

3. SECTION 2 - THE GENERAL APPROACH

3.1 G1 GENERAL RESTRAINT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Objections

363/10837	Campaign for Sustainable Didcot	IG
369/10860	Mrs A Rayner	IG
643/11530	Mr N H and Miss E Ackroyd	IG
652/11554	Mrs U A Cawse	OR
679/11638	Dr P A Cawse	I
690/11696	Mr T D J Feast	OR

Issues

- a. Develop north of Didcot not to the west as the majority of work areas are there.
- b. Due to site exposure, development in the west of Didcot will be subject to inefficient energy use; land to the north-east is better suited to accommodate the proposed development.
- c. Object to Didcot West in view of non-compliance with PPGs as detailed in the SODC Sustainability Appraisal.

Inspectors' Conclusions

3.1.1 None of the objections which have given rise to the above issues indicate a fundamental opposition to the thrust of policy G1, which is simply to make provision for substantial new housing development at Didcot and to restrain the overall level of development elsewhere. It also explains that all development proposals are to be undertaken in a sustainable manner. Objections relating to issues 'a' and 'b' seek to locate the MDA to the north-east of the town but do not raise any new issues that have not already been considered by the Panel and the OCC when they made their earlier recommendations and decisions in 2000 and 2001 respectively. These matters have been discussed in the introductory section above and are not repeated here.

3.1.2 Under issue 'c', the Sustainability Appraisal of the pre-deposit draft SOLP is criticised for not appraising alternative options for the location of housing development at Didcot. The Council points out, however, that there is no requirement for a district planning authority to re-appraise matters decided in a Structure Plan and we agree with this view, in general terms. Moreover, we consider that none of the points put to us raised any significant new matters in this regard to persuade us that the earlier strategic decision is unsound.

Recommendation – No Change

3.2 G3 LOCATIONAL STRATEGY

Objections

690/11697 Mr T D J Feast

OR

Issues

- a. Object to development to the west of Didcot because insufficient detail has been given at the public exhibition for a considered opinion to be reached.

Inspectors' Conclusions

3.2.1 This is a general policy aimed at giving preference to locations for new development which are close to services/facilities and well served by public transport. Such locations can serve to promote and foster more sustainable forms of development as they can reduce the need to travel, especially by private car. These aims are consistent with national planning guidance.

3.2.2 It seems to us that this particular objection does not have a direct bearing on this policy, which makes no specific reference to the actual location of development at Didcot, either in the policy itself or within the reasoned justification. Indeed, it is a general policy which will be required to guide development throughout the district. Matters relating to the degree of detail to be shown within the Local Plans for the Didcot West development area are dealt with further in Section 11 of this report.

Recommendation – No Change

3.3 G4 DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND ON THE EDGE OF SETTLEMENTS

Objections

870/12449 West Hagbourne Parish Council

OR

Issues

- a. A development to the west of Didcot contravenes many of the stated policy requirements shown in the findings of the EIP and should not be exempted from the normal constraints; development should be to the north of Didcot.

Inspectors' Conclusions

3.3.1 This representation is not strictly an objection to policy G4 but rather an assertion that the Didcot West MDA would be in conflict with this policy. We agree that, taken at face value and in isolation, a development to the west of Didcot would appear to conflict with many of the requirements of this policy. It should also be noted, however, that the stated preference of development to the north of the town would have many of the same drawbacks.

3.3.2 It is important, of course, that the Local Plans be read comprehensively and the justification for development on greenfield land at Didcot, promoted in the approved OSP to 2011, is covered in more detail in the introductory section above. However, it does seem to us that an unnecessary ambiguity and potential area of misunderstanding could be removed by a simple addition to the policy. A specific reference to the MDAs at Didcot within the policy itself, rather than just within the supporting text, would address this matter satisfactorily. However, a more

comprehensive change to this policy is recommended in the main SOLP report.

Recommendation - No Change

4. SECTION 3 - PROTECTING AND ENHANCING THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

4.1 C1 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Objections

363/10833	Campaign for Sustainable Didcot	IG
369/10862	Mrs A Rayner	IG
679/11637	Dr P Cawse	I
690/11688	T Feast	OR

Issues

- a. Development proposed to the west of Didcot on relatively high land would be prominent and unsightly in the landscape.

Inspectors' Conclusions

4.1.1 These objections do not take issue with the wording or objectives of policy C1. Rather, they are objections to the proposed Didcot West MDA on the grounds that it would conflict with this policy. Such matters have already been dealt with under paragraphs 1.1.69 – 1.1.73 of the introductory section and are dealt with further in paragraphs 11.2.30 – 11.2.33 dealing with policy DID2 [policy H7].

Recommendation – No Change

4.2 C5 PROTECTION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND

Objections

145/10377	Campaign for Sustainable Didcot	I
275/10643	Mrs L Belton	OR
489/11078	Mr & Mrs J Jary	OR
571/11331	Cllr T Joslin	I
792/11945	Mr T Botto	IG
870/12451	West Hagbourne Parish Council	OR

Issues

- a. The policy is important but should be strengthened.

Inspectors' Conclusions

4.2.1 These representations are not opposed to this policy but consider that it should be strengthened. More specifically, the objectors take the view that the Didcot West MDA would be in conflict with this policy. However, there is no dispute that the issue of the direction of growth for Didcot is a complex matter that has been debated at length many times over recent years. It comes down to a matter of balance and the weight to be accorded to a variety of different issues. These have been set out and discussed at length in the introductory section to this report.

Where relevant, the individual points are also covered later in the sections dealing with policies DID1, DID2 and DID3.1. We do not repeat our conclusions or recommendations here.

4.2.2 On the specifics of policy C5, we consider it to be comprehensive and do not see how it could reasonably be strengthened. Decision makers will always have to weigh competing or conflicting issues against one another and the actual weight to be given is something that cannot be prescribed in advance. Rather, the relevant merits of each particular case need to be taken into account. We are content that this policy, as currently worded, allows for this.

Recommendation – No Change

4.3 EP1 PREVENTION OF POLLUTING EMISSIONS

Objections

369/10861	Mrs A Rayner	IG
652/11551	Mrs U Cawse	OR
679/11635	Dr P A Cawse	I

Issues

- a. Whether the Didcot West MDA would be subjected to air pollution.

Inspectors' Conclusions

4.3.1 These objections do not seek a change to policy EP1 but rather contend that the Didcot West MDA would be subject to air pollution. However, insofar as it relates to decisions regarding the direction of growth for the town, the matter of air pollution has been discussed in the introductory section to this report. We do not repeat our conclusions or recommendations here.

Recommendation – No Change

4.4 EP2 NOISE AND VIBRATIONS

Objections

369/10861	Mrs A Rayner	IG
642/11527	Mr R Powling	OR
643/11531	Mr N H & Miss E Ackroyd	IG
652/11550	Mrs U A Cawse	OR
679/11639	Dr P A Cawse	OR
690/11694	Mr T Feast	OR

Issues

- a. Whether noise from roads and from Didcot Power Station would prevent development at Didcot West.

Inspectors' Conclusions

4.4.1 In a similar way to the above comments on policy EP1, these objections do

not seek a change to policy EP2, but rather contend that the Didcot West MDA should not go ahead as it would suffer from noise from a variety of sources. However, insofar as it relates to decisions regarding the direction of growth for the town, the matter of noise has been discussed in the introductory section to this report. We do not repeat our conclusions or recommendations here.

Recommendation – No Change

4.5 EP4 PROTECTION OF WATER RESOURCES

Objections

369/10859	Mrs A Rayner	IG
638/11500	Mrs C Feast	OR
643/11528	Mr N H Ackroyd & Miss E Ackroyd	IG
690/11695	Mr T Feast	OR

Issues

1. Whether the Didcot West MDA would pollute groundwater resources.

Inspectors' Conclusions

4.5.1 In a similar way to the above comments on policies EP1 and EP2, these objections do not seek a change to policy EP4 but rather contend that the Didcot West MDA should not go ahead as it would pollute groundwater resources. However, insofar as it relates to decisions regarding the direction of growth for the town, this matter has been discussed in the introductory section to this report. We do not repeat our conclusions or recommendations here.

Recommendation – No Change

4.6 EP6 SURFACE WATER PROTECTION

Objections

663/11575	Miss E M Bowey & Mrs M J Hedger	OR
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Issues

- a. Didcot West MDA would exacerbate flooding in East and West Hagbourne.

Inspectors' Conclusions

4.6.1 This policy requires drainage systems for any new development to effectively mitigate any adverse effects from surface water run-off and flooding on people, property, and the ecological value of the local environment. In addition, wherever practicable, it requires developers to demonstrate that the surface water management system on any development accords with sustainable drainage principles. This objection does not seek a change to this policy but rather contends that the Didcot West MDA would cause flooding problems in East and West Hagbourne.

4.6.2 Elsewhere in this report (paragraphs 1.1.85 – 1.1.89 and 11.2.136 –

11.2.139), it is made clear that the existing drainage problems in the area are well known to the Councils and that they should ensure that the surface water drainage system for Didcot West solves, or at least alleviates, these potential problems. Moreover, by being designed to replicate the existing "greenfield" run-off characteristics of the area, the Councils maintain that the Didcot West surface water drainage system will not lead to any additional flooding downstream. This view was accepted by several of the objectors who attended the Joint Inquiry and we see no reason to disagree.

Recommendation – No Change

5. SECTION 4 ENCOURAGING SUSTAINABLE AND HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

5.1 D8 ENERGY AND WATER-EFFICIENT DESIGN

Objections

679/11634 Dr P A Cawse

OR

Issues

- a. Policy D8 is irrelevant as the issue of energy-efficient design did not influence the decision on the direction of growth at Didcot.

Inspectors' Conclusions

5.1.1 Although the objector contends that this policy is irrelevant, it seems to us that the objection is really one against the principle of the Didcot West development. Specifically, it said that, as some parts of the Didcot West MDA site are elevated and exposed, the development would be more wasteful in terms of energy consumption than if it was located on more sheltered land.

5.1.2 Although the objector maintains that the issue of energy-efficient design did not influence the decision on the direction of growth for the town, the Councils have pointed out that this matter was, in fact, considered by the OCC. In this regard we have noted that the report of the OCC's Director of Environmental Services (CD1006) acknowledges that the north-east site would perform marginally better than the Didcot West site in terms of being able to incorporate passive solar design. Nevertheless, this factor was not considered to be an overriding factor in the choice of site and no persuasive evidence has been submitted to convince us that a contrary view should now be taken.

Recommendation – No Change

6. SECTION 5 MEETING THE SOCIAL NEEDS OF THE RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITIES

6.1 H1 THE AMOUNT AND LOCATION OF NEW HOUSING

Objections to Proposed Changes

13/C0107	Didcot Town Council	I
145/C0898	Campaign for Sustainable Didcot	I
147/C0973	Dr P Samuels	IG
366/C1129	Mr C Wilson	IG
420/C1090	Mr P Wilson	OR
615/C0611	Mr T Hackett	OR
616/C0684	Mrs C Hackett	OR
630/C0949	Dr B Davies	OR
637/C1075	Mr TG Feast	OR
638/C1113	Mrs C Feast	OR
639/C1166	Keep Harwell Rural Campaign	I
659/C0560	Mr R Bulman	I
662/C1152	Mr & Mrs N Buckel	OR
664/C0154	Mrs M Hughes	OR
665/C0142	Dr A Hughes	I
678/C1189	Mrs S Powling	OR
690/C1145	Mr T D Feast	OR
869/C0804	East Hagbourne Parish Council	OR

Issues

- a. The housing provision at Didcot should be 5,000 as quoted in the Structure Plan, not 5,300.

Inspectors' Conclusions

6.1.1 These representations are in response to the increase of 300 dwellings for Didcot shown in Table 1 of the plan. The increase arises as a result of the Vauxhall Barracks site being confirmed as available for redevelopment during the plan period. For the reasons set out in paragraphs 11.3.1 – 11.3.8 and in the main report, dealing with the Vauxhall Barracks under policy DID3.1, we conclude that no change should be made to this policy as a result of these objections.

Recommendation – No Change

6.2 H2 SITES IDENTIFIED FOR HOUSING

Objections

182/10476	East & West Hagbourne Society	OR
425/10957	Mr R Sharp	OR
663/11580	Miss Bowey	OR

859/12284	Croudace Ltd	IA
859/12285	Croudace Ltd	IA
870/12455	West Hagbourne Parish Council	OR

Objections to Proposed Changes

366/C1130	Mr C Wilson	IG
420/C1091	Mr P Wilson	OR
571/C0204	Cllr T Joslin	I
615/C0613	Mr T Hackett	OR
616/C0685	Mrs C Hackett	OR
637/C1076	Mr TG Feast	OR
638/C1114	Mrs C Feast	OR
639/C1167	Keep Harwell Rural Campaign	I
643/C0887	Mr & Miss Ackroyd	OR
659/C0561	Mr R Bulman	I
662/C1153	Mr & Mrs N Buckel	OR
664/C0155	Mrs M Hughes	OR
665/C0143	Dr A Hughes	I
678/C1190	Mrs S Powling	OR
690/C1146	Mr TD Feast	OR
695/C0837	Harwell Parish Council	OR

Issues

Greenfield sites on edge of Didcot

- a. Land north-east of Didcot should be identified as a Major Development Area.

General non-site specific objections to Policy H2

- b. Development should take place to the north-east of Didcot, not to the west on high grade agricultural land.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- c. The Table in Policy H2 has added 300 dwellings at Vauxhall Barracks without a commensurate reduction in the figure for Didcot West.

Inspectors' Conclusions

6.2.1 Issues a and b have already been addressed in the introductory section to this report, whereas issue c. is covered by our recommendations on policy DID3.1 in paragraphs 11.3.1 – 11.3.8. In view of these conclusions, we recommend no changes to policy H2 as a result of these objections.

Recommendation – No Change

6.3 H3 PHASING OF DEVELOPMENT

Objections to Proposed Changes

571/C0205	Cllr T Joslin	I
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695/C0838	Harwell Parish Council	OR
859/C0908	Croudace Ltd	IA
869/C0805	East Hagbourne Parish Council	OR

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- a. Remove reference to further expansion of Didcot West post 2011.
- b. Change to last sentence is inconsistent with policy change.

Inspectors' Conclusions

6.3.1 The objections which have given rise to these two issues relate to the changes to paragraph 5.16 of the supporting text rather than to the wording of policy H3 itself. Furthermore, the objections are specifically concerned with the implications of the redevelopment of the Vauxhall Barracks site. As already noted, we discuss this matter under policy DID3.1 in paragraphs 11.3.1 – 11.3.8 and in the main report, thus the points raised are not repeated here. It is sufficient to restate our conclusion that the changes proposed in the revised deposit version of this paragraph are acceptable and that we recommend only a minor change to policy DID3.1.

Recommendation – No Change

6.4 H6 LOCATIONS WHERE NEW HOUSING NOT PERMITTED

Objections

785/11928	Mrs M Sanderson	OR
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Issues

- a. The principles should be adhered to and development should not extend to the west of Didcot. Policy H6 should recognise that the expansion of Didcot is an exception to this policy.

Inspectors' Conclusions

6.4.1 The Council has commented that the special circumstances at Didcot are addressed under separate policies in the plan. In these circumstances it takes the view that it is unnecessary to make reference to such sites in general policies. Nevertheless, we consider that a modest re-wording would clarify the situation, and remove any ambiguity from the policy. We recommend accordingly.

Recommendation - Change

Add at the start of the first line: "Except as specifically provided for under other plan policies,"

6.5 H8 DWELLING DENSITIES

Objections

571/11333	Cllr T Joslin	I
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Issues

- a. The policy is not being applied consistently throughout the plan and should apply to all housing developments.

Inspectors' Conclusions

6.5.1 This representation does not appear to be an objection to the wording of this policy itself or to its supporting text but rather to the way it would be applied to the Didcot West MDA. We comment elsewhere in this report (paras 11.2.50 – 11.2.52) that a housing density of 40 dwellings per hectare (dph) should be provided on the Didcot West site and do not repeat the reasoning here.

Recommendation – No Change

6.6 H9 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Objections

815/12033 Didcot West Consortium IA

Issues

- a. The Opinion Research Services (ORS) advice on the basis of their housing needs survey should be followed.

Inspectors' Conclusions

6.6.1 Matters relating to affordable housing have been covered in paragraphs 11.2.69 – 11.2.75 and in relation to policy H9 in the main report.

Recommendation – No Change

7. SECTION 6 SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

There are no objections from this section which were dealt with at the joint Inquiry.

8. SECTION 7 SUPPORTING VITAL AND VIABLE TOWN CENTRES

There are no objections from this section which were dealt with at the joint Inquiry.

9. SECTION 8 PROMOTING A SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT STRATEGY

9.1 SECTION 8: GENERAL

Objections

679/11633 Dr P Cawse

I

Issues

- a. With respect to the proposed development at Didcot West, there is no consideration of the traffic and transport impact on the A34 trunk road, already in saturation (paragraph 8.4)

Inspectors' Conclusions

9.1.1 We comment, in paragraphs 1.1.58 – 1.1.59, that there are no in-principle objections to the development of the Didcot West site from either of the Highway Authorities responsible for the road network in the area – the OCC for the county roads and the Highways Agency for the A34 Trunk Road. We have already expressed our disappointment that the various transport studies have not yet progressed to a stage where tested, evaluated, and approved transport proposals to deal with the Didcot West development could form part of the Local Plans. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that work is currently being undertaken to assess the transport impact of this development and that negotiations with the development consortium are taking place against the backdrop of the ITS for the town as a whole. It was apparent from evidence submitted at the Joint Inquiry that the Highways Agency will be involved with these discussions and negotiations. In these circumstances we do not consider that any changes to this policy are either appropriate or necessary as a result of this objection.

Recommendation – No Change

9.2 T1 TRANSPORT REQUIREMENTS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Objections

182/10475	East & West Hagbourne Society	OR
663/11581	Miss Bowey	OR
870/12456	West Hagbourne Parish Council	OR

Issues

- a. Access to the Didcot West development from Park Road & Portway will cause an unacceptable increase in traffic through Coscote, West & East Hagbourne.
- b. The statements in paragraph 8.8 are too vague.

Inspectors' Conclusions

9.2.1 Policy T1 sets out the general transport requirements for new developments. As in the revised deposit version, we consider it to be a comprehensive policy which covers all relevant aspects of transport for the development itself. In addition, it seeks to safeguard the amenities and living conditions of those who might be affected by the scheme's transport implications.

9.2.2 There is no dispute that the Didcot West development will increase transport demand and will undoubtedly lead to increased traffic flows on the surrounding road network and elsewhere within the town and surrounding villages. But the same would be the case, at least in general terms, no matter where the MDA was located. The key is to ensure that this increased transport demand can be satisfactorily managed and accommodated, without giving rise to unacceptable harm to those living nearby or to other users of the transport network. We see no reason why this policy, together with the specific transport elements of policies DID1 and DID2, cannot achieve this.

9.2.3 As to the contention that paragraph 8.8 of the supporting text is too vague, policy T1 is intended to apply generally to all new developments throughout the district. Thus, we do not consider that any specific changes are necessary to this policy or the supporting text to address these concerns.

9.2.4 We are, however, a little concerned about the layout of the policy. We acknowledge that the separate items within it are not in any priority order, but nevertheless take the view that the emphasis of the policy would benefit from a modest re-arrangement. We consider that by reversing the listed order of items (ii), (iii) and (iv), the policy would read more comfortably alongside the local and national transport aims to provide for sustainable transport solutions, which promote the use of non-car modes before the private car. We recommend accordingly.

Recommendation - Change

Re-arrange the listed order so that (iv) becomes (ii) and vice versa.

10. SECTION 9 THE RURAL AREAS

There are no objections from this section which were dealt with at the joint Inquiry.

11. SECTION 10 DIDCOT

11.1 DID1 MAJOR DEVELOPMENT AREAS AT DIDCOT

Objections – See list in Appendix A

Issues

- a. The strategic decision to locate growth at Didcot adjoining the western edge of the town and extending north and south of the B4493 was not a sound decision based on a correct assessment of the key determining planning factors having a bearing on that decision and of the weight to be afforded to each of those factors. The key determining factors identified by the County Council were:
 - Access to employment, shopping and other facilities;
 - Integration;
 - Reducing the need to travel – walking, cycling and public transport; and
 - Agricultural land quality.
- b. Paragraph 10.6(iii). Walkable neighbourhoods would not work having regard to the lack of a bus service and services in the MDAs. Only a small proportion of the population will use walkways on a regular basis.
- c. Paragraph 10.6(iv). The provision of public greenspace is not appropriate because facilities would not be provided when needed, the land would not be well maintained and greenspaces would attract anti-social behaviour. The location of the public greenspace on the western edge of Didcot West MDA would make it less accessible to residents.
- d. The provision of wetland, ponds and watercourses is not advisable at Didcot West where flooding is already a problem because of the gradient of the land.
- e. The existing countryside at Didcot West should remain for the benefit of existing residents and should not be replaced by public greenspace which would be less attractive and take many years to become established.
- f. Paragraph 10.6(v). No ITS has yet been approved by the County Council to show how accessibility to key destinations would be achieved. The County Council's assessment that the Didcot West site would have the advantage of good accessibility and good integration was flawed. The lack of a bridge from Didcot West to Milton Park would have an adverse effect on accessibility.
- g. Paragraph 10.6(v). The Didcot West major development area would result in unacceptable levels of traffic on an inadequate local road network. Land to the

north-east of Didcot would have better road infrastructure. New schools proposed at Didcot West would aggravate local traffic problems. The construction of new roads to serve Didcot West would destroy countryside.

- h. Paragraph 10.6(v). There is no assurance that road and transport infrastructure for Didcot West MDA would be agreed and implemented.
- i. Paragraph 10.6(vii). Building new houses would create waste and not conserve energy and other resources. The countryside between Didcot, Harwell and the Hagbournes should be maintained and not used to build houses.
- j. Paragraph 10.6(viii). The Didcot West MDA would exacerbate existing flooding problems in East and West Hagbourne.
- k. Paragraph 10.6(ix). The Strategy for Protection of the Historic Environment does not include a full programme of archaeological field evaluation of Didcot West prior to the determination of any planning applications. High density development would preclude preservation of archaeological remains.
- l. Paragraph 10.6(x). The Ecological Strategy does not include reference to the need for a full programme of biodiversity field evaluation of Didcot West. Protected species should be identified and proposals for mitigation measures agreed, prior to the determination of any planning applications. The Council must manage and protect any new nature conservation areas.
- m. Paragraph 10.6(x). The Didcot West development, particularly high density, would destroy local ecology and no Ecological Strategy could replace what has been destroyed. The development should be located to the north-east of Didcot, where less harm would be caused.
- n. Paragraph 10.6(xii). A properly-managed country park should be provided at the start of the Didcot West development to give it time to mature and to replace the countryside lost to existing residents.
- o. Paragraph 10.6(xii). The Didcot West MDA would remove existing facilities, including footpaths and large natural resources.
- p. Paragraph 10.6(xii). The Council failed to deliver services and facilities when needed at the Ladygrove estate. There is scepticism that it would do any better at Didcot West. The countryside and rights of way west of Didcot are enjoyed by existing residents and should be preserved.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.1.1 This policy establishes the method by which the major development areas (MDAs) at Didcot will be implemented. It explains that comprehensive Planning and Development Briefs will be needed for the whole of each MDA, with Design Statements for parts of each MDA. We understand that the preparation of these Planning and Development Briefs is, in effect, an on-going exercise which is being undertaken in parallel to the planning application process for Didcot West. We consider that this is a practical and appropriate response to what is clearly a difficult time-tabling matter and we agree with the Councils that the early preparation of such briefs is necessary to ensure that they are in place and

available to future developers, in the event that unforeseen problems arise during the processing of the current planning applications. The supporting text identifies that there will be two MDAs, comprising the new area of Didcot West on the western edge of the town, and Ladygrove East, comprising the final part of the Ladygrove development area on the eastern edge of the town.

11.1.2 However, none of the objections considered here relate specifically to the proposed Ladygrove East MDA, whereas many of them appear to oppose any MDAs in principle, and the Didcot West MDA in particular, such as issues 'a' and 'e'. Because of this we refer to the earlier assessment of these matters in the introductory section for our conclusions on many of the issues which have arisen under this policy. However, a number of the objections relate to individual sections of paragraph 10.6, which details the information that the Planning and Development Briefs will need to contain. This information is also contained in Appendix 5 to the VWHLPP. We deal with these points in the following paragraphs.

11.1.3 We first of all deal with the argument that the allocation of the Didcot West MDA was inconsistent and irrational in light of the planning history for this area, which shows that applications for development on this land have been consistently refused in the past (issue 'a'). The planning history was not disputed by the Councils, but they pointed out that these previous refusals of permission were consistent with the planning policy framework operative at that time. The area to the west of the town has not been included in development plans in the past as it had always proved possible to meet the need for new housing without having to allocate this, or similar greenfield areas, for development. We understand that when there was a need to allocate greenfield land at Didcot in the early 1980s, to meet the need for housing identified in the Structure Plan, land was allocated to the north and east of the town as the balance of factors showed those areas to be preferable for development at that time.

11.1.4 But, of course, time moves on and different needs arise and different issues come into play. In our opinion, this is what has happened here. For the reasons already detailed in the introductory section, the strategic planning authority has decided, after carefully weighing all relevant matters, that the balance of advantage for major new development now lies with the area to the west of the town. Whilst this is a different decision to those made in the past, it is wrong to consider it as inevitably inconsistent or irrational as a result. Rather, the County and District Councils see it as the appropriate decision in the current circumstances. As already indicated in the introductory section, we have not heard sufficient persuasive evidence to cause us to take a contrary view.

11.1.5 Issue 'b' relates to criticisms of the concept of "walkable neighbourhoods", whereby homes in each neighbourhood would be within walking distance of local services and public transport routes. It seems to us that the criticisms, at least to some extent, relate to the western side of Didcot as it currently exists, rather than as it will be once the comprehensive proposals for development, which the MDA will result in, have been completed. In particular, the comment that the MDA would not be close to local services and that such services are inadequate anyway, does not appear to recognise that the MDA will contain new services, appropriate to the new population. In any case, government guidance, particularly in PPGs 3 (Housing) and 13 (Transport), promotes sustainable means of transport, such as walking, cycling and public transport and seeks to ensure that new development is arranged to maximise the use of such modes. The detailed layout of Didcot West is a matter for subsequent planning applications but we consider that the

framework provided by this section of explanatory text is consistent with this national guidance. We therefore see no reason to recommend any changes to it.

11.1.6 Objections contend that public greenspace would not be well-maintained; would attract anti-social behaviour; and if located on the western edge of the Didcot West MDA, would be less accessible to residents. Again, those objections which relate to issue 'c' appear to be critical of both the principle of the provision of public greenspace and also of detailed matters of layout. Specifically, the objections relate to subsection iv) of the explanatory text, which details the requirements of a Public Realm Strategy for the MDAs. We are content that the spaces between buildings – be they hard or soft landscaped areas – form part of the overall design of an area and are every bit as important as the design of the buildings themselves. In our opinion, it is entirely appropriate that large development areas, as proposed under this policy, should incorporate such spaces within their overall layout.

11.1.7 With regard to peripheral areas of greenspace, the Councils explained that these would help to provide a buffer between the MDA and the open countryside beyond. But the Councils also indicated a commitment to ensure that 'green wedges' are incorporated into the detailed design of the areas, such that the greenspace will not all be located at the MDAs' periphery. Indeed, paragraph 10.6(iv) [Appendix 5(iv)] refers to public greenspace networks 'within and around the built development'. We are satisfied that the policy and supporting text provides an acceptable framework for development in this regard. Matters relating to detailed location and design of greenspace areas are more properly dealt with through the development control process.

11.1.8 Similarly, matters such as the control and management of greenspace areas should be dealt with through planning conditions or planning obligations. The Councils have recognised this matter in paragraph 10.6(xii) [Appendix 5(xii)], which states that the Planning and Development Brief will identify the body that has agreed to be responsible for the long-term management, including the maintenance, of each of these public realm facilities.

11.1.9 Issues 'f', 'g' and 'h' all relate to objections concerning matters of traffic, transport and road construction. Insofar as policy DID1 is concerned, they are objections to paragraph 10.6(v) [Appendix 5(iv)], which explains that the Planning and Development Brief will contain a Transport Strategy for each MDA. Not surprisingly, many of the objections seem to be to the principle of a Didcot West MDA on traffic and transport grounds, with some contending that an MDA to the north-east would have better road infrastructure. The more general traffic and transport matters have been dealt with earlier in this report, in paragraphs 1.1.53 – 1.1.62, whilst matters of detail are discussed under criterion (xi) of SOLP policy DID2 (VWHLP policy H7), in paragraphs 11.2.140 – 11.2.166. Insofar as policy DID1 itself is concerned, we consider that no changes are necessary. However, in view of the importance which the Councils and the County Council attach to the Didcot Area ITS, we consider that any transport strategy or proposals for the MDAs need to be consistent with this ITS. An appropriate reference within the supporting text, at paragraph 10.6(v) [Appendix 5(v)] would, we believe, be helpful and we recommend accordingly.

11.1.10 Issue 'i' relates to objections which again are, in the main, "in principle" objections to the proposed Didcot West MDA. It is not disputed that the construction of new houses results in the loss of existing land for other purposes;

requires the input of energy and materials; and results in the creation of waste from the new households. But these are inevitable consequences of any new development. What paragraph 10.6(vii) [Appendix 5(vii)] seeks to achieve is a strategy for minimising the use of transport and other natural resources and for maximising the use of recycled materials and for the management of waste. These are laudable objectives and we see no reason why they should not be incorporated into the proposed Planning and Development Briefs. Accordingly, we do not recommend any changes to this section of paragraph 10.6(vii) [Appendix 5(vii)].

11.1.11 We acknowledge that there has been flooding of some of the properties, or grounds of properties, which currently abut open land to the west of Didcot (issues 'd' & 'j'). However, it is clear from the evidence submitted to the Joint Inquiry that the Councils are also well aware of this fact. Moreover, they seek to address it through the requirement in the Planning and Development Briefs for a Surface Water Drainage Strategy, incorporating proposals for a sustainable urban drainage system. This matter is discussed further in paragraphs 1.1.85 – 1.1.89 and 11.2.136 – 11.2.139. We see no need to recommend any changes to this policy or its supporting text to address these matters.

11.1.12 We have discussed the issue of possible archaeological finds on the Didcot West site, in general terms, in paragraphs 1.1.97 – 1.1.102. We have also noted that the matters of cultural heritage and archaeology have been investigated as part of the Environmental Impact Assessments, undertaken for the Environmental Statements which have been submitted with the Didcot West planning application. Environmental Statements are required to investigate the potential environmental impacts of a development and the means by which such impacts could be reduced or overcome. As they will have been prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1999 and must be acceptable to the Councils before planning permission can be granted, we consider that they provide significant safeguards for any archaeological features found on the site.

11.1.13 Against this background we consider that the Strategy for the Protection of the Historic Environment, which paragraph 10.6(ix) [Appendix 5(ix)] explains is required to be prepared as part of the Planning and Development Brief, is quite adequate to provide the necessary protection. We share the Councils' view that it is not necessary for the Local Plans to spell out the requirement in detail (issue 'k').

11.1.14 Similar comments apply to ecological matters (issues 'l' and 'm'). We have discussed them in general terms, in paragraphs 1.1.90 – 1.1.96, and have noted that an Ecological Strategy is required under paragraph 10.6(x) [Appendix 5(x)]. As the Councils have pointed out, ecological investigations will be required to inform this strategy and will also have been a necessary part of the Didcot West ES. Again, we consider that it is not necessary for the Local Plans to spell out the requirements in detail.

11.1.15 We have had regard to the objections which have led to issue 'n', but have noted that neither Local Plan refers to a country park as part of the Didcot West MDA. Nevertheless, we consider that many of the informal recreation and nature conservation functions of a country park would be provided for through the requirements of paragraph 10.6(iv) and (x) [Appendix 5(iv) and (x)]. There is, however, insufficient evidence before us to be prescriptive on this matter. In any case, we consider that it is something which should be dealt with at the planning application stage, or through a subsequent management body, if it is felt to be an

appropriate use for the greenspace. Moreover, whilst we appreciate the concerns raised, we do not consider that it would be reasonable for the greenspace to be provided before the occupation of any new housing.

11.1.16 We accept that the open land to the west of Didcot currently provides a recreational resource for the town's residents, but saw from our inspections that this is generally limited to walks along the statutory and informal footpaths. Whilst it is the case that the nature of this land would clearly change significantly, as a result of the development proposals, this would not constitute authority to close public rights of way. Furthermore, new footpaths and cycletracks would form part of the MDA, as would a network of public greenspaces, all to be provided under the requirements of policy DID2 [VWHLP policy H7]. Clearly, this would not provide the same environment for informal recreation as currently exists and we understand the strong opposition to the Didcot West development on these grounds. Nevertheless, as we have already indicated that the development should proceed on strategic grounds, we consider that the policy framework defined by policies DID1 and DID2 will ensure that the new development area provides adequate and satisfactory informal recreation opportunities (issues 'o' & 'p').

11.1.17 We understand that there were problems with the timetabling of the provision of services and facilities for the existing Ladygrove development and because of this sympathise with the concerns that services and facilities at Didcot West may not be provided when needed (issue 'p'). This matter is, however, addressed by paragraph 10.6(xii) [Appendix 5(xii)], which specifically requires the Planning and Development Brief to identify at what stage in the development programme each element of the agreed facilities and services will be provided, and by whom. No changes are therefore needed to address these objections.

Recommendation:

Add to the first sentence of paragraph 10.6(v) [Appendix 5(v)] after "Strategy": "consistent with the objectives of the Didcot Area ITS,"

11.2 DID2 AND H7 DIDCOT WEST MAJOR DEVELOPMENT AREA

**Policy DID2 (first sentence), paragraph 10.10 and Map 13
[Policy H7 (first and second sentence), paragraphs 8.36 to 8.40, Appendix 5 and Figure 8.1]**

Objections – See list in Appendix A

Issues

- a. The strategic decision to locate growth at Didcot adjoining the western edge of the town and extending north and south of the B4493 was not a sound decision based on a correct assessment of the key determining planning factors having a bearing on that decision and on a correct assessment of the weight to be afforded to each of those factors. The key determining factors identified by the County Council were:

- Access to employment, shopping and other facilities;
- Integration;

- Reducing the need to travel – walking, cycling and public transport; and
- Agricultural land quality.

The County Council should have afforded more weight to agricultural land quality and to other factors including noise, air quality, traffic congestion, pollution of underground water, problems of surface water drainage disposal and the visual impact of building on a prominent site. The MDA should be located to the north-east of Didcot.

- b. The strategic decision to locate development on the western edge of Didcot should be re-assessed to take into account the larger land take now proposed, the greater encroachment towards nearby villages, new public health issues, drainage issues, the need to protect good soil, the discovery of archaeological remains on the site (and possible other remains), the omission of a new road link to Milton Park over the A4130 and railway, and traffic congestion on the A34 trunk road.
- c. Didcot West is not the most sustainable direction of growth. No sustainability appraisal has been made of this proposal in the Local Plan; an independent and comprehensive environmental assessment is required.
- d. The proposals reinforce development in a location which cannot offer a solution to the strategic housing requirements of both the Vale and the City of Oxford.
- e. Map 13 shows the development too close to properties in west Didcot and on the Harwell Road where it would be a risk to security, safety and amenity.
- f. There is no detailed information about infrastructure provision or its phasing to enable the impact of this development to be assessed.
- g. The development would adversely affect local footpaths and bridleways.
- h. The County Council's decision was made by people who did not know the area and was based on false information.
- i. The urban capacity study for Didcot is out-of-date and the development proposed at Didcot West would result in the Government's targets for building on previously-developed land not being met.
- j. The allocation proposed at Didcot West should be reduced to reflect the housing allocation at Vauxhall Barracks in Policy DID3.1 or other potential housing developments on previously-developed land.
- k. Policy H7 should not contain proposals relating to land and matters outside the administrative area of the Vale of White Horse District Council.
- l. Reword Policy H7 to recognise that the land is part of Harwell Parish, for instance introduce H7 with 'land in the Parish of Harwell, west of Didcot'.
- m. It is unclear how the Master Developer will be selected and selection should not occur until consideration has been given to omission site representations.

- n. Paragraphs 8.36 – 8.40 should require more detailed Neighbourhood Masterplans for each primary school catchment area.
- o. It may not be possible for all the community buildings to be specified at the time that the Planning and Development Brief is prepared.
- p. In order to allow the Didcot West development area to be designed and implemented effectively, the requirements contained in paragraphs 8.36 – 8.51 should be modified.

Omission sites and issues:

- q. Not all the development at Didcot West will be delivered within the Plan period so additional allocations should be made.
- r. The strategic decision on the direction of growth at Didcot was unsound, involving the rejection of the “split option” being promoted by Croudace Ltd.
- s. The strategic decision on the direction of growth at Didcot was unsound, involving the rejection of the Persimmon Homes “Milton option”.
- t. Further housing allocations should be made at Lime Road, Botley which is a more sustainable location than Didcot West.
- u. An 8 acre field south of Didcot Road should be allocated for housing to add to the Didcot West Development Area.
- v. Land north of Didcot to the east of Hill Farm should be allocated for housing.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- w. The extent of the Major Development Area (MDA) shown on Map 13 (SOLP) and Fig 8.1 (VWHLP) as proposed to be changed is too great; would result in an unacceptable loss of BMV agricultural land and justifies a reconsideration of the strategic decision on the direction of growth.
- x. The proposed change to remove details from Map 13 undermines the Council's ability to deliver a viable MDA.
- y. The changes to Map 13 and the Didcot Inset Proposals Map should show public footpaths and other rights of way.
- z. The development area shown on Map 13 has increased contrary to Government policy on the density of new housing development.
- aa. The development area shown on Map 13 would mean urban sprawl would encroach to an unacceptable extent into the rural gaps between Didcot and nearby villages, and increase traffic flows.

- bb. Lower density is desirable but not by taking more land to the west of Didcot. Whilst development should be mainly to the west of Didcot, the building of some housing to the north-east at lower density is preferred.
- cc. The boundary of the MDA shown on SOLP Map 13 and VWHLP Figure 8.1 should be the same as that proposed by the Didcot West Consortium.
- dd. The further encroachment of the MDA southwards on to BMV agricultural land is unnecessary and undesirable. Alternative land should be allocated to the north of Didcot.
- ee. The boundary of the MDA north of Zulu Farm is too constrained to provide all the land required for development, and should be extended westwards.
- ff. The increased allocation of land west of Didcot would be unnecessary if the more sustainable site at Lime Road, Botley were to be allocated.
- gg. The new boundary comes closer to Harwell village. If more land is needed due to SODC's density figures the extra land should be taken from SODC not VOWH.
- hh. The new boundary does not properly reflect the Persimmon counter-proposal.
- ii. The enlarged development area unnecessarily commits further countryside to development, enlarging the physical and visual impact of Didcot to the detriment of the landscape and the established settlement pattern.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.1 A significant number of objections lodged against this part of the relevant policies relate to general matters of principle concerning the direction of growth at Didcot. As has already been explained, it is not the role of the Local Plan process in general, nor this Joint Inquiry in particular, to alter strategic decisions taken at Structure Plan level, unless there have been clear and material changes in circumstances of sufficient weight to warrant an alternative decision being taken. All of the matters which could come into this category have been discussed in the introductory section. In the light of our consideration of these matters, we have concluded that the Didcot West MDA should go ahead as proposed in the revised deposit plans, in largely unaltered form. Therefore, wherever possible we do not re-visit these matters of principle in the sections which follow, but concentrate instead on matters of detail relating to the proposed Didcot West MDA.

11.2.2 The above comments apply to issues 'a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'g', 'h', 'r', 's', 't', 'w', 'bb', 'dd', 'ff' & 'ii'. All further matters are dealt with below.

11.2.3 With regard to issue 'e', we see no reason why the houses which front the B4493 should, as a matter of principle, be treated differently to other dwellings adjacent to the site. Whether or not new housing is proposed close to these existing dwellings is a matter to be determined at the planning application stage, when the detailed layout of the site is being considered. We accept that the outlook and environs of some dwellings will change. However, provided normal development control criteria are taken account of (such as those set out in SOLP policy D4 and VWHLP policy DC9), we consider that the residential amenities and living conditions of existing residents should not be unacceptably affected. Furthermore, with careful planning, it does not have to be the case that the new

development would have an adverse effect on property values. In any case, such matters fall outside the direct remit of the planning system.

11.2.4 Under this part of the policies and others in the sections that follow, some objectors contend that the absence of detailed information about infrastructure provision or its phasing mean that it is not possible to assess the impact of the MDA (issue 'f'). Similarly, we have noted that a number of objectors consider that more detail should be shown on Map 13 (SOLP) and Fig 8.1 (VWHLP), including such items as public footpaths and rights of way and the location of facilities and services (issues 'x' & 'y'). Whilst we understand these concerns, the number of dwellings to be accommodated in the MDA is known, as are the main types of facilities (see policy criteria (iv) and (v)). Further details of the proposed MDA are also given in the other criteria of these policies and their reasoned justifications.

11.2.5 Local Plans are primarily concerned with establishing the framework for development and maps and figures need to be read alongside the policies and their supporting text, in order to form a full picture of the Councils' aspirations for their areas. These points lead us to the view that the level of detail currently shown on Map 13 (SOLP) and Fig 8.1 (VWHLP) is appropriate for a Local Plan. Whilst there may be some differences in off-site impacts, depending on the actual position of new road junctions and the on-site disposition of the various facilities, these are matters of detail which are more appropriately dealt with at the planning application stage. Any attempt to establish the detailed layout at this stage would unduly fetter the preparation of a Masterplan for the MDA, which needs to be undertaken through the normal planning application process, guided by the comprehensive Planning and Development Briefs required under policy DID1

11.2.6 Issue 'h' has been addressed earlier, in paragraph 1.1.8. The matters raised in issue 'o' are dealt with in paragraphs 11.2.82 - 11.2.90 and 11.2.95 - 11.2.104, regarding the District and Neighbourhood Centres respectively.

11.2.7 Although objectors have contended that the urban capacity study (UCS) for Didcot is out of date (issue 'i'), CD 106 only dates from June 2002. In our view, this does not constitute an out of date document, as the First Deposit Draft Plan (SOLP) is also dated June 2002. The UCS indicates that there is only a limited amount of previously developed land in the Didcot area and because of this and the amount of housing proposed in the two MDAs, we consider that it would be difficult to meet the Government's targets for the re-use of brownfield sites. Nevertheless, we do not consider that this fact should weigh against the greenfield MDAs, in view of the strategic considerations which led to the choice of Didcot for major areas of housing development.

11.2.8 We do not support the suggestion that the Didcot West allocation should be reduced to reflect the housing allocation at the Vauxhall Barracks site. This matter is discussed later in this report, under policy DID3.1. The absence of any other, significantly-sized, areas of brownfield land in the town means that there would be limited scope to develop such sites in preference to Didcot West, even if it were considered desirable (issue 'j').

11.2.9 The fact that the Didcot West MDA straddles an administrative boundary is somewhat unusual, but not unprecedented. The Councils have made it clear that the relevant policies (DID2 - SODC and H7 - VWHDC), will each only relate to that part of the MDA within the appropriate administrative area. One reason for a Joint Inquiry was to ensure that there is sufficient consistency between the policies in the two plans to enable a satisfactory and comprehensive development to be

realised. We do not, however, see any reason why the fact that the land within the Vale's jurisdiction lies in the Parish of Harwell needs to be specifically mentioned. As the Councils point out, this is not a planning matter (issues 'k' & 'l').

11.2.10 We share the Councils' view that the method of selection of the Master Developer, as in the supporting text to policy DID1, is a detailed matter which does not need to be defined in the Local Plans. The fact that the plans set out the principle of a 'Master Developer' or 'Promoter', and provide the framework whereby the MDAs would be delivered is, in our opinion, sufficient (issue 'm').

11.2.11 The need for more detailed Neighbourhood Masterplans for each primary school catchment area is not a requirement of the Education Authority and no firm evidence has been submitted to persuade us that any such plans are necessary at this stage. Yet again we take the view that such matters are most appropriately discussed and resolved at the detailed planning stage, as part of the planning applications for Didcot West (issue 'n').

11.2.12 The objections which have given rise to issue 'z' contend that the density now proposed for the Didcot West MDA would conflict with Government guidance. We cover the topic of housing density more fully in paragraphs 11.2.50 – 11.2.52, dealing with criterion (i) of policy DID2 [policy H7]. It is sufficient here to state that the densities proposed in the SOLP and the VWHLP are both in accord with the 30-50 dph range contained in PPG 3. Furthermore, we agree with the Councils that the increased land-take now proposed on Map 13 and Fig 8.1 would not close the gaps between Didcot and settlements to the south and south-west to such an extent that either their separate identity, or rural setting, would be significantly harmed (issue 'aa'). This matter has already been discussed in paragraphs 1.1.50 – 1.1.52, and is considered further in paragraph 11.2.123. Traffic flows would not materially increase as a direct result of the increased land-take, as no significant increase in the number of homes or other traffic-generating uses is proposed.

11.2.13 Several of the objections drew attention to the differences between the Didcot West MDA boundary shown on Map 13 of the SOLP, Fig 8.1 of the VWHLP, and the planning application submitted for this area by the Great Western Park Consortium (Objector Nos 815 (SOLP) & 0303 (VWHLP) (issues 'cc', 'ee', 'gg' & 'hh'). We deal first with the four areas of boundary dispute between the Councils and this consortium, as debated at the Joint Inquiry, noting that the first two are of a fairly minor nature.

11.2.14 The first relates to a sliver of land within the development area adjacent to existing houses to the south of the B4493. This area lies outside the control of the objectors and has therefore been excluded from the current planning applications for Didcot West. As the Councils point out, this is an undeveloped parcel of land, wholly surrounded by the planning application site, with no evident beneficial use, other than for residential development or for development as part of the comprehensive MDA proposals. We consider that this small piece of land is of little consequence in the wider context of the whole MDA and the fact that it may not be currently available for development need not have a direct bearing on the boundaries shown on Map 13 or Fig 8.1. We recommend no change to the plans in this regard.

11.2.15 The second disputed area is a small area of land which lies outside the currently proposed MDA boundary, just to the south of the A4130. It is intended that this land would provide a pedestrian link between the A4130 and the MDA and the objectors explained that it had been included at the request of OCC officers.

We can see that such a link would help in increasing the overall accessibility of the MDA to other parts of the town. However, in view of the availability of the main spine road access with the A4130 and the likelihood of pedestrian and/or cycle links being provided from the MDA through Mendip Heights, we do not see this additional link as so essential as to require specific designation through the Local Plan process. Accordingly, we do not recommend any changes to the plans in this regard. Matters of detail relating to this link can, of course, be pursued through the normal development control process.

11.2.16 The third difference between the Councils and the objector relates to a flat area of some 12ha in the north-western corner of the MDA, shown on Map 13 of the SOLP and Fig 8.1 of the VWHL. The Councils explained that this area had been included principally to allow for the provision of playing fields on flat land at a time when it appeared that such a facility could not be provided satisfactorily elsewhere. However, the latest Land Use Masterplan for the Didcot West MDA indicates that playing fields can be accommodated at other locations within the overall site and on this basis the objectors maintain that there is no need to include this additional area of land. Indeed, the requirement for public greenspace, set out in policy DID2(vii) [policy H7(vii)], was increased in the revised deposit plan from 63ha to 74ha. It is this increase which has given rise to objections.

11.2.17 But the Councils pointed out that the playing field locations shown in the latest revised Masterplan have not yet been shown to be adequate and acceptable. On a separate but related matter, later in this report (paragraphs 11.2.50 – 11.2.52), we conclude that on a greenfield site such as this, particularly with a requirement for a relatively high proportion of small dwellings, there is no good reason why an overall density of 40 dph should not be achieved. We recommend accordingly and consider that this higher density is likely to lead to a somewhat revised layout for the MDA as a whole. In these circumstances, it seems sensible to retain some flexibility in terms of layout, which would be offered by retaining this north-western area within the MDA boundary.

11.2.18 Nevertheless, the Councils' officers accepted at the Joint Inquiry that no more than 62ha is required for public greenspace and they therefore proposed that the figure in line 1 of policy DID2(vii) [policy H7(vii)] should revert to this figure, rather than the 74ha currently shown in the Second Deposit Plans. We accept this proposal and make the appropriate recommendation later, in the section dealing with this criterion. The Councils also accepted that if this additional 12ha is not required for playing field purposes, then it should not be developed but should remain in agricultural use. To this end, they proposed an amendment to paragraph 10.20, which we support and again recommend later.

11.2.19 We have considered the objector's request that this area be hatched on Map 13 and Fig 8.1 and annotated to indicate its 'reserve' status but as these plans have to be viewed in the context of the relevant policies and their supporting texts, we do not consider that any such annotation is necessary. We do, however, recommend that additional clarification on this matter is included in the supporting text at paragraph 10.10 [paragraph 8.36].

11.2.20 The final area of dispute relates to the western site boundary, north of the B4493. Different boundaries are shown in the SOLP and the VWHL in this location and both of these differ from the boundaries shown in the current planning applications. We acknowledge that it is not generally the case that planning applications determine matters such as the positioning of Local Plan development

boundaries. However, in certain circumstances, such as where there are no clear physical features to determine the boundary or where there are specific agricultural or landscaping benefits, as are claimed by the objectors in this case, we consider that it may be the most appropriate course to take. It is clear that there has already been some discussion between the objectors and the Councils regarding appropriate site boundaries. Indeed, we understand that information provided by the development consortium was used to guide the choice of development boundary used by both Councils, prior to the publication of the SOLP in September 2003. So, in general terms, we see no particular problem with allowing the planning applications for Didcot West to assist in determining the best boundary location, especially when there appear to be practical advantages in so doing.

11.2.21 Clearly, it is important for both Local Plans to show the same boundary and in practical terms it is also appropriate that this boundary reflects a layout that is achievable on the ground. The difficulty in this case is that there are problems with each of the three suggestions that have been put before us. Firstly, both the SODC boundary and that proposed in the current planning applications relate to an overall site density of 38 dph, whereas we have already indicated that such a density would be too low for this site. We consider that a density of 40 dph is both appropriate and achievable here, but whilst the VWHDC boundary shown on Fig 8.1 is based on this density figure, it does not reflect the agricultural and landscape considerations which the objectors alluded to.

11.2.22 It was said at the Joint Inquiry that adopting a density figure of 40 dph would result in a land saving of some 4.2ha and it seems to us that this could best be achieved by 'flattening out' the westwards bulge which Map 13 shows to the north of Zulu Farm. This leads us to the view that the boundary shown on the VWHLP Fig 8.1 is the most appropriate and it is therefore this one which we shall recommend for both plans. In doing so we do, however, acknowledge that there may be practical difficulties in achieving exactly this boundary and consider that this is an obvious case where ongoing dialogue between the Councils, the objectors, and all other interested parties may well result in minor variations to the recommended boundary. But we do not see this as causing insurmountable problems. It is, of course, relevant that there should be no pockets of undeveloped land just within the MDA boundary, as these could lead to additional development at a later date, which the Councils might find difficult to resist, but would not have formed part of the comprehensive scheme. However, with attention to peripheral landscaping, we consider that any such problems should be avoided.

Omission sites

11.2.23 Objectors have made the general point that not all of the development at Didcot West is capable of being delivered within the period of these Local Plans (issue 'q'). The Councils have acknowledged this in Topic Paper 4A but objectors have argued that additional housing allocations should therefore be made and in this regard a number of omission sites have been put forward.

Omission sites - Croudace Ltd - (issue 'r')

11.2.24 General issues relating to the direction of growth, and the principle of a split option, have already been discussed in the introductory section (paragraphs 1.1.124 - 1.1.129). Here we examine the details of the specific split option put forward by Croudace Ltd. This proposal seeks the substitution of a site immediately to the north of the NPR (referred to as the omission site), which the

objector contends could accommodate some 1,100 dwellings, for that part of the Didcot West MDA that lies to the south of the B4493, referred to hereafter as the South-West Quadrant (SWQ). The issues to be considered in this regard fall under a number of separate headings which, for ease, we consider here rather than under the separate criteria of policy DID2 [policy H7].

11.2.25 The first matter concerns consistency of the proposal with OSP policy H1. We refer back to our conclusions in paragraphs 1.1.12 – 1.1.19 and say that we have no doubt that the proposal would not be in general conformity with the OSP. Not only would it fail to comply with that part of the policy which requires the 5,500 dwellings to be located mainly to the west of the town, it would also be in conflict with the Explanatory Memorandum, insofar as it would not produce a development extending to both the north and south of the B4493. Whilst this does not automatically mean that the omission site should be discounted, it needs to demonstrate material and positive benefits over the Didcot West SWQ before it could be considered in substitution.

11.2.26 However, we find that even if the omission site could provide 1,100 houses, this is substantially less than the 1,450 which it is estimated could be accommodated on the SWQ. However, on the basis of the evidence before us we have significant doubts about the omission site's ability to provide 1,100 homes. Firstly, this total could only be achieved at a density of 44dph. Despite the fact that there would be a high percentage of small dwellings, we are not persuaded that such a density could be readily achieved for an urban extension such as this. We have had regard to the objector's contention that it would accord with government guidance on making the most efficient use of greenfield land. However, Ladygrove East was proposed at 37dph and on the larger Didcot West site we are recommending that a density of 40dph be adopted. Reducing the density on the omission site would require a greater land-take than the 25ha currently proposed or a reduction in the number of dwellings to be provided.

11.2.27 More importantly, doubts were raised by the Councils regarding the ability of the omission site to provide the required amounts of public greenspace and public open space, in accordance with the SODG (CD165) and the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) standard. Further doubt about the site's ability to deliver the proposed dwellings and other facilities arises as a result of the EA's flood mapping, which places an appreciable amount of the site within Zone 3b. On this latter point we acknowledge that the site has no significant history of flooding and that the objector was hopeful that with more accurate survey information and additional work, it may be proved that the site does not fall within this zoning. However, this matter had not been resolved by the close of the Joint Inquiry. Finally, the need to adequately safeguard the setting of the Grade II listed building, Ladygrove Farm, would also place constraints on the development of this site.

11.2.28 Taking all of these points into account and having regard to the fact that the Masterplan discussed at the Inquiry was only illustrative, we cannot be satisfied that the omission site is capable of providing all that the objector suggests. Indeed, as a result of these concerns, the Councils indicated that perhaps as little as 50% of the objector's estimated number of dwellings could be delivered on this site – in other words about 550 dwellings. Although the objector disputed this figure, it does seem to us that there is a strong likelihood that the omission site would fall well short of achieving the suggested 1,100 dwellings.

11.2.29 The Councils did not dispute the fact that development of the omission

site would not involve the loss of BMV agricultural land, whereas development of the SWQ would. Nor did they dispute the fact that the SWQ would involve building over an aquifer, in contrast to the omission site. However, these are not new matters but were before the Panel and the OCC when they made their recommendations and decisions in 2000 and 2001 respectively. Moreover, the only significant change in these factors, since those dates, is the change in emphasis regarding the protection of BMV agricultural land, introduced by PPS 7. As the objector agreed, this changed emphasis does not weigh in favour of developing the omission site. These matters have already been discussed in the introductory section, in paragraphs 1.1.40 – 1.1.49, and we do not repeat them here.

11.2.30 Turning to landscape and visual impact, the objector contended that the SWQ has an attractive, open, downland quality, which would be lost if it were to be developed. It is further contended that the SWQ is open to views over a larger area than the omission site, due to its elevated and open nature, and that its development would therefore impact adversely upon the AONB. Moreover, it is claimed that this elevated and open nature means that development on the SWQ would be very difficult to screen in the early stages. On the other hand, the objector maintained that the omission site benefits from a low elevation and enclosure from both on and off-site vegetation, such that it would have no impact on views in or out of the AONB.

11.2.31 We undertook inspections of the two sites themselves and we also viewed them from numerous off-site vantage points. Contrary to the assertion of the objector, we saw that views into the omission site are possible from the AONB. We noted that whilst these views are fairly well contained by existing vegetation, they are obtained from a distance of just a few hundred metres on a public footpath to the east. We are also mindful of the fact that the areas which would be most readily seen from this vantage point are those which Atlantic Consultants recommended should be kept free from built development.

11.2.32 This situation compares to the wider and more numerous views of the SWQ which are possible from the AONB but which are obtained from a much greater distance. Furthermore, from these viewpoints much of the proposed development would be seen against the backdrop of the existing built-up area of Didcot. We also consider, on the basis of the submitted photographs and our own inspections, that adequate and acceptable screening of the SWQ would be possible. In light of these points, we are of the opinion that although both developments would fundamentally change the landscape character of their respective sites, there would be very little to choose between them in terms of visual impact. We certainly do not consider that any overriding case can be made for or against either site in this regard.

11.2.33 We have noted the objector's contention that development of the SWQ would affect the character and alter the perceived gaps between both Didcot and Harwell, and Didcot and West Hagbourne, but that development of the omission site would not have any detrimental impact on the gap between the town and villages to the north. We have already discussed this matter in paragraphs 1.1.50 – 1.1.52 and we also refer to it again later in paragraph 11.2.123. However, in the specific terms of this objection, we conclude from our own observations that if the Didcot West MDA proceeds, adequate physical and perceived gaps would remain between Didcot and these villages to the south and south-west.

11.2.34 Matters of general accessibility from a western MDA compared to a north-

eastern MDA were considered by the Panel and the OCC, as detailed in paragraphs 1.1.20 – 1.1.39, and have changed little since that time. Even without an overbridge from Didcot West to Milton Park (which was a proposal before the Panel), it was demonstrated that there would still be a marginal distance advantage in favour of the SWQ, for trips to Milton Park. We have considered the evidence submitted regarding the distance from both sites to various facilities in the town. Overall, we favour the Councils' arguments that as the majority of these facilities lie beyond the "preferred" walking distance of 1.6km, it is the level of cycling and bus provision which will be most likely to encourage travellers out of their cars. We have already detailed these matters in the introductory section and no new evidence has been put forward to persuade us that there is a balance in favour of the omission site in these regards.

11.2.35 We acknowledge that there is a good, segregated, cycle and pedestrian network within the existing Ladygrove area, but saw that this only really serves the Ladygrove area itself and that there are limited locations where the railway line can be crossed to reach the town centre. Development on the omission site would be able to make use of this existing network, but cyclists and pedestrians would first have to cross the NPR, which the Councils argued is currently seen as a barrier to permeability. Whilst we share this view, to an extent, we consider that suitable at-grade or grade-separated crossing points could be provided if development were to go ahead on the omission site. The objector's proposal to convert some of the existing roundabout junctions on the NPR to traffic signal controlled junctions could provide such crossing points and ease vehicular access to the omission site and we accept that delays to through traffic using the NPR could be minimised by linking the traffic signals in order to provide a "green wave".

11.2.36 The OCC, as Highway Authority, expressed concern that such measures could well be costly to introduce and that they would be likely to reduce the attractiveness of the NPR to through traffic. It considered this a particularly important matter as it intends to upgrade the NPR to a County Major Route of strategic significance, once the link through Ladygrove East has been completed. However, we are not persuaded that delays on this route would be so great as to discourage drivers from using it in favour of taking an alternative route through the town. In any case, we consider that such a scenario could be addressed by traffic management measures. Nevertheless, even though we have taken a different view to the Councils on this matter, we consider that the whole issue of access to the omission site simply represents a "neutral" position. In addition, it was always known that the Didcot West development would have an access onto a busier section of the A4130 than would any north-eastern development and the objector's proposals do not alter this fact.

11.2.37 We acknowledge that recent completion rates will need to be increased in order to produce the required amount of housing during the life of these plans and that having a further development site in the town would provide the scope to improve "deliverability". However, with the availability of the brownfield Vauxhall Barracks site (discussed later), as well as Didcot West and Ladygrove East, we are not persuaded that there is an overriding need to make provision for a further development site in the town at present.

11.2.38 Taking all the above points into account, we consider that there would be no overall benefit in substituting the omission site for the SWQ. In coming to this conclusion, we have not been influenced by the Councils' comments that if we were to recommend that the SWQ be deleted in favour of the omission site, then this

would be highly likely to lead to the need for a modifications inquiry, with inevitable delays for the adoption of the Local Plans and new housing provision. Rather, we have considered the objector's proposal, as with all other matters before us – on its own merits. Having done so, we have concluded that this proposal should not be supported.

Omission sites – Persimmon Homes Wessex Ltd – (issues 'p' & 's')

11.2.39 Persimmon Homes (Wessex) Limited is the developer who was promoting the Milton option for the MDA at the time of the 2011 OSP EIP. Initially, the objector continued to pursue this option through both Local Plans, lodging objections at both stages, which sought to substitute its original objection site for the MDA proposed in both the SOLP and the VWHLP. However, at a late stage in the process, the objector formally indicated that it no longer wished to pursue this case for the substitution of an alternative MDA.

11.2.40 In justifying this change of approach, the objector took the view that pursuing the original objection would place the revised MDA, if recommended for inclusion in the Local Plans following this Joint Inquiry, in conflict with the provisions of the OSP to 2011. In these circumstances, it was said that this would be bound to lead to considerable delay in the adoption of the two Local Plans and that this would simply restrict the rate of housing growth in Didcot. Although the objector has expressed some concerns regarding the landscape impact of the currently proposed MDA and its implications for the protection of BMV land, it is not pursuing these matters as formal objections to the MDA. Indeed, it has confirmed that it is broadly in agreement with the MDA boundaries as shown in the revised deposit plans and is now only seeking minor amendments to the MDA boundary and the disposition of land uses within it.

11.2.41 In terms of the western boundary, we have already noted elsewhere that there are differences between the alignment shown on the SOLP Map 13 and the VWHLP Fig 8.1, largely as a result of the slightly different dwelling densities which the two authorities had chosen. This objector seeks yet another variation of this boundary in the area north of the B4493 (issue 'hh'). In itself, in terms of scale, this does not amount to a significant matter as we recommend that the alignment shown on the VWHLP Fig 8.1 be adopted for both Plans. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that some minor amendments may be necessary as the planning application process proceeds.

11.2.42 Of more importance and concern is the fact that the objector seeks to keep large areas of land within the MDA free from built forms of development. The reasoning behind this is that it is keen to ensure that the MDA proposals should be designed to accommodate and not pre-empt any possible further development westwards, possibly in the post-2011 period, along the lines of the objector's original Milton proposal. However, in our opinion, it is premature to consider such matters at this stage, especially in light of the Report of the 2016 EIP Panel, which recommends only a modest further growth for the town in this period. Notwithstanding this point, we see no reason why the currently proposed MDA would necessarily preclude, or provide a precedent for, a further western expansion of Didcot, and that any such decision is a matter for future plans.

11.2.43 Returning to the particular amendments the objector is seeking, we consider that they would give rise to a number of unacceptable problems. Firstly, a revised masterplan for development within the current MDA, suggested by the

objector but allowing for a later westwards expansion, shows development right up against the MDA boundary in the north-western corner. This would lead to a hard edge to the MDA at this point, which would be intrusive in the landscape. In addition, keeping such a large, central portion of the MDA free from built development would be likely to lead to the creation of two separate housing areas – one to the south of the B4493 and one to the north. In turn, we consider that this would make it more difficult to provide good accessibility to services and facilities within the MDA and would also work against the creation of a comprehensive and integrated development.

11.2.44 For the above reasons, therefore, we do not support the changes sought.

Omission sites – Others - (issues 't', 'u' & 'v')

11.2.45 Arguments that a site at Lime Road, Botley would be a more sustainable location than Didcot West and that further housing allocations should be made there, were not heard in detail at the Joint Inquiry (issues 't' and 'ff'). This matter will be dealt in the main VWHLP report. Nevertheless, it is clear that any major change to the housing allocation would not accord with policy H1 in the OSP.

11.2.46 A further omission site which has been suggested is an 8 acre site just to the west of the proposed MDA boundary, immediately to the south of the B4493, opposite Zulu Farm (issue 'u'). The objectors contend that this additional land should be included within the MDA as it would provide a suitable edge to the proposed development area. It is argued that this would add to the benefit of the whole area, as the existing dwellings on this land are not part of Didcot proper, nor in a convenient grouping. In our opinion, however, these are not compelling arguments in favour of the omission site. Moreover, the Councils have pointed out that sufficient land has been identified in the Didcot West MDA to provide the amount of housing required by the OSP. For these reasons we conclude that no changes should be made to policies DID2 or H7 to address this matter.

11.2.47 We reach similar conclusions regarding the suggestion that land north of Didcot, to the east of Hill Farm, should be allocated for housing (issue 'v').

Recommendations:

Amend Map 13 to show the same MDA boundary as on Fig 8.1 of the VWHLP;

Add a new 5th sentence to paragraph 10.10 (SOLP) and a new 7th sentence to paragraph 8.36 (VWHLP), after the sentences referring to Map 13 or Fig 8.1 respectively, to read:

“It includes a 12ha field in the north-western corner which is to be considered as a reserve allocation, solely for the purpose of accommodating playing fields, if such a facility cannot be located elsewhere within the area.”

**Policy DID2 criterion (i) and paragraph 10.11
[Policy H7 criterion (i) and paragraph 8.41]
Number of dwellings and average net density**

Objections – See list in Appendix A

Issues

- a. The average net housing density of 45 dwellings per hectare is too high. The density would be unacceptable for an urban extension and incompatible with SOLP Policy H8 and with the existing development in west Didcot.
- b. The overall number of dwellings and the number in South Oxfordshire should be changed to reflect Persimmon Homes' omission site proposal. The criterion should refer to the total number in the MDA but should not split it between districts, as this is a matter for the Planning and Development Brief.
- c. It may not be possible to deliver the homes within the plan period because of the level of infrastructure and services that will be needed in advance, and the 500 in the Vale are likely to be one of last phases.
- d. The number of homes allocated should not be increased any further than as set out in policies DID2 and H7, as there will not be sufficient time to deliver any more in the plan period and it would cause unacceptable landscape impacts.
- e. Large developments of high density low-cost housing in Scotland have been social disasters. Smaller developments can be better integrated into cities.
- f. The average net housing density should be reduced from 45dph to 40dph or 37dph to match the density of other urban extensions. The Didcot West allocation should not be increased in size as a result of reducing density but new land allocations made elsewhere in the district.
- g. High density development would obscure the form of the landscape, would result in overlooking, cramped living conditions and poor neighbour relations.
- h. The poor quality housing proposed would have to be demolished after 20 years and it is not worth destroying countryside of high agricultural value for it.
- i. The number of dwellings proposed at Didcot West should be reduced to take account of the likely availability of Vauxhall Barracks as a housing site.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- j. The average net housing density in SOLP DID2(i) should be raised from 38 dph to 40 dph or in VWHLP Policy H7(i) should be lowered to from 40dph to 38dph to ensure that the two plans are compatible.
- k. The increase in land take to accommodate a reduction in housing density would result in the loss of more BMV agricultural land and more coalescence of settlements than was the case when the OCC decided the direction of growth of Didcot on 'finely balanced' arguments. This invalidates the decision to locate the MDA west of Didcot and it should be relocated to the north-east.
- l. The reduction in housing density to 38dph would result in the loss of more BMV agricultural land than was proposed when the strategic decision was made on the direction of growth and reduce the amount of housing in South Oxfordshire below the OSP allocation. Relocate the MDA to the north or east of Didcot.

- m. Decreasing the density in the VWHLP from 45 to 40 dph has resulted in an undesirable increase in the land take from 71 to 80 hectares and an unjustified loss of good agricultural land. If density must be lowered, instead of increasing the land take, reduce the number of dwellings and/or relocate the secondary school to the north or east of Didcot.
- n. The criterion should specify projected occupancy numbers so that levels of car ownership and traffic flows can be predicted.
- o. The proposed extension of the MDA is unnecessary as the same density can be achieved by the inclusion of housing at Vauxhall Barracks and by the allocation of the omission site proposed by Croudace Ltd on the land north of Ladygrove.
- p. Rather than more land take, decrease the density by increasing the proportion of larger dwellings from 50% to 60% or greater, which would be more in keeping with the existing residential area adjacent to the MDA.
- q. The reduction in density is welcomed but 38/40 dph is still too high and is more appropriate to town centres than to suburbs.
- r. Reducing the density does not make the most efficient use of land; return to 45dph as this is achievable given the requirements for 50% small dwellings.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.48 Having moved past the first sentence of policy DID2 [policy H7], it is appropriate briefly to explain our general approach to the structure of this policy, before moving on to consider the detailed objections. The second sentence of the introductory paragraph makes it clear that the criteria, which follow, set out both Councils' assessment of the planning policy framework necessary and appropriate to guide the detailed development of the area. Although this assessment draws on the Councils' expertise in such matters, it cannot be considered as final and unalterable because additional information is almost certain to come to light during the planning application process. Nevertheless, we have taken the general view that if the Councils' initial assessment seems appropriate and reasonable, having regard to the currently available information and evidence, then it should be supported at this Local Plan stage. It is only where strong and convincing evidence has been put forward by objectors, or where we have taken a clear opposing view to the Councils, that we have recommended that the policy or its supporting text should be changed.

11.2.49 By adopting this approach we are mindful of the fact that this would not preclude additional information, which may emerge during the development control process, from serving as material considerations which could allow a decision to be made other than in strict accordance with policy DID2 [policy H7].

11.2.50 We turn then to the issue of housing density for Didcot West, which has generated a number of objections from different perspectives. The figure of 45 dph, proposed in the first deposit versions of both Plans, was subsequently accepted to be too high by both Councils. It was therefore reduced at revised deposit stage to 40 dph in the VWHLP and to 38 dph in the SOLP (issues 'a' and 'f'). However, this change prompted further objections from those who considered that reduced densities would result in an unacceptable increase in the amount of

BMV land required, whereas some objectors contended that the density should revert to 45 dph (issues 'k', 'l', 'm' and 'r'). Others welcomed the reduction in density but still felt that figures of 38 or 40 dph were too high (issue 'q'), whereas others still, contended that if a reduction in density is necessary, it should not result in further land-take, but should be addressed by allocating further development areas either within the town or elsewhere in the district (issue 'o').

11.2.51 In terms of the appropriate housing density for Didcot West, there is a conflict at the present time between the figure of 40 dph proposed in the VWHLP and that of 38 dph in the SOLP (issue 'j'). The VWHDC points out that PPG 3 indicates that in encouraging local planning authorities to make the best use of land, densities of between 30 dph and 50 dph will be appropriate. We have had regard to comments from SODC that because of the long boundary with the existing built-up area of the town and the need to be sensitive to the existing densities in these areas, a figure of 38 dph is appropriate. We have also noted the examples of new urban extensions and other recent housing developments which have been brought to our attention and accept that some are much smaller than Didcot West, whilst others have a different relationship to their respective towns than would be the case here.

11.2.52 In addition, we acknowledge the comment from the Didcot West development consortium, that for sites allocated as urban extensions, where significant infrastructure and community buildings will need to be provided, it could be considered difficult to apply and achieve an average density at the upper end of the PPG targets. However, we are not persuaded that an average density of 40dph across the whole site would, in fact, fit this description. Taken literally, this figure lies mid-way within the 30-50 dph range contained in the guidance. Furthermore, we are mindful of the fact that the Didcot West MDA would comprise a significant area of land and amount to a substantial number of dwellings. Because of this, and in view of the proposed dwelling mix (discussed later in paragraphs 11.2.58 – 11.2.68), we consider that with careful design, it should be perfectly possible to achieve a high quality development with an average density of 40 dph. We shall recommend accordingly.

11.2.53 We have already indicated, in the previous section (paragraphs 11.2.39 – 11.2.44), that we do not support the changes sought by Persimmon Homes (Wessex) Ltd (Objector Nos. 813 (SOLP) & 457 (VWHLP)), aimed at reorganising the proposed land-uses within the Didcot West MDA and amending its western boundary. We therefore cannot support the objectives sought through issue 'b', which are a natural consequence of the objector's main proposal, and which require a revised split of dwelling numbers between the two Districts.

11.2.54 Although we have noted those objections which foresee social problems with high density housing (issues 'e', 'g' & 'h'), government guidance in PPG 3 is clear that high density and high quality can and should go together. Indeed, the guidance indicates, in paragraph 54, that local planning authorities and developers should think imaginatively about designs and layouts which make more efficient use of land without compromising the quality of the environment.

11.2.55 On other matters raised, the Councils have indicated that there are no proposals to increase housing numbers beyond what is set out in the Structure Plan, but nor is there any reason to believe that the 500 dwellings proposed for the VWHDC area will necessarily be the last area of Didcot West to be developed. In any case, it is unclear in what way the policy could be amended to address these

objections (issues 'c' & 'd').

11.2.56 Those objections which suggest that the MDA as a whole should be relocated to the north or north-east of the town have already been dealt with in the introductory section. Similar comments apply to suggestions that the Secondary School should be relocated to the north-east. Matters relating to the omission site proposed by Croudace Ltd have already been discussed in paragraphs 11.2.24 – 11.2.38. Arguments concerning the Vauxhall Barracks site are dealt with under policy DID3.1, in paragraphs 11.3.1 – 11.3.8 (issue 'i').

11.2.57 Finally, issues of dwelling mix, together with matters which will allow levels of car ownership and traffic generation to be estimated (issues 'n' & 'p'), are covered below, under criteria (ii) and (iii).

Recommendation - Change

Replace "84" with "80" and "38" with "40" in criterion (i). [This will make the SOLP version of this criterion the same as that for policy H7 of the VWHLP].

Policy DID2 criterion (ii) and paragraph 10.12 [Policy H7 criterion (ii) and paragraph 8.42] Mix of dwelling types and sizes

Objections – See list in Appendix A

Issues

- a. The mix of dwelling types and sizes proposed for the general market housing has too high a proportion of small dwellings. It would not create a balanced settled community, which is more important than meeting targets. It could damage social cohesion, increase crime, not provide the pupils needed for the secondary school and lead to a high number of vacant and buy-to-let homes.
- b. For the general market housing the requirement for 50% 1/2 bed dwellings is too high and should be amended to 45% to reflect the results of the ORS study.
- c. The specific breakdown on bed size and type is inappropriate detail for incorporating within a Local Plan and should be deleted.
- d. The mix of housing should be kept in line with the Vale's assessment, not changed to reflect SODC's HNS, particularly for 1 bed units where 54% is needed, not 10%.
- e. There should be greater flexibility in the size of the units, with the mix depending on the nature of the development and financial viability.
- f. The type of dwellings constructed adjacent to Slade Road and Park Road should be specified so that they are in keeping with existing properties.
- g. Two-bed houses should be the minimum, frontages should be 8 metres minimum and private gardens are vital.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- h. The proportion of small dwellings is too high and will not lead to a settled community or contribute to community spirit.
- i. The requirement for 1/2 bedroom units should be reduced from 50% to 45%.
- j. The mix of housing is too prescriptive.
- k. The change in the proportion of smaller dwellings is not justified by any change of survey data or demographic need.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.58 Within this section, the objections are predominantly opposed to the proposed dwelling mix, with the general thrust being that there would be too high a proportion of small dwellings. It is contended that such a mix would lead to a variety of social problems and fail to produce a balanced, settled, community (issues 'a', 'h' & 'k').

11.2.59 We have had regard to the Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) undertaken by SODC in 2000 (CD168), its update from 2004 (CD169), and the similar exercise undertaken in the VWHDC area resulting in its Housing Needs Survey (HNS) of 2001. These documents showed the Councils that a significant amount of smaller housing units were required in both districts and this has been addressed in each Council's general housing policies.

11.2.60 Within the VWHLP, policy H15 seeks at least 50% of the open market dwellings to have 2 bedrooms or less on all sites capable of accommodating at least 4 dwellings. SOLP policy H7 seeks a mix of open market dwelling types and sizes to meet the needs of current and future households in the District, with the supporting text making it clear that the Council will seek to ensure at least 45% of such dwellings have 2 bedrooms, unless this would adversely affect the character of the surrounding area. Indeed, this supporting text explains that in order to address the findings of the HNA, the Council will endeavour to ensure that the size of dwellings on all open market sites of two or more units reflects a general mix of 12% 1-bed, 47% 2-bed, 23% 3-bed and 18% 4-bed or larger. Our comments and recommendations on this general mix, to be applied throughout the District, are contained in the main report on the SOLP. In summary, we accept that the required dwelling mix is necessary and appropriate in principle.

11.2.61 However, we share the Councils' view that if this sort of mix were to be applied over a site of the size of Didcot West, it would result in a very large number of small dwellings and could make it more difficult for a reasonably balanced community to be achieved. But, we do consider that a mix of 50% small dwellings (with 1 or 2 bedrooms) and 50% larger dwellings (with 3 or 4+ bedrooms) would be acceptable, as it would create a balance between the dwelling types. As a result, we consider that such a development should provide ample opportunity for people to move from smaller to larger dwellings within the overall MDA, or from larger to smaller dwellings in certain circumstances.

11.2.62 Moreover, evidence from the Councils that there is a preponderance of larger dwellings in the existing built-up area immediately adjacent to the MDA was not disputed. We share the Councils' view that this would provide further opportunities for residents of the MDA to move to larger properties in the local

area, if and when the need arises.

11.2.63 For these reasons, and in view of the findings of the HNA and HNS, we generally agree that the mix of about 10% 1-bed, 40% 2-bed, 30% 3-bed and 20% 4-bed, listed in the supporting text, is appropriate. We do, however, consider that this list should be amended slightly so that this last figure refers to properties with 4 bedrooms or more. Such a requirement in the lower case text and not in the policy itself would, we believe, offer a certain amount of flexibility to address such matters as viability, as the development progresses (issue 'e').

11.2.64 We have considered the objections which maintain that the figure for 1 and 2-bed dwellings should be reduced to 45%, but consider that this would fail to reflect the identified local needs (issues 'b' & 'i').

11.2.65 With regard to those objections which consider that matters of housing mix are too detailed for inclusion in Local Plans (issues 'c' & 'j'), we endorse the Councils' views that PPG 3 specifically allows for such measures. Paragraph 11 of this guidance makes it clear that local authorities should take account of assessments of local housing need in determining the type and size of additional housing for which they should plan. It also explains that they should assess the composition of current and future households in their area and formulate plans which, amongst other matters, secure an appropriate mix of dwelling size, type, and affordability, in the light of the likely assessed need and encourage the provision of housing to meet the needs of specific groups.

11.2.66 We have some sympathy with those objectors who contend that the mix of housing should be in line with the Vale's assessment of housing need, particularly with respect to 1 bed accommodation for which it appears a much greater amount is needed in the Vale than in the SODC area (issue 'd'). However, in practical terms it must make sense to require an overall housing mix for the whole development, which closely reflects the needs in South Oxfordshire, in view of the far greater proportion of the MDA, in terms of dwelling numbers, which will lie within this latter District.

11.2.67 No firm evidence was presented to indicate that the presence of a fairly high proportion of small dwellings would lead to the type of social problems that objectors fear (issue 'a'). Matters relating to the type of dwelling to be located alongside the existing dwellings and the size of frontages and gardens are, in our opinion, too detailed to be specified within a Local Plan (issues 'f' & 'g'). They are more appropriately dealt with as part of the planning application process. We accept that the proposed dwelling mix and the need to respect the existing adjacent dwellings may well test the skill of those responsible for designing the layout of the MDA. But, we see no good reason why a balanced, attractive, and successful development should not be achieved, if PPG 3 guidelines on designing for quality are followed.

11.2.68 We consider that, as the catchment for the new Secondary School would extend beyond the Didcot West MDA, there should be no specific requirement to locate a high proportion of family dwellings close to it. Finally, no evidence has been submitted to substantiate the claims that the proposed dwelling mix would lead to a high number of vacant and buy to let properties. On this latter point, we share the Councils' view that such tenures are unlikely to be provided unless there is a demand. If so, they would clearly be serving a useful function (issue 'a').

Recommendation - Change

Add "and larger" at the end of the second sentence of para 10.12 [paragraph 8.42].

**Policy DID2 criterion (iii) and paragraph 10.12
[Policy H7 criterion (iii) and paragraph 8.42]
Affordable housing**

Objections – See list in Appendix A

Issues

- a. The requirement for 40% of the dwellings to be affordable is an unacceptably high percentage which will not deliver a mixed and balanced community.
- b. The requirement for affordable housing should be increased to 50%.
- c. Sheltered housing for the elderly, the disabled and those with learning difficulties should also be provided for in the policy.
- d. Flexibility should be introduced so that Didcot West developers finance affordable housing in other parts of the district.
- e. Affordable housing should be provided to the north-west of Wantage Road.
- f. A requirement for 54% 1 bedroom units is unsustainable.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- g. The amount of affordable housing should not be diluted.
- h. Supplementary planning guidance should be produced jointly with the Vale.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.69 The majority of the objections to this part of the policy contend that the requirement for 40% of the dwellings in Didcot West to be affordable represents an unacceptably high percentage which will not deliver a mixed and balanced community (issue 'a'). However, there are others who contend that the figure is too low and should be increased to 50%, which is the figure contained in the VWHLP policy H16 (issue 'b'). Others still make the general comment that the amount of affordable housing should not be diluted (issue 'g').

11.2.70 We acknowledge that the size of the Didcot West MDA means that a significant proportion of the new housing should be required to be affordable and share the Councils' view that this is an inevitable consequence of the housing strategy contained within the OSP. We consider that the Councils are right to seek a relatively high percentage of affordable housing on a large site such as this, because of the difficulties of under provision which can often arise on smaller sites, either because of "rounding-down" factors, or economic viability. It is important, however, to ensure that the percentage of affordable housing is not so great as to prejudice the creation of genuinely mixed and balanced communities. In view of the fact that some 50% of the open market housing will be of 2 bedrooms or less,

and as a significant proportion of the affordable housing is also likely to constitute smaller dwellings, we consider that the figure of 40% is the maximum amount of affordable housing that should reasonably be accommodated on this site.

11.2.71 In coming to this view we have been mindful of the fact that if the percentage of affordable housing were to be reduced, on a site of this size, then it could be very difficult for the shortfall, shown to be necessary by the various housing needs surveys, to be compensated for elsewhere. We do not consider, however, that it would be appropriate to indicate specific areas where the affordable housing should be located (issue 'e'). This would unacceptably fetter the design and layout of the MDA, which should more properly be determined through the development control process.

11.2.72 We have noted the objection which seeks to introduce flexibility to the policy to allow the Didcot West developers to finance off-site provision of affordable housing elsewhere in the District (issue 'd'). However, we would expect there to be limited scope for this and do not therefore recommend any changes to the policy in this regard. Whether it happens or not in practice should be a matter for negotiation as an exception to policy H9 (SOLP) on a case by case basis.

11.2.73 The Councils have commented that the mix of dwelling sizes in the affordable housing sector is likely to change over the plan period to 2011 and that it would therefore be inappropriate to set out detailed requirements for affordable housing. Rather, it is the Councils' intention to prepare Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), which can more readily be changed, to address this matter. This is outlined in the amended text introduced into paragraph 10.12 [paragraph 8.42] at revised deposit stage (issue 'h'). We consider that this is a sensible move, which we support.

11.2.74 Although the first deposit versions of these plans indicated the current needs for different sized affordable dwelling units in the supporting text, these references were removed at revised deposit stage. This addresses issue 'f', which contended that a requirement for 54% 1 bedroom units would be unsustainable. The Councils have now indicated that the mix of affordable housing sizes will reflect assessed needs and will be determined through the development control process. We agree that this would be appropriate.

11.2.75 Finally, we share the Councils' view that the service providers will be able to provide special needs housing within the overall figures proposed but that specific reference to groups such as the elderly, the disabled and those with learning difficulties is not necessary within this policy. In current circumstances, the same conclusion must apply in respect of key workers.

Recommendation – No Change

Policy DID2 criterion (iv) and paragraphs 10.13 to 10.19 [Policy H7 criterion (iv) and paragraphs 8.43 to 8.49] The District Centre

Objections – See list in Appendix A

Issues

- a. There is no need for a District Centre which would encourage car use and congestion and should not be built in the countryside.
-

- b. The locations of the District Centre and schools are inappropriate.
- c. The secondary school should be located at Ladygrove.
- d. Provision should be made for a community police facility either within the proposed community centre or as a separate facility.
- e. The sports provision and contributions should be based on a robust assessment of local need.
- f. The secondary school should occupy a campus setting given the need for playing fields and other potentially expansive facilities with a dual use.
- g. A primary health care practice should not be located in the District Centre.
- h. Within the Didcot West MDA an additional 4.8 hectares should be allocated for healthcare developments, to provide more than primary health care facilities.
- i. The local shops and retail services proposed are unlikely to be commercially viable but should not be located where they will undermine local shops nearby.
- j. The proposed shops and retail services will undermine the vitality and viability of the town centre.
- k. There should be no limitation on the size of shops and retail services in the District Centre or of the services provided.
- l. The size threshold for the small supermarket should be increased to "about 600 sq metres."
- m. No buildings in the District Centre should be more than two/three storeys.
- n. Rather than over-provide local shops at the start and result in the area looking run down, reasonable provision should be made with later expansion.
- o. Paragraph 8.43 should refer to 3 new neighbourhoods, each the catchment of a primary school, with the central neighbourhood focused on the District Centre.
- p. Family dwellings as well as smaller dwellings should be located along the main movement corridors, to allow children and parents the best possible access to public transport facilities.
- q. The need for a secondary school, a primary school, a community centre, an indoor sports hall, primary care premises, and local shopping facilities may not be justified.
- r. There is no guarantee that the services and facilities will be provided at all or when required.

- s. There should be further provision of public services and amenities such as multi-storey car parks, police and emergency services.
- t. There is no evidence that live/work units are required but some provision should be made for people who want to work at home but not run a retail unit.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- u. The location of the District Centre and other facilities should not be deleted from the Didcot Inset Proposals Map because it is essential that the public can assess the sustainability and viability of their location.
- v. The District Centre should be re-named the Neighbourhood Centre.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.76 Paragraph 10.13 [paragraph 8.43] now makes it clear that there will be three new neighbourhoods in the MDA, with the District Centre being the focal point of the central neighbourhood, as well as of the development as a whole (issue 'o'). The District Centre is listed as needing to contain a number of facilities, such as local shops and retail services, including a small supermarket (about 500sqm) and further small unit premises (about 1,200sqm in total). With regard to the objection which seeks to have the District Centre renamed as a neighbourhood centre (issue 'v'), the objector accepts that it is appropriate to place a limit on the amount of retail provision at the District Centre, but maintains that because of this, it is inconsistent to refer to the centres in terms which may imply that they are larger than they actually are, or need to be.

11.2.77 The objector considers that it would fall between a district centre and a local centre in terms of size and provision. It seems to us, however, that even though the supermarket would be well below the 2,500sqm maximum size referred to in PPG 6, the size of centre proposed would quite happily accord with PPG 6's district centre definition. We therefore recommend no change to the wording of this part of policy DID2(iv) [policy H7(iv)], or to the reference to the district centre in the supporting text, at paragraph 10.13 [paragraph 8.43] and elsewhere.

11.2.78 Moving briefly to the next lower tier of centre, this same objector contends that it would be more appropriate and consistent with PPG 6 to refer to them as local centres, rather than neighbourhood centres, as they are called in policy DID2(v) [policy H7(v)]. However, although we can see some merit in this, it remains the case that there is no requirement for the terminology used in PPG 6 to be strictly followed. In these circumstances, we consider that it would be unduly prescriptive to recommend a re-wording from neighbourhood centre to local centre. In any case, as the Councils have referred to the separate areas within the proposed MDA as neighbourhoods, the use of the term 'neighbourhood centre' is both understandable and consistent.

11.2.79 With regard to issue 'a', it is of course the case that any MDA at Didcot has to be built on what is currently countryside. It therefore follows that any district centre within such a MDA will also have to be built within the countryside. Although PPG 3 seeks to encourage the use of previously developed land before greenfield sites, the fact that some need to be developed is a matter which has already been decided is appropriate and necessary, during the OSP process. This matter has been discussed at length in the introductory section to this report and

we do not repeat our comments and conclusions here.

11.2.80 It is necessary to ensure that residents in the new MDA have facilities close to hand – preferably within walking or cycling distance - so that journey lengths can be kept to a minimum and residents have the opportunity to use the more sustainable forms of transport. In this way, unnecessary car journeys can be reduced. We recommend no change to the policy as a result of these objections.

11.2.81 With regard to issue 'b', a diagrammatic location for the District Centre was shown in the first deposit plans, but not for a Secondary School. It is likely, therefore, that the objectors are referring to details submitted as part of the planning applications. Notwithstanding these points, the Councils have taken the view, at revised deposit stage, that it is unnecessary to show the detailed disposition of facilities within the MDA. We agree, as it would be wasteful of both time and resources to investigate and seek to resolve such matters of detail at this stage. We understand and appreciate the concerns of objectors that Map 13 [Fig 8.1], as currently proposed, provides virtually no detailed information on which to assess the specific implications of the Didcot West MDA (issue 'u'). Nevertheless, this is an appropriate approach for a Local Plan, which is primarily concerned with establishing the framework within which more detailed planning decisions can be made through the development control process. Accordingly, we recommend no change to either plan in this regard.

11.2.82 In terms of the education provision (issues 'c' and 'f'), suggestions that the Secondary School should be located at Ladygrove, in the north-east of the town, have already been addressed in paragraphs 1.1.74 – 1.1.80. Moreover, the Councils are opposed to the suggestion that the Secondary School should occupy a campus setting, arguing that these large buildings should, instead, occupy key positions in the streetscape. We understand the reasoning behind this and do not think that the absence of a campus setting would prevent the dual use of playing fields and other facilities, which appears to be the thrust of the objector's concerns. We therefore see no need to recommend changes to paragraph 10.14.

11.2.83 Conflicting views have been expressed on the subject of healthcare provision (issues 'g' and 'h'). However, paragraph 10.19 [paragraph 8.49] explains that the requirement for the provision of primary healthcare facilities in the District Centre has been based on advice received from the Primary Care Trust. This fact, coupled with the unchallenged views of the Councils that the existing practices in the vicinity of Didcot West are operating at capacity and have no plans to extend their services, leads us to conclude that no changes should be made to policy DID2 [policy H7] or its supporting text to address this matter. This view is reinforced by the fact that a major review of healthcare facilities in Oxfordshire is currently in progress. We share the Councils' views that, in these circumstances, it is not yet clear what facilities will eventually be needed in the Didcot area and so it would be inappropriate to make specific provision in the plans.

11.2.84 With regard to retail facilities (issues 'i', 'j', 'k', 'l', and 'n'), again there is a conflict of views, with some objectors arguing for more provision, whilst others for less. Paragraph 10.17 [paragraph 8.47] sets out the Councils' strategy for retail provision at Didcot West. In essence, this seeks to cater for residents' day-to-day needs for convenience goods and services, whilst not undermining the vitality and viability of Didcot town centre. This seems to us to be a perfectly acceptable, appropriate, and sustainable objective, which will assist in minimising trip lengths and reducing trips on the rest of the road network.

11.2.85 There is no firm evidence before us to support the view that the size threshold for the small supermarket should be increased to 600sqm, so we see no reason to recommend a change to the figure of 500sqm proposed by the Councils. The phasing of provision of local shops is a matter best decided through the detailed development control process. Similarly, the long-term viability of such shops cannot be gauged at this stage. Market forces will have a big say in such matters, but the Councils have pointed to the success of the District Centre in the Ladygrove area and there is no reason to suppose that a well planned retail element would not also be successful at Didcot West.

11.2.86 In terms of building size and mix, we share the Councils' views that to emphasise the function and status of the District Centre, it would be appropriate for it to have taller buildings and a higher density than some other parts of the MDA. We agree, however, that a maximum height of three storeys is likely to be appropriate in this area, with particular care and attention needing to be paid to ensure that taller buildings are satisfactorily located within the local topography and do not sit uncomfortably alongside existing or proposed buildings (issue 'm'). But, again, this is a matter which can best be assessed in detail through the planning application process, within the general guidelines set out in policy DID2 [policy H7].

11.2.87 Paragraph 10.13 [paragraph 8.43] refers to the fact that the main movement corridors should be the preferred locations for higher density development, containing large numbers of small dwellings. This has prompted an objection to the effect that family dwellings should also be located along such corridors to allow children and parents the best possible access to public transport facilities (issue 'p'). Although we appreciate these concerns, the Councils have pointed out that these paragraphs do not preclude family dwellings from these locations. Whilst this is true, due care and attention will be necessary throughout the design of the whole MDA to ensure that good access to public transport is available for as many homes as possible. We consider that this should be emphasised more than is currently the case, and that this could best be addressed by minor amendments to policy DID2(xi) [policy H7(xi)] and supporting paragraph 10.21 [paragraph 8.51], dealt with below. We recommend accordingly in the section dealing with criterion (xi) below.

11.2.88 We understand that there were problems with the timetabling of the provision of services and facilities for the existing Ladygrove development and because of this sympathise with the concerns that services and facilities at Didcot West may not be provided when needed – if at all (issue 'r'). This matter has, however, been acknowledged by the Councils, and is addressed by policy DID1 and paragraph 10.6(xii) [Appendix 5(xii)], which specifically require the Planning and Development Brief to identify at what stage in the development programme each element of the agreed facilities and services will be provided and by whom. No changes are therefore needed to this part of policy DID2 [policy H7] or its supporting text.

11.2.89 In general terms, some objectors have questioned the need for the facilities listed in this part of the policy, whereas others suggest that further facilities will be required (issues 'q' and 's'). The Councils have, however, re-assessed the need for the listed facilities and still consider them to be valid. No firm evidence has been submitted to cause us to take a different view. With regard to other facilities, such as for the Police and other emergency services, these are not precluded by the policy (issue 'd'). But in the absence of any firm justification,

we do not consider it appropriate to suggest any amendments to the policies in this regard. With regard to issue 'e', which arises as a result of an objection contending that the sports provision should be based on a robust assessment of local need, we consider that the framework set out in this part of the policy is satisfactory. Further detailed work will, of course, be necessary to establish precise needs, but, in our view, this is a matter best addressed as part of the consideration of the Didcot West planning applications.

11.2.90 It has been suggested that live/work units should be available, if necessary, for those who want to work from home, but who do not want to run a retail unit (issue 't'). Paragraph 10.18 [paragraph 8.48] does not relate specifically to live/work units in the District Centres or Neighbourhood Centres having to be related to retail uses and we see no reason why appropriate non-retail uses could not be successful in such areas. But, in any case, the Councils have stated that office space could also be provided within dwellings outside the District Centre and Neighbourhood Centres, if there proved to be a demand for it.

Recommendation – No Change

**Policy DID2 criterion (v) and paragraphs 10.13 to 10.19
[Policy H7 criterion (v) and paragraphs 8.43 to 8.49]
Neighbourhood centres**

Objections – See list in Appendix A

Issues

- a. The neighbourhood centres are not needed and are unacceptable in principle.
- b. Relocate the housing elsewhere so that neighbourhood centres are not required.
- c. The list of facilities and land uses proposed for the neighbourhood centres is not sufficiently comprehensive.
- d. There may not be a need for all of the primary schools, community centres and shopping facilities.
- e. Additional primary schools are not required.
- f. The local shops and retail services in neighbourhood centres are unlikely to be commercially viable.
- g. Local shops and retail services in neighbourhood centres would undermine the viability of existing local shops in west Didcot.
- h. There is no guarantee that these services will be constructed when required or at all.
- i. The future residents will want family restaurants, pubs, nightclubs and areas for outdoor concerts not community centres and schools.
- j. Pubs, nightclubs and takeaways are not needed.

- k. The proposed uses would create a massive increase in traffic on local roads.
- l. There will be insufficient facilities to justify three centres.
- m. The northern primary school is too close to Stephen Freeman Primary School.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- n. The location of the neighbourhood centres should not be deleted from the Didcot Inset Proposals Map because it is essential that the public can assess the sustainability and viability of their location.
- o. The neighbourhood centres should be re-named 'local centres'.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.91 We deal first with issue 'b', which relates to an objection which seeks to relocate the MDA elsewhere. This is a matter of principle, relating to the direction of growth for the town. As such, we have already dealt extensively with this matter in the introductory section to this report.

11.2.92 Similarly, issue 'o', which seeks the re-naming of neighbourhood centres as 'local centres', has already been dealt with in the previous section (paragraph 11.2.78). We do not support this request.

11.2.93 Another group of objections, which it is appropriate to deal with at this stage, are those opposed to the deletion of the diagrammatic locations of the neighbourhood centres from Map 13 [Fig 8.1] in the revised deposit version of the plans (issue 'n'). The general thrust is that the suggested location of such centres should be shown, so that the public can assess their sustainability and viability. However, it is important that the neighbourhood centres contain local facilities, as we discuss below, but the optimal locations for such facilities cannot be determined in isolation. Rather, they have to relate well to the location and disposition of homes, open spaces, and other features within the neighbourhoods. It is clear, therefore, that this is a matter which can only sensibly be undertaken through the detailed layout and design process for the MDA.

11.2.94 We do appreciate that many local residents feel that they can have less influence at the detailed planning application stage than they can at the more general forum presented by a Local Plan inquiry. Nevertheless, for the reasons already given, it is our view that it is not appropriate to unnecessarily constrain the design and layout of the MDA at this stage. Concerns that the locations chosen for the centres may prove to be unsustainable should be unfounded, as other policies within the plans, which deal specifically with such matters, are also relevant to development proposals such as this.

11.2.95 As with other sections of this policy, objectors have expressed a number of conflicting views, covering such matters as the need for the neighbourhood centres (issues 'a', 'd' and 'l'); the facilities they should or shouldn't provide (issues 'c', 'e', 'f', 'i' and 'j'); the likely effect on existing local shops in west Didcot (issue 'g'); and the traffic impact likely to be caused (issue 'k').

11.2.96 Dealing first with the need for neighbourhood centres, we consider that in a development of this size it will be essential for some services and facilities to be provided close to homes, in a way which would not be possible if they were all

concentrated within the District Centre. As well as helping to limit the number and length of trips, such centres would also provide the opportunity to foster a better and more intimate community spirit than would be the case if only a single District Centre were to be provided. Moreover, it is our view that as any new shops and facilities would primarily serve the new population, it is unlikely that they would have a significant impact on existing shops in west Didcot, which are likely to already have established catchments and possibly a certain amount of loyalty from existing customers.

11.2.97 The Councils have indicated that the facilities and services listed within this part of the policy have been assessed, at this preliminary stage, as being necessary for provision at each of the neighbourhood centres. They have commented, however, that this list will be reviewed at the planning application stage, with the implication that if any prove to be unnecessary, they will not have to be provided. On the other hand, if a need for facilities which are not currently listed can be identified, then these should also be considered. We conclude that in these circumstances, the current wording of the policy is acceptable and would not prevent material considerations from influencing the development control process.

11.2.98 All parties agreed that there would be a demand for religious and uniformed uses in the centres and the Councils indicated that there is a strong likelihood that there would also be a demand from secular and non-uniformed uses. However, several objections question whether all the listed facilities would be required at each of the centres (issues 'q' & 'r'), with a particular case in point being those lodged by the GWP Consortium (Objector Nos. 815 (SOLP) & 303 (VWHLP)). This objector does not dispute the need to provide three district/local centres in total, but considers that only a total of two community centres are required – one in the district centre and one in one of the two local centres. As a result, the objector seeks the addition of the phrase '(at one location only)', at the end of item (b) in criterion (v).

11.2.99 The Councils oppose this suggestion contending largely on accessibility grounds and the desire to create a sense of community that there should be a community centre in each of the local and district centres. They did not, however, submit any persuasive evidence to demonstrate a need for this level of provision. On the other hand, the objector submitted evidence of the level of community facility provision at two recent developments – one of some 3,000 new dwellings in Aylesbury and the other of about 3,200 new homes in South Cambridgeshire. We understand that a single, designated, community building is proposed for each of these developments, albeit there would also be some dual use of facilities with a secondary school and additional meeting room space would be available within other buildings. On this basis, the objector maintained that the most appropriate form of provision at Didcot West would be a main community centre in the district centre of some 750-800sqm and a smaller facility of about 200-250sqm in one of the local centres.

11.2.100 Notwithstanding this evidence, there was an acceptance by all parties that further work is necessary to establish more clearly the appropriate level of provision. Furthermore, the objector accepted that if a need for three community centres could be identified then it would be important to provide the necessary facilities to support this need. In this regard, we have noted that in the work currently undertaken by the development consortium, reserve areas of a significant size are proposed in each of the three centres to allow for future expansion and/or additional community facilities.

11.2.101 It seems to us that the resolution of such matters can only, realistically, be achieved through detailed negotiations as part of the development control process. However, because of the importance of creating a strong community spirit in new housing areas, we favour the presumption that all facilities are needed in each centre, unless the evidence clearly indicates otherwise. Adopting the objector's change would, in our opinion, give the wrong emphasis to this part of the policy. Moreover, the same argument could be used for each of the listed facilities and as a result the policy could easily get unnecessarily cumbersome. We accept that there is a need for all parties to be flexible in this regard and to be guided by the evidence, but we consider that the policy already provides for this by using the phrase "the Council proposes that the development of the site will include:" to introduce the various criteria of policy DID2 [policy H7]. Whilst clearly setting out the Councils' aspirations, such wording does not, in our view, prevent individual factors being assessed on their own merits. We therefore do not recommend any changes to the policy to address this objection.

11.2.102 With regard to the objections relating to educational facilities (issues 'e' and 'm'), the Councils have commented that the Education Authority does not favour expanding the existing primary schools. Instead, the provision of new schools is seen as a way of assisting with the integration of the new and existing housing areas, by drawing pupils from both communities. The existing Stephen Freeman Primary School abuts the MDA and care will be needed to ensure that any new primary school in this northern part of the MDA is appropriately sited. However, we see no reason why this matter cannot be addressed adequately through the planning application process. It is not a matter that requires any specific amendments to policy DID2 [policy H7].

11.2.103 We appreciate the concerns that new shops in the neighbourhood centres would not be commercially viable, but the Councils are alert to this prospect and have indicated that the level of provision would not be excessive. In our opinion, it would certainly be desirable for some commercial premises to be provided in these centres for the sustainability and community creation reasons already given. But, as the Councils have stated, if a shop unit failed to find an operator after a reasonable period of time, then the owner would be able to seek an appropriate change of use. At this early stage in the process we consider that no changes are necessary to this part of the policy.

11.2.104 We have had regard to the references to the need, or otherwise, for such facilities as family restaurants, pubs, nightclubs, takeaways and areas for outdoor concerts. In this regard the Councils have specifically commented that "bad neighbour" uses are not proposed within the neighbourhood centres. Nevertheless, it seems to us that some facilities, such as pubs and takeaways, could be perfectly appropriate within such centres. In addition to providing focal points for the neighbourhoods, they would also offer local facilities which could reduce the need for residents to travel to similar outlets in the town centre or elsewhere within the town. However, we consider that the safeguards offered by other general development control policies, such as policies D1, EP1 and EP2 (SOLP) or policy DC9 (VWHLP), would be sufficient to protect the amenities of neighbouring uses.

11.2.105 Concerns about guarantees that the services and facilities would be provided when required, or even at all, have already been addressed in paragraph 11.2.88 above (issue 'h')

11.2.106 Finally, we have noted that the Highway Authority has raised no objections to what the Councils describe as the relatively small-scale development proposed in the neighbourhood centres. We take a similar view as the provision of such services, at a local level, is likely to assist in reducing car trips both within the MDA itself, and on the existing highway network.

Recommendation – No change

Policy DID2 criterion (vi) and paragraph 10.20
[Policy H7 criterion (vi) and paragraph 8.50]
Public urban spaces

Objections

89/13141	Mrs K Cheswick	IG
667/13374	Ms D Davies	OR
813/13392	Persimmon Homes (Wessex) Limited	WR
VW/0457/13f	Persimmon Homes (Wessex) Limited	OR

Issues

- a. The quantity of land required for public urban spaces should be modified to conform with omission site proposals for major development areas.
- b. There is no guarantee that the facilities would be provided or that they will be provided when required to meet the needs of new residents.
- c. Public urban spaces should not be constructed in the countryside.
- d. Small dwellings should not be built without private gardens.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.107 Issue 'a' arises from the objections by Persimmon Homes (Wessex) Limited that have already been discussed in paragraphs 11.2.39 – 11.2.44 above.

11.2.108 Issue 'b' has already been dealt with in paragraph 11.2.88 and we recommend no change to the policy in this regard.

11.2.109 Issue 'c' has also already been addressed, as the public urban spaces which are to be provided through this policy clearly form part of the overall MDA. Although the land involved is currently countryside, the strategic decision that this area should provide the next stage of the town's expansion has already been made and, as stated earlier, we see no good reason to recommend to the contrary.

11.2.110 With regard to issue 'd', the Councils have explained that the gardens which are to be provided in the public urban spaces are not intended to be substitutes for private garden areas serving individual dwellings with ground floor access. However, in order to meet the density and housing mix requirements of policy DID2 [policy H7], it is likely that a number of smaller dwellings will be provided in the form of flats or maisonettes. Not all of these will necessarily be able to have their own private garden areas, but not all residents want private gardens and we do not see this as a negative reflection on the design of the MDA. Indeed, provided there is a good mix of dwelling types overall, we consider the

provision of some flatted development as a likely and necessary consequence of the higher density requirements of PPG 3.

Recommendation – No change

**Policy DID2 criterion (vii) and paragraph 10.20
[Policy H7 criterion (vii) and paragraph 8.50]
Public greenspaces**

Objections – See list in Appendix A

Issues

- a. The existing greenspace/ farmland should be left undisturbed.
- b. The quantity of greenspace should be modified to conform with an appropriate disposition of land uses other than dictated by the administrative boundary.
- c. Adequate provision should be made for private gardens for recreation.
- d. There is no guarantee that the greenspace will be provided or that the space on the western boundary would be implemented first.
- e. There are no proposals for implementing the ecology strategy.
- f. The network of public greenspaces should not all be provided adjacent to the western and southern edges of the built up area.
- g. The outer edges of the development should be green spaces.
- h. The open space should be integrated in the development; adjacent to homes.
- i. Public greenspace should be provided adjacent to existing homes on the edge of Didcot and along Wantage Road.
- j. There should be a policy requirement for the developer to provide private garden extensions adjacent to properties on the western edge of Didcot.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- k. The area of public greenspace should not be increased.
- l. Requiring commuted sum payments to cover the costs of maintaining the open spaces and other facilities for 25 years is unduly onerous, unrealistic and not consistent with the advice in Government Circular 1/97.
- m. The greenspace should be located in pockets throughout the built-up area so that it is easily accessible to all residents rather than being concentrated around the western and southern edges.
- n. The additional sentence in criterion (vii) should be deleted as this is a matter for a planning and development brief.

- o. The location of the greenspace on the outer edge of the MDA would limit accessibility, particularly if that at Vauxhall Barracks is lost, contradict the South Oxfordshire Design Guide and cause management problems.
- p. The greenspace should not be between the development and nearby villages.
- q. Extending the site to the south-west will harm Harwell and West Hagbourne.
- r. The countryside should not be replaced by urban landscaping.
- s. The existing public footpaths should be retained as greenspace corridors.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.111 Issue 'a' relates to the principle of the direction of growth and has already been discussed above.

11.2.112 With regard to issue 'b', the Councils have commented that the disposition of land uses in the MDA will not be dictated by the administrative boundaries and the evidence before us supports this view. There is therefore no need to modify the quantity of greenspace for this reason. Other objectors have, however, protested about the increase from 62ha to 74ha in the revised deposit plans. The Councils have accepted that this increase cannot be justified (see issue 'k') and for the reasons given below we agree and recommend accordingly.

11.2.113 Although this part of policy DID2 [policy H7] is dealing with the provision of public greenspaces, many objectors have used this criterion as an opportunity to seek the adequate provision of private gardens for recreation (issue 'c'). In our view this is more a matter of dwelling mix and detailed layout, to be dealt with through the planning applications, and not something which needs to be addressed through this policy. In any case, we have already noted in paragraph 11.2.110 above that the MDA is likely to include a number of dwellings in the form of flats or maisonettes, for which private garden areas may not be provided. Public greenspaces would not be an alternative to the provision of private gardens, but would be able to cater for a wide range of activities for the new population. We do not propose any changes to the policy to address this matter.

11.2.114 A number of objections relate to the detailed location and disposition of the public greenspaces, whilst others question whether the greenspace will actually be provided and, if so, in what order it would be implemented (issues 'd', 'f', 'g', 'h', 'm' & 'o'). Map 13 [Fig 8.1] in the first deposit versions showed that public greenspace would be concentrated around the outer edges of the MDA, with some relatively thin corridors linking these peripheral green areas to the western edge of the existing built-up area. However, the Councils felt that this level of detail would unreasonably constrain the preparation of a Masterplan and should more appropriately be considered in the preparation of the Planning and Development Brief. They also considered that there would be benefit in providing wider corridors and wedges of greenspace between the existing built-up area and the outer edge of the site. These would enhance routes and wildlife corridors between the existing town and the countryside and would also ensure that all new homes had good access to greenspace.

11.2.115 We consider that there is clear merit in these points. Within a large development area, the availability of public greenspace close to new dwellings

should assist in creating a pleasant living environment. In addition, the introduction of wider corridors and green wedges penetrating the MDA could well provide the opportunity for a number of the existing formal and informal footpaths to be retained (issue 's'). Moreover, the provision of peripheral planting and landscaping is, in our view, of particular importance as it would help to soften the edge of the MDA and shield the new development, thereby reducing any impact within the landscape. Because of this we endorse the introduction of the final sentence of criterion (vii), at revised deposit stage, which deals specifically with the need for this peripheral greenspace. Although we have noted an objector's comment that such matters should be left for the professional assessment in the Planning and Development Brief, we share the Councils' view that it is a matter of sufficient importance to be specified, in general terms, within the policy (issue 'n').

11.2.116 Concerns about the timing and provision of the public greenspaces would be addressed by the need for a Management Strategy to be prepared, under the provisions of policy DID1 and its supporting text [Appendix 5].

11.2.117 It is understandable that those Didcot residents who currently live alongside the town's western edge, many of whom look out onto open fields, are concerned about the effect that this major development will have on their living environment. In these circumstances, it is no surprise that many are seeking to distance themselves, physically, from the new development, by requesting that public greenspace should be provided adjacent to these existing homes (issue 'i'). Alternatively, a significant number of objectors seek the introduction of a policy which would require the developer to provide greenspace in the form of private garden extensions for those existing dwellings which back onto the MDA (issue 'j').

11.2.118 However, in view of the reasonable desire of the Councils to ensure that the new development is integrated with the existing town, we do not consider that extensive green areas immediately alongside the rear of these existing dwellings would be either appropriate or necessary. We acknowledge that the outlook from many of the existing dwellings will change, but we saw at our site inspections that the majority of these dwellings have reasonably sized rear garden areas. Consequently, we are satisfied that the application of normal development control standards would be able to provide adequate and satisfactory living conditions for both existing and future residents in this respect.

11.2.119 Issue 'k' relates primarily to the increased provision of public greenspace, proposed in the revised deposit plans (74ha compared to 62ha in the first deposit plans). The Councils explained that this increase relates to a flat area of some 12ha in the north-western corner of the MDA and had been included principally to allow for the provision of playing fields on flat land at a time when it appeared that such a facility could not be provided satisfactorily elsewhere. However, the latest Masterplan for the Didcot West MDA indicates that playing fields can be accommodated at other locations within the overall site. On this basis the proposed development consortium maintains that there is no need to include this additional area of land.

11.2.120 Notwithstanding the latest Masterplan, the Councils pointed out that the playing field locations shown in the revised Masterplan have not yet been shown to be adequate and acceptable. Moreover, we have already concluded that on a greenfield site such as this, particularly with a requirement for a relatively high proportion of small dwellings, there is no good reason why an overall density of 40 dph should not be achieved. Our recommendation on this matter is therefore likely

to lead to a somewhat revised layout for the MDA as a whole and in these circumstances it seems sensible to retain the flexibility offered by this north-western area.

11.2.121 Nevertheless, the Councils' officers accepted at the Joint Inquiry that no more than 62ha are required for public greenspace and they therefore proposed that line 1 of policy DID2(vii) [policy H7(vii)], should revert to this figure. We accept this proposal and make the appropriate recommendation below. The Councils also accepted that if this additional 12ha is not required for playing field purposes then it should not be developed but remain in agricultural use. To this end, they proposed an amendment to paragraph 10.20 [paragraph 8.50], which we support and recommend below.

11.2.122 We have considered the objector's request that this area be hatched on Map 13 [Fig 8.1], and annotated to indicate its 'reserve' status, but as these plans have to be viewed in the context of the relevant policies and their supporting texts, we do not consider that any such annotation is necessary. We do, however, recommend that additional clarification on this matter is included in paragraph 10.10 [paragraph 8.36], and have recommended accordingly in an earlier section.

11.2.123 Under issue 'k', and also issues 'p' and 'q', we have also considered the impact of any increases in the area of the MDA, or in the amount of greenspace, on the surrounding villages, with particular concerns having been raised in relation to Harwell (see also paragraph 1.1.52). The Keep Harwell Rural Campaign (Objector Nos. 639 (SOLP) & 165 (VWHL)) seeks a reduction in the scale of development planned for Didcot West, so that the western boundary and its associated public greenspace can "move" eastwards. In this way, it seeks to increase the gap between Harwell village and the MDA boundary from 0.5km to at least 1km. However, we have both walked and driven the stretch of the B4493 between the western edge of Didcot and Harwell and take the view that the currently proposed gap is more than sufficient to maintain the separate identities of these two settlements, especially in view of the intervening trunk road and its associated landscaping. Furthermore, the requirement for greenspace at the western edge of the MDA will help to visually emphasise the gap between Harwell and the built development at Didcot West.

11.2.124 Issue 'r' relates to the general concern that the countryside should not be replaced by urban landscaping. This is a matter, however, which has to be judged in context. It is the case that the nature of the land to the west of the town will change significantly when the MDA goes ahead. As the Councils have commented, the existing countryside in the area of the MDA is largely devoid of planting. In these circumstances the landscaping that is proposed will serve specific purposes in relation to this new development area; both by providing recreational space for new residents to enjoy and screening to help shield new buildings and soften the edges of the development.

11.2.125 We have had regard to the concerns about the extent of peripheral greenspace, particularly if the open space at Vauxhall Barracks is lost. However, we have also been mindful of the Councils' comments that the precise nature of development at this Vauxhall Barracks site has not yet been determined. This matter is discussed further below, but in general terms we agree that it is premature to assume that the existing greenspace at the barracks would be lost.

11.2.126 Issue 'l' relates to the issue of requiring commuted sum payments to cover the costs of maintaining the open spaces and other facilities for a 25 year

period. This is dealt with in the main report under paragraph 5.79.

Recommendation - Change

Replace "74" with "62" in the first line of DID2(vii) [policy H7(vii)].

Add to the end of paragraph 10.20 [paragraph 8.50] a new sentence;

"The boundary of the MDA shown on Map 13 [Fig 8.1] includes a field in the north-western corner which may be necessary to accommodate playing fields if suitable land cannot be found elsewhere on the site. If it is not required for this purpose the land should not be developed and should remain in agricultural use."

Policy DID2 criterion (viii) [Policy H7 criterion (viii)] Children's play areas

Objections

667/13376 Ms D Davies OR

VW/0436/11c Harwell Parish Council OR

Issues

- a. There is no guarantee that the children's play areas will be provided at all or when required to meet the needs of new residents.
- b. Rather than focussing on equipped areas with swings etc., provide small areas of open space within easy reach of all where toddlers can play.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.127 We are aware of the difficulties which arose in the past, with regard to the provision and timing of facilities and services, in association with the existing Ladygrove development, which was commenced in the 1980s. However, the Councils are now well aware of these problems and have taken steps through the provision of appropriate policies in these plans to address these matters. Specifically, SOLP policy DID1 and VWHLP Appendix 5 both require the submission of a Management Strategy specifying when the children's play facilities would be provided. Furthermore, policy DID1 makes it clear that adherence to the Planning and Design Brief and Design Statements, when the MDAs are implemented, will be secured by means of planning conditions or planning obligations. In these circumstances, we are satisfied that the Councils will be in a position to ensure that the necessary facilities are provided and at the appropriate time.

11.2.128 Issue 'b' indicates a preference for small areas of well-located informal open space for children to play, rather than more formal equipped areas. However, policy DID2 [policy H7] does not make specific reference to the type of children's play areas to be provided. It does, however, provide some further information, by cross referring to the more specific recreation policy R2. The supporting text to this policy explains that there are three levels of children's play space, covering both informal and formally equipped areas. The particular types to

be provided within Didcot West will depend on their location and the number children they are expected to cater for. Such matters are more appropriately dealt with as part of the consideration of the planning applications. Thus, we see no reason to recommend any changes to policy DID2 [policy H7].

Recommendation – No Change

Policy DID2 criterion (ix)

[Policy H7 criterion (ix)]

Mitigation of impact on off-site infrastructure and services

Objections

48/10179	Mr R Neal	OR
126/13153	Mr I Meharg	OR
815/13051	Didcot West Consortium	IA
907/13414	Oxfordshire County Council	CW
VW/0303/5h	Great Western Park Consortium	IA

Objections to Proposed Changes

146/C0930	Mrs W Birch	OR
571/C0207	Cllr T Joslin	I

Issues

- a. There is insufficient information about the impact of the proposal on infrastructure and services and it is unlikely that sufficient capacity exists.
- b. It is not clear whether there is a need for contributions to arts, cultural and entertainment facilities in Didcot or improvements to Didcot Wave.
- c. The policies should require contributions to the improvement of waste management facilities.
- d. Developer contributions should be spent providing an excellent community sports centre at Didcot West rather than at Didcot Wave.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- e. The nature and location of waste management facilities should be specified.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.129 With a major development of the size proposed here, it is quite understandable that there are concerns about the ability of infrastructure and services within the town to cope with the additional demands which will be placed upon them (issue 'a'). Criterion (ix) of policy DID2 [policy H7] addresses this matter in two ways. Firstly, policy DID2(ix) indicates that the provision of necessary off-site infrastructure and services will be in accordance with policy D10. This makes it quite clear that the Council will only permit development if it is satisfied that adequate on or off-site infrastructure and other services and facilities,

made necessary by the development, are available or will be provided to service it. Government guidance in Circular 1/97 enables Councils to seek appropriate financial contributions for necessary facilities, through planning obligations and this matter is reflected in policy D10.

11.2.130 Secondly, policy DID2(ix) [policy H7(ix)] lists a number of facilities or services for which financial contributions will be sought, although it is made clear that this list is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, this has given rise to further objections, as the need for some of the listed items has been questioned (issue 'b'). The development consortium acknowledges that it is entirely reasonable to contribute to these facilities, should this prove necessary. However, the objector claimed that the Councils have not provided any specific requirements or justification for the named improvements, even though this information has been requested as part of the Didcot West planning application process. To allow for flexibility, a rewording of the policy is sought such that no named facilities are included, but rather that the need for financial contributions should be identified as a necessary consequence of the population increase arising from Didcot West.

11.2.131 The objector supported policy DID2(ix) [policy H7] in the first deposit plans, but reserved its position on the need for contributions to arts, cultural and entertainment facilities in Didcot town centre and improvements to Didcot Wave leisure centre, on the grounds that it was not clear at that stage whether such funding would be reasonably necessary. At revised deposit stage, changes were introduced to these policies, aimed at securing financial contributions to library facilities, Didcot Civic Hall and waste management facilities. The objector supported the change to policy DID2(ix) at this time and made no representations regarding VWHLP policy H7(ix). As a result, the objector acknowledged at the Joint Inquiry that it had no duly made objections to support its case that the specific, named items should be removed from the policies. Nevertheless, it maintained that its proposed wording would be a better way to achieve the Councils' aims.

11.2.132 The Councils pointed out that the list of items for which contributions will be sought is not exclusive – hence the reference to 'inter alia'. Nevertheless, the current wording presupposes that contributions will be justified for all the listed items, whereas this may not prove to be the case in practice. The matter of financial contributions in accordance with government guidance in Circular 1/97, towards on or off-site infrastructure and other services and facilities made necessary by development, is already covered by policy D10 [policy DC8], as noted above. Indeed, because of this it was suggested at the Joint Inquiry that there may not be a need for a specific reference to such matters within policy DID2 [policy H7] at all.

11.2.133 However, we favour the retention of this topic within these policies, which are intended to provide self-contained guidance for developers. But, notwithstanding this point, we consider that a modest rewording of the policies is necessary to make them less prescriptive. We recommend accordingly.

11.2.134 Under issue 'd' it is contended that no contributions should be made by the Didcot West developer towards the Didcot Wave Leisure Centre. However, we have had regard to the Councils' comments that a second swimming pool for the town is unlikely to be viable and no firm evidence has been submitted to the contrary on this matter. In our view, it is clear that residents of the new MDA will wish to make use of swimming facilities in the town. In these circumstances it seems perfectly appropriate that contributions towards improvements at the Didcot

Wave Leisure Centre should be sought, although this is a matter that can only really be resolved through the detailed negotiations over a planning application. This, again, would be addressed by the minor amendment to the wording of this part of the policy which we recommend below.

11.2.135 Issue 'c' relates to objections which seek a change to the policies to recognise the fact that contributions will be necessary towards the improvement of waste management facilities. This has been addressed by the revised deposit plans, which refer to the need for the improvement of waste management facilities in or near Didcot under criterion (ix) of policy DID2 [policy H7]. Understandably, some objectors maintain that the nature and location of such facilities should be spelt out within the plans and we agree that if known, such information should be included (issue 'e'). The Councils have, however, indicated that the relevant information has not yet been specified by the OCC. In these circumstances, it is not possible for the policies to contain further details but, in our view, this is not an insurmountable problem, as such matters can be considered in detail through the planning application process.

Recommendation - Change

Replace "inter alia" with "where appropriate" in policy DID2(ix) [policy H7(ix)].

Policy DID2 criterion (x)

[Policy H7 criterion (x)]

Off-site surface water drainage works

Objections

276/11721	Miss R Boshier	OR
663/13423	Miss Bowey	OR
695/11746	Harwell Parish Council	WR
VW/0029/15	D Summers	OR
VW/0430/1c	J Abbott	OR

Issues

- a. The Didcot West Major Development Area will not be drained satisfactorily and could aggravate flooding problems.
- b. Increased surface water run-off may reduce recharging of the underlying aquifer.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.136 We heard much about the current and past drainage situation in the area to the west of Didcot and the nearby villages, particularly East Hagbourne, for which we undertook an extensive site inspection. We were told that the land drainage system on the Didcot West MDA site has suffered in recent years from the loss of drainage ditches and the provision of inadequate culverts, as well as from blockages and poor maintenance and we saw examples of some of these matters during our inspection of the MDA site. We were also told that some houses in the Slade Road area have experienced flooding in the past and understand that this is

because many of the houses are built against the natural contours.

11.2.137 Nevertheless, all parties generally accepted that the issues relating to surface water drainage for the Didcot West MDA can be adequately and satisfactorily addressed. Although this will require the preparation of a carefully considered and detailed drainage scheme, no evidence was put before us to suggest that any insurmountable difficulties are likely to arise in this regard. We have noted the Councils' comments that the drainage works will be required to only discharge at a rate equivalent to the greenfield run-off and accept that, in these circumstances, there is unlikely to be any requirement for off-site drainage works. Moreover, we have no reason to doubt the Councils' view that the drainage scheme would address the Slade Road area flooding problem and bring about a positive benefit to these householders.

11.2.138 In addition to the above, we acknowledge the concerns raised regarding the recharge of the underlying aquifer, covered by issue 'b'. However, we have noted that neither the Councils' engineers, nor the EA, raise any objections on water management grounds to the proposed MDA.

11.2.139 Overall, we are mindful of the fact that both SOLP policy DID1 and VWHLP Appendix 5 require the submission of proposals for a sustainable urban drainage system, which will need to contain fully researched measures to protect the water environment. These are detailed matters which can best be dealt with through the planning application process. We consider that the Local Plans provide the framework to adequately address these matters through the required Planning and Development Brief. In these circumstances, we consider that no further changes to policy DID2(x) [policy H7(x)] are necessary.

Recommendation – No Change

**Policy DID2 criterion (xi) and paragraph 10.21
[Policy H7 criterion (xi) and paragraph 8.51]
Transport infrastructure**

Objections – See list in Appendix A

Issues

- a. The criterion does not provide sufficient information about transport infrastructure and its phasing to assess whether it would meet the needs of the MDA and to enable the impact of the development to be assessed.
- b. A lot of countryside will be destroyed for roads.
- c. Unacceptable traffic congestion would be caused in Broadway, Station Road, and the town centre. Traffic flows detrimental to highway safety and local amenities would be caused through Didcot, Harwell, East and West Hagbourne.
- d. Policy DID2 does not fulfil the obligation in T1 that the road network can accommodate traffic without creating traffic hazards or environmental damage.
- e. There are no existing footpaths, cycleways or suitable roads to connect the development to: relocate the development.

- f. Traffic through Harwell village would be much increased even with a by-pass or A34 slip road. The infrastructure and road priorities should be defined before development proposals are decided.
- g. DID2(xi)(a) should be expanded to refer to "connecting to existing and proposed networks" and in paragraph 10.21 "identify" should be replaced by "advise on".
- h. Policy DID2 fails to reflect that trunk road improvements may be required.
- i. The existing road at the rear of 102 Freeman Road is private and should not be used as an access to the MDA.
- j. There is no need for new bus services as there is already a substantial network west of Didcot.
- k. Didcot West would rely on access from three principal roads all of which carry high volumes of traffic or which have been traffic-calmed due to a poor accident record. Communications from the MDA would not be good and significant traffic problems would be caused by a new secondary school.
- l. The road accesses are too few and unsuitable, more road links are necessary, and the A34 should not be congested with more local traffic. Relocate the development to the north-east.
- m. The B4493 is very congested with traffic. The proposed location of the access from the B4493 shown on Map 13 should be moved further west.
- n. The road accesses from Park Road and Portway should be severely restricted to limit traffic increases in East and West Hagbourne and south Didcot and traffic calming and reduction schemes are required.
- o. The criterion should specify new off-site transport improvements, including a Harwell by-pass, new direct road links to the A34, modifications to the A34 interchanges at Chilton and Milton, new slip road accesses to the A34, improvements to the A34, a road connection to Milton Park via a new bridge over A4130 and the railway, a western perimeter road for Didcot West and West Hagbourne, limitation of the use of any access on to Park Road, a road link via Vauxhall Barracks, and a new cycle track between Harwell and Didcot.
- p. The Didcot West MDA should be provided with a perimeter road to divert traffic from existing streets in Didcot and the villages, which are inadequate to accommodate the traffic. The location of the road access points should also be reassessed to provide minimum disruption to residents.
- q. The proposal does not demonstrate easy access to Milton Park. This was one of the claimed advantages of Didcot West when it was adopted in the OSP, with the aid of a bridge across the A4130 and railway but this bridge has disappeared from the plans. The removal of this claimed strategic feature tilts the balance away from the western direction of growth.

- r. A new bridge is required to link the development with Milton Park.
- s. The District Centre should not be on the B4493 where it would cause congestion.
- t. New slip road accesses to the A34 trunk road and improvements to the A34 itself are required.
- u. There should be an access to the A34 and/or a new road to by-pass Harwell.
- v. With the closure of Vauxhall Barracks, a new access could be created from the MDA and Mendip Heights to Foxhall Road.
- w. Traffic impact in Coscote and West Hagbourne should be relieved by a by-pass and by locating some development north of Didcot.
- x. A bus route should be established early to serve residents of the first phases.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- y. DID2(xi)(a) first sentence: insufficient information on transport infrastructure.
- z. DID2(xi)(a) second sentence: the insertion of 'indicative' with reference to road network connections now means that the plan has insufficient detail.
- aa. DID2(xi)(b): insufficient information on transport infrastructure.
- bb. DID2(xi)(b): add to text "and access to and from the A34 trunk road."
- cc. DID2(xi)(b): reference should also be made to other roads that may be required to Abingdon, the South and south-east Oxford.
- dd. VWHLP para 8.51 should clarify the role of the Highways Agency as the strategic highway authority on motorways and trunk roads, e.g. the A34.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.2.140 – All issues - The vast majority of objections lodged against this criterion express great concern and scepticism about the traffic and transport implications of the proposed MDA and are critical of the amount of information available in the Local Plans. They contend that unacceptable traffic congestion will be caused at various locations in the town; that there will be an unacceptable increase in traffic flows through nearby villages; and that there will be adverse effects on highway safety and on the environment. In this context, a variety of schemes to address the anticipated problems have been put forward by objectors, including by-passes for the various villages, a new bridge to link the MDA with Milton Park, and various improvements relating to the A34 Trunk Road. In addition, several objections are critical of the number and location of access points proposed for the MDA, arguing that the existing roads are congested and will not be able to cope satisfactorily with the additional traffic volumes likely to be generated.

11.2.141 Such comments are understandable and we recognise that matters such as increased traffic volumes, congestion, severance effects, noise, pollution, the

standard of public transport services and the provision of opportunities for the use of non-car modes can have significant effects on existing communities. We appreciate, therefore, that these can be contentious issues, which touch the lives of most residents, in one form or another, often on a daily basis. As the objections are wide-ranging, with many relating to more than one topic, we have not tried to deal with them separately, but have covered the matters which have been raised in the following comments and recommendations.

11.2.142 We take as our starting point, however, the fact that neither of the relevant highway authorities (OCC for the County roads and the Highways Agency for the A34 Trunk Road), raised objections to the 5,500 new homes allocated to Didcot in the OSP, as detailed in paragraphs 1.1.58 – 1.1.59. As a result, it was accepted, as a matter of principle, that this amount of development could proceed without causing unacceptable traffic impacts within the town or on the surrounding road network. Nevertheless, it is clearly the case that the Didcot West MDA will generate a significant amount of additional transport demand, which will need to be managed in a sustainable way, by a variety of means and measures.

11.2.143 In view of these points, we found it both disappointing and frustrating that very little in the way of firm, tested, evaluated, and approved transport proposals were put to the Joint Inquiry. We acknowledge that work is ongoing, through the Didcot Area Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) and that there is a need to ensure that only appropriate, realistic, and achievable schemes are included in the 5 Year Local Transport Plan. Even so, in terms of firm proposals aimed at addressing the inevitable increased demand for transport which will result from the MDA, little tangible progress appears to have been made in the 4 years since the decision to develop to the west was taken. We find this particularly surprising in view of the wealth of traffic and transport studies which have been undertaken since the late 1990s.

11.2.144 That having been said, we accept that insofar as on-site private and public transport provision is concerned, these are matters which can best be examined and pursued through the detailed discussions and negotiations which will accompany the planning applications for Didcot West. We also consider that the final form and number of connections to the existing highway network can only really be achieved through the planning application process, as it is at that stage that detailed assessments can best be undertaken.

11.2.145 In view of these points, we are satisfied that those objections which are critical of existing footpath and cycletrack provision in the area and those which relate to the detailed status of existing roads, can be adequately addressed by these means. We are also satisfied that links with or through the Vauxhall Barracks development site are a matter for the development control process and do not need to be specified in detail within the Local Plans. As the Councils have pointed out, local people will have an opportunity to comment on such planning applications and their proposals before they are determined and it seems to us that this would go some way towards addressing the concerns expressed.

11.2.146 Understandably however, it is the likely off-site traffic and transport implications which have given rise to most concern and it seems to us that policy DID2 [policy H7] is particularly unhelpful in providing adequate information to those who have genuine concerns in this regard. In particular, there is no indication within the policy or the supporting text of what criteria the Councils will use for assessing the adequacy of the off-site provision. We recognise that this

topic, as with many others in the planning field, often gives rise to conflicting views and aspirations. Put simply, local residents generally want current conditions to get no worse, and ideally to improve, whereas the Planning and Highway Authorities generally work on the basis that changes in existing conditions must be kept to an acceptable level. Not surprisingly, the general public and the relevant authorities often have conflicting views regarding what is 'acceptable'.

11.2.147 Against this background, we have noted the various traffic flow forecasts which have been suggested by the objectors, but we accept the Councils' evidence that it is not a case of simply estimating the amount of newly generated traffic and adding it to the flows which are already observed on surrounding roads. Firstly, there is the issue of modal split. With the close proximity of major employment areas and other facilities and the intention to improve public transport services from day one, the Councils are hopeful that there will be an appreciable number of new residents who will walk, cycle or reach their destinations by bus. Secondly, the newly generated car traffic is likely to cause some of the existing traffic to re-assign onto alternative routes or even persuade existing travellers to seek alternative modes of transport. We are not suggesting that the impact of the new development will not be noticed – rather, that it is a complex matter than can best be assessed by the established method of traffic modelling and not just by simple manual estimates.

11.2.148 In this regard we take some comfort from the fact that a detailed traffic model is being used to assess the implications of the development and will, we understand, have input from all the relevant authorities. We also accept that detailed work will have to continue on the ITS and that these two aspects of the future transport requirements for the town and its surroundings are inter-related. In addition, we have noted the Councils' promises that, in due course, local people will be given the opportunity to comment upon draft ITS proposals for new transport infrastructure and that OCC will take these comments into account before the ITS is finalised.

11.2.149 There are, however, two matters which, in our opinion, are not adequately reflected in policy DID2 [policy H7]. The first is that although these policies are the primary ones to guide the development of Didcot West, other relevant policies within the plans will also be applicable to the MDA. Indeed, insofar as policy DID2 is concerned, it makes reference in its introductory sentence to a need for the development to also accord with the requirements of policies DID1 and D10 and there are further references to other policies throughout the various criteria. There is however, no reference to any of the plan's Transport policies or to the matters outlined at the beginning of the Transport Section, which set out the Council's general transport strategy objectives. We consider that it would be appropriate for Policy DID2 to cross refer to the relevant transport policies, particularly T1, and for the supporting text in paragraph 10.21 to explain more about the Council's objectives for achieving a sustainable transport system. Similar comments apply to VWHLP policy H7(xi), although this should, of course, refer to the general transport policies within that plan. We recommend accordingly.

11.2.150 The second matter which we believe should be given greater prominence in policy DID2 [policy H7] is the Integrated Transport Strategy. This was referred to repeatedly at the Joint Inquiry as the means by which the transport improvements for the town would be delivered but in the context of these two policies it only gets the most fleeting of references in SOLP supporting paragraph 10.21. We acknowledge that there are timetabling issues, in terms of dove-tailing

this on-going transport study with the preparation of the Local Plans. However, we were told that in October 2003, the ITS was split into two parts, so that the traffic management, walking and cycling, village and public transport improvements could be progressed without delay, as Phase 1.

11.2.151 We understand that many of the schemes contained in this Phase 1 programme are generally smaller-scale projects, mainly involving changes within existing highway boundaries. As such, we accept that they may well have no direct or specific land-use implications that would warrant their inclusion in the Local Plans.

11.2.152 Phase 2 of the ITS will cover major highway and public transport schemes in the context of the planned housing and employment development for the area. But, for a variety of reasons, this second phase has been delayed and consultants commissioned by the OCC had only been able to prepare a provisional strategy by the time of the Joint Inquiry. In essence, this provisional strategy comprised 8 highway schemes designed to improve traffic flows at key junctions in order to take east-west movements away from Milton Interchange (the A4130/A34 junction). Although concentrating primarily on improvements to junctions, one of the proposed schemes is a link from the A4130 across the B4493 down to the A417, incorporating a Harwell by-pass.

11.2.153 Support for the provisional strategy, as the basis of a package of measures to be presented to the Joint Inquiry, was finally given by the County Council's Executive in November 2004. The Executive also resolved to give emphasis to north/south movements in the Didcot/Oxford corridor as part of Phase 2 of the Strategy. Further assessment and development work will take place to produce a final strategy but it was indicated at the Joint Inquiry that this is unlikely to be available before Autumn 2005, at the earliest.

11.2.154 The consequence of this series of events is that although both District Councils and the OCC accept that details of the improvement works needed to mitigate the impact of the MDA should, ideally, have been included within the Local Plans, they simply have not been progressed to an appropriate stage. As we have already commented, we find this situation extremely disappointing and frustrating. However, as the measures themselves cannot be firmly established or identified at this stage, we consider it all the more important that the criteria against which any proposals can be assessed should be clearly set out in policy DID2 [policy H7]. At the very least, we consider that the objectives which helped to guide the creation of packages of schemes to be included in the ITS, as set out in the Phase 1 Final Report, should feature in these policies. Accordingly, we make the appropriate recommendations.

11.2.155 Furthermore, now that approval has been given to the provisional strategy for Phase 2 of the ITS, we urge both Councils and the OCC to consider further the detailed options for an A4130 to A417 link, to include a Harwell by-pass. As PPG 12 makes clear, planning authorities should safeguard land needed for future transport schemes through proposals in Local Plans. Clearly, a precise route for such a link will take some time to prepare but, if the proposal was sufficiently advanced, an area of safeguarding could be shown on the VWHLP Proposals Map.

11.2.156 In terms of this possible new link road, we are mindful of the Councils' comment that the need to minimise loss of countryside will be taken into account in the ITS process, when road improvements are considered. We also consider

that, even though the decision to build on BMV land has been taken, there is still a need to avoid being unduly wasteful of this resource. Accordingly, it is our opinion that it would be inappropriate for further land to be taken to provide a peripheral link road between the A4130 and the B4493, as part of any future Harwell by-pass, over and above that required for the MDA. Rather, we consider that the distributor road through the development should be designed to cater for an element of north/south through movements, as well as development generated traffic. It would also, of course, need to cater for the safe crossing of pedestrians and cyclists, but we were told at the Joint Inquiry that this would not present any significant design problems. We recommend, accordingly, below.

11.2.157 Turning now to consider the A34, the Highways Agency is primarily concerned about the likely impact on this Trunk Road and is keen to see some form of queue management on the A4130 to regulate the amount of traffic accessing the A34. It accepts that travel demand on the A34 will increase but considers that, provided such increases are properly managed, this would not cause undue operational problems for the Trunk Road. In this regard we understand that the Highways Agency is supportive of improvements which have been agreed for Milton Interchange as part of a Section 106 Agreement relating to proposed development on land just to the north-east of the junction. As a result of this planning obligation, capacity at the junction would be increased by dualling a length of the A4130 to the east and widening and fully signalling the circulatory carriageway of the junction itself.

11.2.158 In terms of traffic impact on the Trunk Road, we have also been mindful that one of the reasons why Didcot was seen as a good location for additional housing development was that there is a significant amount of local employment, at such locations as Milton Park and the Harwell/Chilton Campus. Moreover, further increases are planned for the number of jobs at these locations during the life of these Local Plans. There is therefore every opportunity for an appreciable proportion of the new population to work locally and to be able to travel by more sustainable means than the private car. This cannot be guaranteed, of course, but the close proximity of population and jobs would help to encourage such sustainable travel patterns. In turn, this could limit the amount of traffic wishing to access the A34 to reach more distant destinations.

11.2.159 The Highways Agency has also indicated that it would be supportive of measures which could remove some east-west traffic from the Milton Interchange, such as those already outlined as part of the Phase II ITS works. Furthermore, the Agency indicated at the Joint Inquiry that it would be prepared to re-consider additional on or off-slips for the A34 at locations such as Chilton or the B4493, as has been suggested in previous transport studies, even though it had not looked favourably on such proposals in the past. It did, however, make it clear that it was unlikely that any such improvements could realistically be implemented within the timescale of these Local Plans.

11.2.160 But, notwithstanding the above points, there is still a potential conflict between the Highway Agency's desire to limit and regulate access to the A34 and the OCC's wish to avoid excessive queueing and congestion on the County roads. The OCC is concerned that queue management measures could well lead to rat-running onto less suitable routes, with adverse environmental implications. There is no simple answer to this potential conflict – at least not until the ITS and the transport assessments for Didcot West have been progressed further.

11.2.161 However, we found it important to note that the Highways Agency indicated that it has no reason to doubt that acceptable transport measures can be devised to adequately accommodate and mitigate the impact of Didcot West. Its principal concerns – which we echo – are that a full transport strategy, with clearly defined schemes and measures, is not yet in existence. The solutions will clearly have to be found through a combination of the traffic modelling work which is currently on-going to assess the implications of Didcot West and the ITS, which will need to have meaningful input from all interested parties and authorities.

11.2.162 The Highways Agency has also objected to the VWHLP on the grounds that its transport policies do not represent a sufficiently robust framework within which the Trunk Road interests can be protected. But, as already noted, this is not an objection in principle to the Didcot West MDA and to some extent this objection may be addressed by our recommendations regarding policy DID2 [policy H7].

11.2.163 Looking a little further ahead, we are aware that the OCC is undertaking a Transport Networks Review (TNR) to provide a long-term strategic background for future Local Transport Plans. This review will define the roles that different parts of the transport networks will be required to play over the next 15-20 years. A new road and river crossing in the Appleford area, mentioned by some objectors, along with schemes to improve access to the town from the north are possible longer term schemes that are not included in the TNR's emerging strategy. They have therefore not been included in Phase 2 of the ITS and cannot reasonably be considered for these current Local Plans.

11.2.164 Objections which refer to an overbridge linking the Didcot West MDA with Milton Park, as was originally considered by the Panel have already been addressed in paragraphs 1.1.23 – 1.1.26.

11.2.165 Turning finally to those objections which deal with public transport provision, we do not agree with those who contend that there is no need for further bus services to serve the MDA. We are aware that a certain level of service already exists in west Didcot and along such roads as the B4493 and Park Road. However, if there is to be a realistic chance of influencing the modes of travel of new residents, then it is essential that good quality, comprehensive, bus services are available to serve the new population at an early stage.

11.2.166 In summary, we are disappointed that we are not in a position to firmly recommend which specific off-site highway schemes will be necessary to accommodate the MDA and to mitigate any adverse impacts arising. This information will have to emerge both through negotiations on the planning applications and through the ITS. Whilst we do not under-estimate the work which is still ahead for the authorities, nothing that we have heard leads us to believe that acceptable travel conditions could not be achieved for the town as a whole and the surrounding road network. This is provided, of course, that a sustainable transport strategy emerges from the ITS and is then adequately funded and rigorously pursued to implementation. Because of the absence of any finalised transport assessments, we can do no more than recommend the addition of some detailed guidelines and criteria to policy DID2 [policy H7] and their reasoned justifications, as already outlined above.

Recommendation - Change

Add to the first line of criterion (xi) after "infrastructure":

“in accordance with Policy T1 [policy TR1], aimed at encouraging sustainable modes of travel and reducing the need to travel by car”

Reword the second and third sentences of para 10.21 [paragraph 8.51] to read:

“Criterion (xi) will secure this objective by providing appropriate on and off-site transport infrastructure. The highway authority and the Highways Agency will advise on the transport measures required. These measures will be identified through the development of an integrated transport strategy for the Didcot area, having regard to the following objectives:

- To reduce reliance on the use of the private car by improving choices available to meet transport needs within Didcot and between Didcot and the surrounding settlements;**
- To increase accessibility to facilities for those without cars and/or with mobility impairment;**
- To promote the use of public transport (bus and rail);**
- To identify and provide a safe, continuous and high quality network of pedestrian and cycle routes;**
- To promote road safety and reduce the number and severity of road casualties;**
- To promote efficient highway management including the identification of transport infrastructure as appropriate, and parking demand and supply;**
- To improve provision for interchange between all modes of transport; and**
- To relieve traffic congestion where it is causing significant amenity or environmental problems.”.**

The District Councils and OCC should urgently consider the detailed options for an A4130 to A417 link, to include a Harwell by-pass. For the section between the A4130 and the B4493, this link should not require additional land outside the boundary of the MDA.

11.3 DID3.1 VAUXHALL BARRACKS

Objections – See list in Appendix A

Issues

- a. Reference in paragraph 5.16 (SOLP) to part of the Didcot West development being deferred is too vague and the area not to be developed should be shown.

Issues Arising from Proposed Changes

- b. Policy DID3.1 should include a specific commitment in the Local Plan that any development at Vauxhall Barracks should reduce the number of dwellings and land take for Didcot West.
- c. Delete reference to a secondary school at Didcot West.

Inspectors' Conclusions

11.3.1 Many of those who have objected to this policy are not opposed to the principle of redeveloping the Vauxhall Barracks site but rather contend that its development means that the size of the Didcot West allocation could be reduced, thereby reducing the amount of BMV land-take. At the Joint Inquiry, objectors also argued that the close proximity of the Barracks site to the Didcot West MDA means that the infrastructure of the two should be planned together to provide good integration and help to move the centre of gravity of the MDA closer to the town centre. Other objectors saw the redevelopment of the barracks as an opportunity to reduce the housing density at Didcot West.

11.3.2 It was also argued that as the Didcot West MDA is unlikely to be completed by 2011, it would make sense to substitute the Vauxhall Barracks site for part of the Didcot West site. It was contended that this would assist the Councils by giving them freedom to consider where to put any future housing. However, SODC indicated that it did not want or need this "freedom", explaining that it has undertaken an urban capacity study which has concluded that there is very limited capacity within Didcot.

11.3.3 We share the Councils' view that because of the importance of the Didcot West MDA in meeting the District's housing requirements, it should be treated as a strategic site in accordance with the Government's good practice guidance in Planning to Deliver (CD94). This allows for such sites to extend beyond the period of a Local Plan and this seems relevant in this case, as Topic Papers 4 and 4A indicate that there is likely to be a shortfall (of at least 450 dwellings) by the end of the plan period in 2011. In view of this, it is unlikely that the Structure Plan target would be materially exceeded, if at all, by 2011, even with the Vauxhall Barracks site developed in full. We also agree that it makes good sense to plan, at the outset, for the full extent of the MDA, in order to achieve the optimum layout and secure the full and appropriate package of infrastructure and services.

11.3.4 We are not persuaded, however, that it is either reasonable or necessary to try and define, in detail, which part of the MDA would be delayed to the post-2011 period, as is sought by some objections. In our view, this is a matter that can only really be determined once planning permission has been granted and a phasing programme agreed, although the SWQ must be a candidate in this respect.

11.3.5 With regard to using the redevelopment of the Barracks site as an opportunity to reduce the housing density on Didcot West, we do not support such a move as it would not accord with PPG 3 guidance to make the best use of land. We have already discussed the housing density for the site (see paragraphs 11.2.50 – 11.2.52), and consider that an average net density of 40 dph would be both achievable and appropriate.

11.3.6 In view of the above points we see no good reason why the Didcot West MDA should be reduced, either in area or housing numbers, as a result of the redevelopment of Vauxhall Barracks.

11.3.7 The issue of the proposed cycle, pedestrian, and public transport link

through the site was also raised at the Joint Inquiry. Concerns were expressed that this link would pass close to the Stephen Freeman Primary School and could give rise to safety issues and that it would also be difficult to prevent other vehicles from using it. In this regard, we were informed about the current problems which arise in Oxford City Centre, where it is proving difficult to prevent cars and other vehicles from using bus-only links. However, as such a link between the MDA and the Vauxhall Barracks site would only be relatively lightly trafficked, we doubt that any insurmountable safety problems would arise. Moreover, because it would only carry limited numbers of buses, we consider that it should be possible to control it by remote means, such as bus-actuated bollards or gates.

11.3.8 Issue 'c' relates to objections which contend that the new Secondary School should not be located at Didcot West. We have already discussed this matter at length (paragraphs 1.1.74 – 1.1.80) and have concluded that the proposed Didcot West MDA is the appropriate location for the new Secondary School. Taking all the above points into account, we recommend that no changes are made to this policy or its supporting text.

Recommendation – No Change

12. SECTION 11 HENLEY ON THAMES

There were no objections from this section dealt with at the Joint Inquiry.

13. SECTION 12 THAME

There were no objections from this section dealt with at the Joint Inquiry.

14. SECTION 13 WALLINGFORD

There were no objections from this section dealt with at the Joint Inquiry.

15. GLOSSARY

There were no objections from this section dealt with at the Joint Inquiry.

16. APPENDICES

There were no objections from this section dealt with at the Joint Inquiry.

17. MAPS

There were no objections from this section dealt with at the Joint Inquiry.