184) for provision made in NPs to be '*aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area*' and '*in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan*'. Bearing in mind the capped nature of the provision at Henley it will be important to make positive plans for reasonably early delivery. If the timing and nature of the local planning process for the town were to be uncertain this could raise issues of concern unless they can be quickly and effectively resolved. However, the CS itself (modified as described above) supplies an appropriate target for the town and is justified and effective. In my view further changes to the CS, including any attempt to introduce more site specificity as a means of furthering early delivery, are not required in soundness terms.

Issue 5 – Are sound proposals made for a strategic allocation at Thame?

49. The submission CS proposes 530 new dwellings at Thame, all sited on a strategic allocation to the north-west of the town. However, in order to achieve consistency with the former PPS3 by removing reliance on assumed windfalls, the Council's PCs increased the town's allocation to a total of 775 in accordance with the distribution principles discussed under Issue 2. 600 were to be at the strategic allocation and 175 identified through the SADPD.
50. The strategic allocation (known as site F) has many favourable sustainability credentials. However, it is unclear that it has the scope to accommodate as many as 600 new homes together with sensitively planned structural planting on a sufficiently generous scale to avoid excessive damage to the attractive sloping landscape on this side of the town as appreciated, for example, from the Thame Valley Walk. An allocation on this scale has therefore not been shown to be justified in soundness terms.
51. During the evolution of the CS a number of other potential sites around Thame have been found to have their particular advantages and disadvantages and their own sets of supporters and opponents. Moreover, the PCs reflected the fact that more than one site is required to provide for the town's total housing growth, and it is evident that there is considerable local support for spreading this scale of provision among a number of different locations.
52. It was reported at the hearings in November 2011 that Thame Town Council (TTC) was an identified 'front-runner' in neighbourhood planning and had

recently started the process of preparing the Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP), assisted by a respected consultancy specialising in master-planning and urban design. This is a significant new factor since TNP offers an opportunity for a community-based approach to allocating the required CS housing provision, including consideration of the implications of any school relocation that may or may not be shown to be necessary or desirable. An IPC therefore proposed deleting the strategic allocation and devolving the task of identifying sites for all of the town's growth to the TNP.

53. SODC supports the IPC introduced through the relevant advertised changes but has some concern that there may not be a demonstrable 5-year land supply if TNP does not reach adoption by April 2013, for example by failure to secure the necessary majority in the referendum. The SA identified this as a negative factor which could arise in such circumstances. The Council therefore considers it essential to insert a contingency measure into the CS to ensure a continuing 5-year supply from assured allocations. However, SODC's most recent housing land supply estimate for 2012/13 – 2016/17 shows that the 'Rest of the District' had a modest 5-year surplus, including allowance for a 5% buffer. [This is without taking account of the 775 allocations yet to be made in the TNP or the 1,554 allocations to be made at Henley, the LVs and Bayswater Farm through the SADPD.]
54. The District's preferred measure would be for the CS to allocate a 'reserve site' to be brought on stream if TNP does not achieve timely adoption. However, this option could not proceed without evidence being compiled and SA and consultation being undertaken on a selected option. This process would delay the adoption of the CS and is unwelcome to TTC because the term 'reserve site' would overlap with other 'reserve sites' included in the TNP concept options as a means of dealing with an unrelated type of contingency. It is wholly understandable that TTC wishes to avoid public confusion by more-or-less contemporary consultations on different kinds of reserve sites in two different plans covering the same town, especially as consultation on a CS reserve site could be perceived by some participants as a threat to the freedom and integrity of the TNP process.
55. Moreover, any contingency measure needs to be proportionate to the degree of risk. Under TTC's updated programme of May 2012 the original unrealistic timetable for TNP has been revised, with the referendum now expected later – ie, in mid April 2013. TTC also reports more appetite among the town's various residents' groups for the idea of working together to coalesce around a package of acceptable development sites rather than, as found in the CS process, individually opposing the nearest candidate site for a large strategic allocation. The TNP is therefore showing promising signs of progress and there are no obvious reasons why the process should fail. If it did, SODC would have been closely engaged in its evolution and the threads of work on the CS and TNP, including the accumulated evidence base, would provide ready tools for SODC to progress and adopt a plan for the town much more quickly than if work had begun from scratch. On the current land supply data referred to above it would not be unreasonable to conclude that such a plan could identify sites to augment delivery during 2017/18 or earlier.
56. SODC's less favoured option would be for the CS to establish a trigger date of 1 April 2013 for 'taking back responsibility for allocating land at Thame'.

However, this degree of prescription and precision appears unnecessary and could be counter-productive in the circumstances described above, especially if the TNP were to be delayed only by a few weeks or months. Policy CSC1 (iii) already states that one solution for dealing with a delay to a 'strategic' housing site would be to 'allocate alternative site(s) through a DPD'. The Council's suggested revision to bullet (iii) to make it accord with the NPPF, ie 'identify (through a plan or other mechanism) alternative deliverable site(s) in general accordance with the distribution strategy of this plan' would give increased flexibility on this point. Together, these changes provide SODC with more flexibility about the response it could take to any unexpected delays in the bringing forward of allocations in the CS/SADPD/NPs.

57. The necessary changes to the CS concerning the increased number of dwellings in the town, devolution of the allocations to the TNP and the division of responsibility for other matters among the CS, TNP and other plans are made through the set comprising **MM2, 33, 62-64, 68-71, 99-103, 111 & 113**. Subject to these, the CS is justified and effective in its provisions for Thame.

Issue 6 – Are sound proposals made for a strategic allocation at Wallingford?

58. The submitted CS proposes 400 new dwellings at Wallingford, all directed to a strategic allocation to the west of the town (site B). SODC's PCs subsequently increased the number at the site to 555 homes in order to achieve consistency with the former PPS3 by removing reliance on assumed windfalls.
59. The choice of a site for the strategic allocation at Wallingford has been the subject of much contention throughout the CS's preparation. At the PO stage 5 candidate options were reduced to two potential urban edge locations: site B to the west and site E to the south. Since no clear preference emerged, SODC formed a steering group with representatives from the District, Town and Parish Councils and appointed consultants to review all the options again. After this further consultation took place on 3 options (A, B and E). The SA of these sites considered them to have broadly similar sustainability credentials. Eventually, site B was selected for inclusion in the submitted CS.
60. Following the November hearings I formed the view that site E would be the sound option for the Wallingford allocation, ie 'the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives'. This potential change was subjected to SA and advertised for public comment. A subsequent hearing session in May 2012 then afforded a formal opportunity for views to be expressed on whether the adopted CS should include a change of allocation to site E or revert to site B as originally proposed. This process highlighted a substantial amount of relevant new and amplified information about both sites.
61. The comparative merits of the two sites in sustainability terms can be considered under a number of subheadings as follows: proximity to major destinations, the functionality and attractiveness of pedestrian and cycle links to the town, possible improvements to public transport, education implications, conservation/townscape issues, landscape issues, flooding, ecological issues, open space and recreation issues, Wallingford-Cholsey links, and mineral extraction issues.

62. Proximity to major destinations Wallingford's modest size and compactness make it a generally 'walkable' town, so sites B & E are both within reasonable distance of the town's main destinations. The agreed distances show that E (710m) is closer to the primary destination (the town centre) than B (1229m), and much closer to the Health Centre (190/1682m). B is much closer to the Sports Park (352/1160m) and nearer to the Secondary School (951/1401m) while there is little between the two in terms of proximity to the centre point of Hithercroft Industrial Estate B (649m/E 688m).
63. Pedestrian/cycle links The evidence suggests that a limited amount of consideration was given during the preparation of the CS to the functionality and attractiveness of the potential pedestrian links between the two sites and the rest of the town. Such matters seem to have been treated as matters of detail, capable of later resolution. Unfortunately, however, past development in Wallingford has left both sites cut off from the town's street network; site B would take all its vehicular access from the bypass and site E would have to take more than 80% of its vehicular access by that means. The adequacy of the sites' pedestrian/cycle links therefore has a substantial bearing on whether or not residents would have suitable access to the town's main destinations on foot or by bike.
64. Site B has 3 existing footpaths leading into built-up parts of the town and it emerged during the examination that newly acquired access rights are capable of increasing links to site E to the same number. Dealing with site B, despite representations to the contrary the evidence is that the footpath to Queens Avenue can be made up to provide a direct footpath/cycle link between Wantage Road and the proposed main north-south/east-west footpath spines across the site. However, fully 'designing-out' possible conflicts between pedestrians and the current informal unmade car-park at the head of Queens Avenue may require the purchase of land owned by a liquidated company.
65. The north-east footpath link (390/16) offers an existing route heading towards the town centre via Station Road. Its current nature as a pot-holed alleyway could be improved by making it up under the Cycle Tracks Act although it is unclear how much of its width is within the definitive path and how much may be outside it. The attractiveness and perceived safety of this lengthy route for its potential users is also affected by the presence of about 20 private garages and a lack of natural surveillance, although this could be countered to some extent by the erection of suitable lighting and CCTV cameras.
66. The south-east path affords links to Hithercroft Industrial Area, and the Sports Park and an onward footpath link to other places further to the east in the town. It emerged that the Town Council is willing, as owners of the adjoining allotments, to work with the promoters of site B to remove the current pinch-point where the path leaves the main part of the site between a high domestic fence and the hedged boundary of the allotments. A safe and adequate lit route could therefore be provided at this point. In addition, a fourth link could be provided from site B via the Sports Park to Hithercroft Road. This would probably be primarily used to get from the site to the Sports Park itself and may be unlikely to be attractive as a route to other destinations, although it could provide an additional option for some journeys.
67. Turning to site E, the proposed link into Winterbrook would provide a direct

onward pedestrian/cycle route to the town centre via Reading Road or Squires Walk. Although criticism has been made of the width of Reading Road and its footways (and the current lack of a footway at Brook Lodge), the measures associated with the last Wates appeal introduced a helpful element of traffic calming and satisfied the Highway Authority. Although that scheme proposed far fewer houses than the strategic allocation, the traffic movements onto Winterbrook from site E would be limited to a similar number. Pedestrian/cycle numbers using this route may also not be very different since the promoters now offer additional pedestrian/cycle links into the town across Bradford's Brook, via (i) 69 Brookmead Drive and (ii) the head of Barley Close.

68. Both of these would introduce additional pedestrians/cyclists into currently quiet culs-de-sac, quite lengthy and circuitous in the case of Barley Close. However, movements to/from site E would be dispersed among all 3 of the links according to the origins and destinations of individual journeys. Although concerns have been expressed about conflicts between traffic and pedestrians at the two additional links, these may be over-stated given the indicated design solution in Barley Close and the opportunity to use the whole width of 69 Brookmead Drive rather than a narrow shared path/cycle track carved out of its curtilage. Use of all of the new and existing links at sites B and E would bring changes in the perceived conditions of nearby residents in relation to security, noise and disturbance. However, the significant additional evidence produced on the pedestrian/cycle accesses shows that both sites B and E have the overall potential to be adequately, albeit not ideally, served in these terms. The links now able to be provided at both sites remove one of the 'disadvantages' of site E noted in that respect in the SA. Overall, neither site can now be greatly favoured over the other in terms of its link's potential functional adequacy, safety and attractiveness to users and neighbours.
69. Public transport links/improvements OCC's primary public transport objective for Wallingford is to enhance the twice-hourly Oxford-Wallingford-Reading premium express bus route (X39/x40). The strategic allocation is seen as a pump-priming opportunity to increase the frequency of the service to 3 per hour between Oxford and Wallingford, with the additional bus terminating at the site (or possibly Cholsey) rather than continuing to Reading. This is more likely to be achievable at site E as it involves less diversion from the route. In theory it would also be possible to divert one of the present half-hourly services to run through site E, so increasing the number of houses passed by the service, but it is unknown whether or not the operators would opt to do so. Reading Road/Winterbrook also carries an hourly circular service between Wallingford and Cholsey with other associated routes making less frequent extensions to other villages. Site E therefore has reasonably good connections with Oxford, Reading and Cholsey, with its rail links to London.
70. Turning to site B, a new commercial 36/x36 hourly service has recently started operation between Wallingford, Didcot, Milton Park and Wantage. This route connects with Science Vale locations such as Didcot Town Centre, Didcot station (offering faster and more frequent services to London than Cholsey) and Milton Park. The site promoter's proposal is to (a) divert this service from Wantage Road to run through the site and then to the town centre via the bypass and Hithercroft Road and (b) make a pump-priming contribution to increase the frequency of the route from one to two per hour. It is also

proposed to extend this service to Oxford on an hourly basis.

71. This overall package would result in some reduction in accessibility to the 36/x36 service in the Wilding Road area (possibly compensated by diversion of another service) and gains in other parts of the town, including services to the Hithercroft area and the Sports Park.
72. Education implications At present Wallingford has 3 forms of entry across the primary years. The allocation would raise the need to 4 forms of entry. OCC's strategic plans aim to (a) relocate St Johns Primary to a site able to remove the current disadvantage of its detached playing field and (b) convert the existing St Nicholas Infants and Fir Tree Junior into full primary schools.
73. Development at site B would enable St Nicholas to relocate as a 2-form entry primary with Fir Tree developing on its present site as a 1-form entry primary. The present St Nicholas site would be available for other uses, but St Johns would remain with its split-site issues unresolved. Development at site E can enable St Johns to vacate its site and relocate as a 2-form entry primary. However, St Nicholas and Fir Tree Schools would remain as 2-form entry Infants and Junior establishments respectively. Thus both sites can contribute substantially to OCC's strategic objectives, but neither would complete them.
74. Conservation/townscape issues Site E lies to the west of houses fronting Winterbrook, a continuation of the main north-south route through Wallingford. In the most recent Wates appeal decision concerning part of site E (May 2011) the Inspector concluded that *'the linear nature and sense of enclosure of Winterbrook amounts to a non-designated heritage asset in the terms defined in PPS5'*. He also noted that other agreed non-designated assets were clustered around 2 Winterbrook (the point of access to part of Site E), namely the locally-listed buildings of Brook Lodge and Nos 1 & 3-13 Winterbrook, and the setting of Bradford's Brook which divides around Brook Lodge. He found that a new highway opening would cause an element of harm to these assets and their settings albeit this was capable (setting aside the 'prematurity' issue which arose in that case) of being outweighed by other benefits, mainly the provision of required housing.
75. The material discussed at the hearing session concerning site E included a recent consultants' report on a 'Wallingford Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan'. The report provided an independent assessment of Winterbrook and included a recommendation that a new Conservation Area be designated covering its historic core. The recommended area included the junction with Winterbrook Lane (which has a low-key rural nature) but excluded the junction with The Murren which is an unsympathetic suburban feature detracting from Winterbrook's linear nature. Very recently (September 2012) SODC has followed up the report by resolving to designate a Conservation Area at Winterbrook within the recommended boundary.
76. This designation provides a statutory duty to have regard to the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of Winterbrook, a key feature of which is its linear nature. Against this background the harm which would stem from the insertion of an additional road junction at No 2, as identified in the appeal decision, assumes increased weight. Conservation issues therefore now indicate that the provision of housing at site B (where no such questions

arise) should be favoured over site E.

77. Landscape issues Site B is mainly arable land but, where present, existing trees and boundary vegetation can be retained and supplemented. Although linear development projects west along Wantage Road from Wallingford in the direction of Brightwell, development at site B would reduce some of the rural gap perceivable between the main urban area of Wallingford and the nearest parts of Slade End, particularly as seen from local footpaths. However, there is scope for some mitigation of this effect, dependent on the layout of the site and the chosen balance between areas to be occupied by development and open land uses.
78. Turning to site E, the SA notes the 'potential for landscape detriment' as a second disadvantage of this site, compared with B. However, site E also mainly comprises undistinguished fields and, as at site B, it would be possible to retain and reinforce the most important hedges and groups of trees present there. No issues of 'coalescence' arise and the proposed lack of development south of Winterbrook Lane would provide a largely open aspect to the bypass, with the attractive eastern tree-lined fringes of Winterbrook remaining widely visible from the open space south of Winterbrook Lane. The eastern end of the site is ascribed value in the SODC landscape evidence, although many parts of this area have limited visibility from nearby public vantage points except across the paddock in Winterbrook Lane. However, this part of the site, in particular, provides part of the current open setting for Winterbrook Conservation Area, while the whole of Winterbrook Lane forms part of the 'Agatha Christie Trail' between the author's long-term home in Winterbrook and her grave at Cholsey. These factors now lead to a judgement that the landscape issues affecting the two sites, although very different in nature, are broadly equal in the weight they should bear.
79. Flooding Site B is unaffected by flooding issues. Although suggestions were made that this is not the case at site E, the SFRA determines that the flood plain of Bradford's Brook, where it crosses the site east of the bypass, is contained within its banks during 1:100 and 1:1000 year events except for a very small part of the site between 2 Winterbrook and Brook Lodge, which would provide the entrance to that part of site E. A degree of criticism was levelled at the assumptions used in the SFRA, but the responsible body (the Environment Agency) confirms that the modelling used to inform the SFRA was fit for purpose and still provides the best available data for predicting flood events along the brook. On this basis there is no convincing evidence to indicate that flooding represents a constraint to the development of site E or the installation of suitably designed bridges to Barley Close and Brookmead Drive. Moreover, new development on this scale is commonly required to include sustainable drainage features to reduce run-off rates below existing levels in addition to any necessary flood compensation measures.
80. Ecological issues No issues were identified in relation to site B. However, SODC ascribed value to the old orchard near the eastern end of site E. This long unmanaged feature is now vestigial. Wates' ecological survey of the site (agreed by the appropriate bodies) identified that only a dozen trees remain and that all but two were likely to lose any existing value within 10 years. While traditional orchards are a priority habitat for the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, this is clearly a very poor example. The last Wates scheme proposed a

community orchard retaining a few of the better existing trees within their associated grassland, supplemented by new planting. The orchard therefore presents no material barrier to the allocation of site E.

81. The surveys found that Bradford's Brook supports transient use by otters and water voles, while bullhead fish were also found. The brook-side corridor was also considered suitable habitat for reptiles and invertebrates. The Wates layout retained an undeveloped area along the brook within which a mosaic of complementary habitats could be created through appropriate indigenous planting and the exclusion of roads. The Environment Agency agreed the approach detailed in the Wates Environmental Management Plan and this could be continued throughout site E, thereby increasing the value of the habitat in the wider brook-side corridor compared with its present state.
82. Provided that lighting in this area were to be kept to the minimum compatible with safety (particularly at the approaches to the pedestrian/cycle bridges) and carefully and appropriately designed and specified there is no reason to conclude that development of site E would be discouraging to passing/foraging bats. As for suggested increased ecological disturbance caused by residents of the site, there is no reason to suppose that new residents of the area would have any less of a 'proprietary' interest in the welfare of wildlife in and alongside the brook than existing residents on the north side, nor that they would be any less keen to ensure that the detailed measures of an agreed Environmental Management Plan were regularly implemented.
83. Open space and recreation issues At site E some 7ha of public open space would be created to the south of Winterbrook Lane. The promoters suggest this could be used for playing fields, allotments and other open space uses. There would also be open corridors next to Bradford's Brook and along the western edge of the site. This combination of spaces could provide an attractive setting and amenity for the new development and nearby parts of the town, although the presence of underground archaeological remains is a factor which places uncertainty over use of this area for any activities resulting in surface disturbance.
84. The concept plans for site B indicate the provision of a broad corridor of open space/planting next to the bypass, expanded at the southern end to provide land to meet demands to extend (a) the neighbouring allotments run by the Town Council and (b) the existing playing fields at Wallingford Sports Park. The Sports Park is a thriving facility accommodating a number of active clubs providing the town with a wide range of outdoor and indoor sports and social activities and the Trust is keen to provide for their expansion. Development at site B could meet the above needs and new residents would be very well-placed to benefit from the expanded facilities by using the proposed new pedestrian link from site B through the Sports Park to Hithercroft Road.
85. In one sense site E offers an opportunity to provide allotments and playing fields closer to residents in other parts of the town rather than concentrating them all in one place. However, it is unclear what would be the archaeological implications of meeting these needs at site E and in any case there may be a greater general willingness to travel further to high quality sports facilities rather than scattered ones less able to enjoy the same advantage of critical mass. Site B is therefore to be favoured in terms of its ability to contribute

towards the desired consolidation of the town's main body of open space and recreation facilities.

86. Wallingford-Cholsey cycle route The LTP aspires to the provision of a cycle route from Wallingford to Cholsey, the nearest railway station. Existing developer contributions are available to secure about £177,500 of the total estimated cost of the scheme (£400,000), while a development of 555 houses at site B or E could contribute around £89,000 based on the scale of funding agreed in the Wates appeal case. Additional funding would therefore be needed from other sources. Despite the funding already collected, OCC now considers completion of the link not to be a prerequisite for the development of either site and places more emphasis on the need for buses connecting with the station.
87. Mineral extraction issues In April 2012 OCC resolved to publish the Proposed Submission version of the Oxfordshire Minerals & Waste CS. This proposes new gravel-working at Cholsey, expected to begin production around 2020. Much of the land within the site nominations in the Cholsey area is to the south of site E on the opposite side of the bypass. It remains to be seen whether or not the County's CS will be adopted in its published form and, if so, which areas within the nominated sites may later be selected for working. No doubt any 'bad neighbour' aspects of mineral working in relation to any southern extension of Wallingford onto site E would be a factor, among others, to be considered in those various decisions. The potential for any necessary mitigation issues would also be considered. However, since minerals can only be worked where they occur, the publication of OCC's plan is a factor which (on the precautionary principle) attracts some modest weight against site E as compared with site B.

Overall conclusion

88. It has long been clear that there is little to choose between the overall merits and demerits of sites B & E. The SA of the submitted CS found the credentials of sites B and E (and A) broadly similar and considered that there was no clear 'winner'. The subsequent SA of the FPC indicated still further narrowing of the 'differences' between sites B & E. The examination has since permitted much more detailed consideration of the material relevant to a decision about which site represents the most appropriate strategic allocation for Wallingford.
89. Overall there is little between the sites in terms of proximity to Wallingford's major destinations although site E is closer to the town centre, which may be considered the primary destination. Moreover, the evidence gathered during the examination indicates that both sites can be adequately, although not ideally, served by a set of footpath/cycle links. Neither has material favour over the other in terms of the potential functional adequacy and safety of the links and their attractiveness to users and neighbours.
90. The two sites can both make potential contributions to public transport. These are different but broadly equally valid in terms of their overall benefits. While site E could best contribute to OCC's primary public transport objectives for enhancing the premium Oxford-Wallingford-Cholsey-Reading route, the proposal for site B could offer improvements to the new service linking Wallingford with Didcot town centre, Didcot station and other important

destinations in the Science Vale area. The further development of such west-east links is seen by the LTP as very important to the overall spatial strategy for expansion of house-building and economic activity in the Vale.

91. As for the proposed cycle/footpath link between Wallingford and Cholsey, despite the previous collection of contributions towards it, the Transport Authority does not consider that this scheme should attract weight in a choice between sites B and E as it is not required or deliverable by a Wallingford allocation. The County places more emphasis on bus links to Cholsey but west-east links to Didcot and the Vale are also important to sustainable development in the area.
92. There is little to prefer one site to the other in terms of the contributions they can make towards meeting the objectives for primary school education in the town. The landscape issues affecting the two sites are different, but broadly equal in the weight they should bear. Issues of flooding and ecology require closer examination in the case of site E, but the evidence does not suggest that these matters should rule out building there.
93. Turning to conservation/townscape factors, the recent consultants' study and the Council's resolution to designate a Conservation Area at Winterbrook strengthen the weight to be accorded to the negative effects associated with site E, as identified in the Wates appeal. This contrasts with the situation at site B where no such considerations arise. Application of the precautionary principle also favours site B over site E in relation to proximity to the possible mineral extraction site, while the former also offers greater potential for meeting the formal recreational needs of the town, albeit that site E could provide open space of a different kind.
94. Reaching an overall judgement on the evidence now available, my final conclusion is that site B is narrowly the most appropriate and sustainable strategic allocation for accommodating the growth of Wallingford. This judgement also reflects the 'collective vision' (NPPF para 155) expressed by the Local Planning Authority, although local opinion is plainly strongly divided and many individuals and some groups in the town do not share that view. This outcome requires that the CS does not include the content of the draft changes consulted upon under references 72, 74, 77, 105, 111 (Wallingford reference) & 112. These are therefore omitted from the final schedule of MMs at Appendix A to this report.

Issue 7 – Are sound proposals made for the 'Rural Communities'?

95. As previously discussed under issue 2, the CS now proposes 1,154 allocations at the 12 LVs and Bayswater Farm (to be made in the SADPD) to help secure the retention of a network of strong service centres within the rural area. CS para 7.18 states that these allocations are 'to be divided between these settlements on the basis of proportional growth' with some flexibility on precise numbers to allow for site availability and local constraints.
96. This strong apparent emphasis on proportionality raised concerns arising from (a) the great variation in the sizes of the identified villages, ranging from well over 2,000 dwellings down to as few as 260 and (b) their different relationships with the Green Belt and AONBs. Some of the larger LVs are

entirely within (or mostly enclosed by) one or the other of these major constraints.

97. **MM34a** makes the CS effective in terms of providing an appropriate clearer brief for the SADPD. Proportionality is more clearly established as only a starting point. This is to be modified by consideration of various stated factors such as an individual vision for each village, the existence of designations such as Green Belt or the AONBs, the individual sustainability credentials of the villages in relation to local facilities and transport links, and the existence of particular needs and opportunities. Subject to this change the CS provides a robust, consistent and transparent framework for this aspect of the SADPD.
98. Turning to the selection of the individual LVs, the CS aims to ensure that all residents are within about a 5km journey of a town or LV. All except one of the latter rank immediately below the four towns in the SODC Settlement Assessment Background Paper and most, although not all, have a reasonably definable service hinterland according to the above measure. Nettlebed is the clear exception as it has a considerably smaller population than the other LVs as well as being within the AONB. However, it is not unsound to identify it under policy CSS1 in order to provide a focus for an appropriate level of local services within this relatively sparsely populated part of the Chilterns.
99. Crowmarsh Gifford also has a comparatively small population and a low 'score' for its facilities. Moreover, it lies very close to Wallingford with which it has functional links. It may be hard to identify an independent service hinterland for the village compared with that of the other identified centres. However, judged on its overall characteristics and position Crowmarsh Gifford would be able to accommodate an appropriate number of the dwellings which may be allocated to it by the SADPD from the LVs' share. On balance its categorisation is not unsound.
100. In view of the location of Horspath between the urban area of Oxford and the much larger nearby village of Wheatley there is no reason to identify it as a LV. Turning to Shiplake, the Settlement Assessment Background Paper covers Lower Shiplake and Shiplake Cross separately whereas, if taken together, their size and services (including a railway station) could make them candidates for consideration as an LV. However, there is a clear break between these two settlements and their combined services are distributed over quite a wide area. Bearing in mind the much more powerful concentrations of services at nearby Henley and the extensive urban area of greater Reading, there is no clear evidence to suggest that the omission of Lower Shiplake and/or Shiplake Cross from the list identified LVs undermines the aim of the CS in establishing the network, or is otherwise unsound.
101. **MM79 & 80a** are necessarily put forward (a) to clarify the application of policy CSR1, particularly in terms of its interrelationship with paragraph 13.10 in respect of redevelopment, and (b) to remove inconsistency with national policy guidance concerning AONBs.
102. CS para 13.8 follows current local plan policy under which the classification of any village as a 'Larger/Smaller/Other Village' in CS Appendix 4 is changed automatically through the Annual Monitoring Report when monitoring shows that its local facilities have been reduced/increased to an extent taking it into

a different category. This approach means that individuals' commercial decisions would drive changes to village classifications rather such decisions resulting from due consideration of wider planning policy issues affecting the rural service network. **MM78 & 110** render the CS sound on this point by giving the CS classifications appropriate robustness and longevity for the whole of the period to 2027.

Issue 8 – Are sound proposals made for transport?

103. The schemes comprising the package of transport improvements resulting from the Southern Central Oxfordshire Transport Study (SCOTS) are almost entirely located to the west of Didcot in Vale of White Horse District. The soundness or otherwise of these site-specific schemes has therefore not been open to examination in the context of this CS. Consequently, **MM 6-16 & MM 97** set out quite an extensive package of changes to CSM1 and related parts of the text of the CS. The list of specific schemes, together with maps 5.1 – 5.3, are omitted and replaced by more general reference to the proposals set out in the Local Transport Plan's (LTP) Area Transport Strategy for Science Vale UK which reflect the SCOTS package. The changes also clarify the requirement for developments in and around Didcot, including DNE, to provide proportionate and timely contributions towards the delivery of this transport infrastructure.
104. The County and two District Councils are working to devise a framework for the funding and delivery of the SCOTS schemes. Although new road-building is unlikely to occur before 2018 at the earliest it is proposed to accumulate funding from a variety of public and private sources, including a formulaic approach to a 'strategic transport contribution' at a given sum per dwelling or square metre. Funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy and the New Homes Bonus scheme is also being investigated. In the meantime some public transport improvements are expected.
105. From the evidence presented there appears to be a reasonable prospect of funding being obtainable. However, the embryo budget for implementation of SCOTS assumes that a substantial proportion of the total funding will come from contributions from planned expansions at Milton Park and Harwell Oxford. Unless alternative funding is available, it will be important to ensure that the benefits and exemptions associated with the designation of the Enterprise Zone do not (without equivalent replacement) result in the non-delivery of the expected major contributions from these sources.
106. Turning to the CS coverage of Thames crossings, there has been 'considerable pressure' for a new bridge near Reading, but OCC and SODC do not consider that a convincing case has been made for a bridge as an appropriate solution to cross-river issues in that area. However, policy CSM1(iv) commits them to continue current working arrangements with other local authorities affected by cross-Thames travel near Reading. The CS is therefore sound on this point.
107. The Local Transport Plan (LTP) for 2011-30 identifies the Thames bridges at Culham and Clifton Hampden (together) as among 7 key junctions operating at capacity which are used by traffic on the way to the 3 main employment sites in Science Vale UK, one of which is Culham Science Centre. However, the focus of the LTP's Area Transport Strategy for Science Vale UK, reflecting

the SCOTS proposals, is to achieve containment of trips generated by existing and proposed development within the Vale, rather than proposing solutions for traffic travelling out of the area to the north via the crossings and their links to the A415.

108. Local Parish Councils and residents will hardly see it as an advantage, but the nature and limited capacity of these bridges and their links with the A415 to some extent impose a self-limiting traffic management measure at the busiest times. Although the County Council recognises that greater peak hour spread may occur as a result of new developments, the LTP considers it unlikely to be financially practical to build a new river crossing over the life of the LTP, commenting that it could be considered for inclusion in the programme if circumstances materially change.
109. There is no firm evidence to conclude that the two major CS proposals nearest to these bridges (Didcot North East and the growth of Culham Science Centre) would have such an impact on traffic as to make them unsound on that account, either alone or in combination with other proposals. Although this will need to be kept under review, it will be important in the meantime to assess and explore any options for localised actions which can be secured to reduce, redirect or mitigate movements across the bridges in the context of relevant planning applications such as those at Didcot North East and Culham Science Centre. This does not require change to the content of the CS itself.
110. Subject to the MMs referred to above, the transport-related content of the CS is sound.

Issue 9 – Are sound proposals made for economic development?

111. The CS identifies a need for the equivalent of 20ha of employment land for class B uses to 2027 in addition to existing commitments and allocations. This allows for a small margin over the needs for the plan period assessed in the Employment Land Review (ELR).
112. Under CSEM2 specific allowance is made for about 6.5ha of this total to be met on land in VoWH District to the west of Didcot. As so much of the growth in both Districts is intended to be centred at Didcot, this integrated cross-boundary arrangement is a sound approach which can complement the planned SCOTS improvements. However, change is needed to para 6.18 (**MM19 & MM59**) to avoid inappropriate prescription upon the future VoWH CS, removing the impression that Harwell Oxford and Milton Park may be the only candidate locations in VoWH which could be selected to accommodate economic growth to meet the requirements of South Oxon.
113. Reference has been made under issue 4 to the future closure of Didcot A power station, which will eventually result in the availability of about 40ha of brownfield land across the border in VoWH. Options for employment use (at least in part) of this and possibly other adjoining land may need assessment in the VoWH CS but without a joint CS it would be inappropriate for the South Oxon CS to fetter consideration of this matter.
114. Policy CSEM2 proposes allocations of a further 2ha of employment land at each of Thame and Wallingford and a total of 4.2ha at some of the LVs. These quantities are not exactly proportionate to the distribution of housing growth

but it is relevant to temper any such straightforward approach against many other factors including the desire to increase the self-containment of settlements, realism about locations to which businesses are prepared to move, the availability or otherwise of sustainable travel options, the high share of the District's population living in rural areas, and the wish to retain a network of LVs capable of providing sustainable services including an appropriate amount of local employment.

115. While some case can be made for increasing the allocation at Thame, the ELR rates the town's existing estates as generally good and there is scope for increasing provision within them by redevelopment and intensification. TNP also offers an opportunity to explore local needs and opportunities in more detail, including the existence of any scope for mixed uses containing an element of class B use. Overall, there is little evidence to justify any specific departure from the CS planned distribution at these places.
116. The CS identifies Culham Science Centre as having potential over time to raise the site's current low employment density from about 2,000 to 3,000 jobs mainly by progressive, more intensive, redevelopment of a substantial part of the existing floorspace for research and science-based businesses. This provision is compatible with the aims for Science Vale UK, of which Culham Campus is part, and the wider aims (inherited from the SEP) to make Central Oxfordshire a world leader in education, science and technology.
117. The CS sees the Culham proposals as representing the equivalent of the required balance (5.3ha) of the SODC target of 20ha. Work on a master-plan for the Culham site, recognised in the Local Plan as a Major Developed Site in the Green Belt, has already commenced on a joint basis with the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. Investigation of sustainable transport solutions will form an essential part of this work, ensuring that the future of the site is considered in the context of (and can contribute to) the SCOTS package.
118. South Oxfordshire has a strongly rural character with small towns and villages of historic importance and interest, many set in attractive landscapes including parts of the Chilterns and North Wessex AONBs. These assets make income from tourists and visitors important to the local economy, but the CS policies do not overtly recognise this. **MM17** remedies this deficiency by inserting a new criterion relating to tourism into CSEM1. This will permit the economic benefits of any new tourism proposals to be weighed more overtly against the conservation of important natural and heritage assets. It would be unnecessary and inappropriate at this stage for the CS to refer to particular potential locations or individual types of tourism proposals since these are capable of being brought forward in the SADPD or judged by Development Management policies if and when necessary.
119. A further necessary change to CSEM2 (**MM18**) removes excessive emphasis on B1 development in the final sentence and makes it more welcoming to a range of employment uses.
120. As for policy CSEM4, changes are needed to clarify bullet points (i) (**MM22**) and (iv) (**MM20**) and remove confusion between the CS and retained LP

policy E6 (**MM21**). Subject to the foregoing changes the plan is sound and consistent with national policy.

Issue 10 – Are sound proposals made for town centres & shopping?

121. The typology of centres adopted in CST1 is inconsistent with the definitions previously used in national advice in Annex B to PPS4. No clear or useful purpose was served by this different terminology and its continuation could give rise to unnecessary confusion. **MM51** therefore brought CST1 into line with that terminology. As for the place of Great Western Park within the retail hierarchy, the issue of whether or not this should be designated as a District Centre must be a matter for the VoWH CS.
122. The Council's Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment undertaken in 2008/09 identified needs for new floorspace over the District to 2026 and was updated in November 2010 to 'reflect the final housing distribution in the CS and the economic downturn'. Based upon this evidence, table 8.1 & figure 8.1 of the CS set out the assessed total quantified need for new town centre floorspace (Use Classes A1-A5) broken down for the 4 individual towns and the periods 2007-16 and 2007-2027. The forecast for the longer period is said to be less reliable and therefore subject to future review.
123. The robustness of some aspects of the study and update can be open to debate, especially in terms of their lack of full and overt consideration of qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) factors, albeit that there was some coverage of quality-related factors. However, there is no reason to favour the range of assumptions adopted in other assessments as opposed to those used in the studies undertaken for SODC. The latter are reasonably proportionate for the purpose of a CS even though they may need further consideration in future for more specific planning purposes.
124. In any case, a retail study, no matter how well formulated, can yield only a snapshot in time. Any study is likely to need to be revisited after a certain time in order to consider the effects of changed circumstances. If study results are translated into unduly firm policies in a DPD they may come to be regarded as inappropriately fixed targets or requirements and their reliability may become increasingly open to question. **MM53** therefore clarifies para 8.12 to indicate that the numbers are 'guidelines' to be reflected in the SADPD and Didcot Area Action Plan. These future plans will give more specific consideration to the physical capacity of opportunity sites and any existing commitments to new floorspace. This is sufficient clarification of the weight to be accorded to the figures in the CS and makes the strategy generally sound on this point. Consideration of any particular future proposals will also need to take account of all then current factors.
125. An example of this is the Cattle Market site in Thame. **MM65-67** therefore clarify the categorical reference in the CS to the non-development of a food store here, anchoring that view to current Local Plan policy and explaining the process for future consideration of options for this site and other sites through the Thame Neighbourhood Plan. They also clarify the position with regard to future definition of the Town Centre boundary.

126. Finally, policy CST1 and para 8.14 impose a blanket ban on all out-of-centre shopping proposals. This approach is inconsistent with the more nuanced policy position of the NPPF which generally continues the approach which operated under PPS4. **MM52a & 54** remedy this conflict.

Issue 11 – Are sound proposals made for the Environment?

Green Belt Reviews

127. The CS proposes 'local reviews' of the Oxford Green Belt (GB) at Wheatley and Berinsfield, proposed under CSEN2. Chapter 7 (at 7.16) describes these as 'limited reviews'. Such reviews require to be considered against the long-established national approach (continued in the NPPF) that, once GB boundaries are established in adopted development plans, they should be altered only in exceptional circumstances.

128. Wheatley The CS identifies (7.19) two factors said to be 'exceptional circumstances' for loosening GB constraint at Wheatley: - (1) that it 'needs to maintain' its role as a key local service centre and (2) that removing the 'significant employment centre' at Wheatley Bridge from the GB would 'allow this area to prosper' and that 'linking it to Wheatley would be helpful'. The SODC case is further explained in SODC/3 which indicates that the potential for incremental 'internal' growth on non-GB sites will only be sufficient for the population to remain generally static over quite a long period (2001-27) and that its demographic pattern will tend towards a more elderly structure.

129. These are not in themselves unusual circumstances, still less exceptional. The CS LVs all have a service role and many have similar demographic trends. Planning for such villages to receive a certain amount of growth may be appropriate in principle but this generalised case is not an 'exceptional circumstance' for removing land from the GB. There is also no indication that the existing employment area cannot function in a satisfactory way. As for the need for further housing in the area indicated for release, the Parish Council recognises the existence of local needs for more affordable housing, but its long-held view is that the 'exception sites' approach is the more appropriate method of dealing with that issue. Wheatley is the largest village in the District and its proximity to Oxford and the M40 make it likely that new housing development in the village would serve not just 'local needs', but also those generated (and able to be met) over a considerably wider area.

130. Moreover, special caution would be required in any relaxation of GB controls on the eastern edge of Oxford. Horspath, Littleworth and Wheatley already form 'beads on a string' of development extending east from Cowley. Local communities understandably place great value on the narrow gaps which remain between these settlements and consider them important contributors to independent village character - indicators of the GB 'fulfilling its purpose'. The CS implies the extension of Wheatley down to Wheatley Bridge through exclusion from the GB of open land to the east of the village together with the outlying industrial area. This would emphasise Oxford-related 'sprawl' and urban encroachment into the countryside, contrary to two of the main purposes of the GB and unjustified by exceptional circumstances.

131. Since this aspect of the CS is inconsistent with national policy, the changes comprising **MM35, 36a, 82 and 83a** delete references to a Green Belt review at Wheatley and confine them to Berinsfield (see below).
132. Berinsfield The CS identifies 'exceptional circumstances' for this review as follows: (a) the 'washed-over' GB status of Berinsfield inhibits its ability to achieve necessary regeneration, (b) more land may be needed to improve housing mix and provide increased opportunities for service and employment provision, (c) more development would be consistent with the role identified for the village as an LV service centre, and (d) removing it from the GB and placing it within a defined 'inset' boundary would be consistent with the approach formerly described in paragraph 2.11 of PPG2. SODC/3 again sets out more detail of the case.
133. Berinsfield is unusual in being a new, relatively large, post-war settlement in the open countryside. It has a heavy concentration of ex-Council housing and all the hallmarks of a planned entity of its time – shops, services and community facilities positioned around a large green, a series of culs-de-sac served off a circular distributor road and separate industrial sites on the village edges. One of these is in poor condition and in need of regeneration. Considering its rural Oxfordshire location, some parts of Berinsfield have unusually high scores on the Multiple Deprivation Index. The fairly densely-planned nature of the village, coupled with its GB status, affords few 'infill' opportunities and it is estimated that its population could fall by a substantial amount (10%) over the period 2001-27, exacerbating the social and economic issues facing the village and reinforcing the need for regeneration.
134. A survey of village residents undertaken in July 2009 for the 'Berinsfield Parish Plan' showed very understandable strong opposition to building on valued green spaces within the village but less for building outside current village limits. It is unusual for a GB village of this size not to be inset within its own boundaries and this factor, together with those discussed above, represent a set of exceptional circumstances justifying a local GB review not confined to drawing a boundary tightly around the existing built-up area. This review can be taken forward in the SADPD, thereby permitting Berinsfield to develop in accordance with a new community vision as may be considered necessary to address its local needs and opportunities. This aspect of the CS is sound.

The historic environment

135. Following publication of the NPPF, in particular part 12, SODC proposes the insertion of a new CS policy (CSE3) on the Historic Environment, together with related amendments to policy CSQ3. The submitted CS contains no specific coverage of this issue but **MM83b & MM84a** would bring soundness in this respect.

Issue 12 – Is the CS sound with regard to 'sustainable development'?

136. The Government clearly regards it as critical to the soundness of development plans that they should include text incorporating the gist of the 'model policy'. In this case it is logical to place such a policy above para 1.18 under the existing heading 'National policy guidance'. Moreover, splitting the essential content of the model policy into two, providing an appropriately edited policy

and explanatory paragraph, achieves clearer, more concise and readable text. **MMO & MMOa** effect this change to the CS.

137. Turning to policy CSQ2i (sustainable design and construction) this requires certain types of larger developments to provide 20% of their energy demand from on/near-site decentralised and renewable or low carbon sources, where this is viable. The relevant July 2011 background paper draws upon research indicating that the costs of achieving reductions in CO2 emissions vary greatly with the chosen method. It is also evident that suitable and available methods vary from site to site, particularly in the AONBs. However, with the proviso that CSQ2 is operated with appropriate sensitivity to viability, as required by para 96 of the NPPF, it is generally consistent with national policy.
138. CSQ2ii & iii require schemes of 200 or more homes to achieve at least level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH). Smaller schemes are to achieve CSH level 3, and level 4 from April 2013. The NPPF states (para 95) that any local requirements for sustainable buildings should be *'consistent with the Government's zero carbon buildings policy and adopt nationally described standards'*. The CSH does indeed describe itself as *'the national standard for the sustainable design and construction of new homes'*. However, it also states that it is *'not a set of regulations. (It) goes further than the current building regulations, but is entirely voluntary'*.
139. The Government's target is that buildings should meet zero-carbon standards by 2016. Consultation took place in early 2012 on changes to part L of the Building Regulations (BR) on the conservation of fuel and power. These changes would be effective in 2013 and represent a step towards the 2016 target. Evidence on the additional costs of moving from CSH Level 3 to Level 4 shows that these are material but not on the 'step-change' scale currently forecast for moving to Level 5. Since the CSH is due for revision to align it with the emerging standards of the BR as they will be in 2013, house-builders and buyers are anyway going to incur the cost of moving from level 3 to level 4. CSQ2 is therefore not unsound and it is understandable that SODC wishes to bring it into operation by the dates stated. By the time they come into operation they will barely, if indeed at all, predate similar changes in the BR.
140. However, it is appropriate to express a caveat. The consultation document on the BR points out (para 197) that authorities need to take care to avoid confusing the CSH and zero carbon policy: the latter only overlaps with one small part of the code, which remains a voluntary scheme. CSH homes include many more sustainability features than just the energy-related ones and these other factors also impact on the extra-over costs. It is clear from other CS issues that tensions can arise between the demands of legitimate 'planning gain' requirements, especially in current economic circumstances, eg the viability of affordable housing can be affected by the size of contributions sought towards other infrastructure needs. Full code 4 requirements on non-energy related matters could increase these tensions, so policy CSQ2 may need to be operated with sensitivity about the interplay between these factors and the Council may sometimes need to decide which 'planning gains' should be prioritised over others, especially in relation to the non-energy components of the code, bearing in mind its voluntary nature.

141. Parts iv and v of CSQ2 state requirements for other types of development, relating these to the EcoHomes standards (residential refurbishment) and BREEAM standards (small-scale non-residential development). While this is not unsound, the Council may need to review all its standards as the revised BR emerge in order to ensure that it is not applying a complex plethora of standards which is confusing and expensive to operate.

Issue 13 – Is the CS sound in relation to infrastructure & implementation?

142. Coverage of infrastructure issues in the CS is complemented by two free-standing Infrastructure Delivery Plans (IDP), one for Didcot and the other for the 'Rest of the District'. These are intended to be 'live', readily-reviewable documents sitting alongside the CS and giving guidance to infrastructure providers, developers and others. The IDPs set out prioritised lists of infrastructure associated with individual elements of the CS.

143. Chapter 18 of the CS itself is generally sound on the issue of implementation. However, this is subject to certain exceptions mainly concerning the deletion of various references to phasing and programming, which appear to indicate an over-prescriptive or rationing approach to the timing or 'release' of land for development. **MM85-86, 87a, 88-93, 94a, 95, 96a, 98, 104 & 106-107** replace such inappropriate terms with references to anticipated delivery timescales.

Assessment of Legal Compliance

144. My examination of the compliance of the CS with the legal requirements is summarised in the table below. I conclude that it meets them all.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS	
Local Development Scheme (LDS)	The CS is identified in the approved LDS 2010-2013 which sets out an expected adoption date of February 2012. This date will be missed by some months because the examination period has been longer than expected due to (a) the need for more work and consultation on some phases of main modifications and (b) changes in the background of national policy. Otherwise, the content and timing of the CS are compliant with the LDS.
Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and relevant regulations	The SCI was adopted in July 2006. Consultation on the CS and the subsequent changes/MMs has been compliant with the requirements of the statement.
Sustainability Appraisal (SA)	Concerns were raised that inadequate SA was undertaken in relation to the PCs issued after the Exploratory Meeting concerning the distribution of the increased numbers of allocations across the 'Rest of the District' outside Didcot. Points raised were that reasonable alternatives were not considered in relation to (a) the 60/40 split between the main towns and the larger villages (b) the selected option at Thame, (c) the selected option at Wallingford, and (d) the delegation of allocations at

	Henley to the SADPD. It was also suggested that SOSDA should have been assessed as a viable and realistic stand-alone option to the CS distribution strategy. I issued a statement dated 30 November 2011 (ID/33), concluding that the SA process had been compliant, albeit narrowly in some respects.
Appropriate Assessment (AA)	An AA of the CS was undertaken in December 2010 and updated after the Council's PCs. It concluded that none of the 6 Special Areas of Conservation within influencing distance would be adversely impacted by the CS either alone or in combination with other plans and policies.
National Policy	The CS is consistent with national policy except in certain cases where this report recommends MMs.
Regional Strategy (RS)	The CS is in general conformity with the RS.
Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)	Satisfactory regard has been paid to the SCS.
2004 Act (as amended) and 2012 Regulations	The CS complies with the Act and the Regulations.

Overall Conclusion and Recommendation

145. **As discussed in this report, the plan has a number of deficiencies arising from certain aspects of soundness and/or legal compliance. I therefore recommend that it should not be adopted in its submitted form in accordance with S 20(7A) of the Act.**
146. **However, the Council has requested that I recommend main modifications to the plan to make it sound and/or legally compliant and capable of adoption. I conclude that with the recommended main modifications set out in Appendix A the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy satisfies the requirements of S 20(5) of the Act and meets the criteria for soundness in the National Planning Policy Framework.**

Roy Foster

Inspector

This report is accompanied by Appendix A: Main Modifications (separate document)