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Planning (Local Plan Consultation 2041),
Council Offices,
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20 October 2023

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON WEST OXFORDSHORE LOCAL PLAN 2041

1. Thank you for the opportunity to comment upon your 'Focused Consultation: Ideas and Objectives' for the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041, a crucial document that will affect every District resident now and in the future. In responding, we are mindful of the consequences of the prolonged delay in the 2018 adoption (at least 7 years late) of the current Local Plan 2031, a policy vacuum seized upon with glee by speculative developers and unscrupulous landowners. It is vital therefore that there be a smooth transition between the current and proposed Local Plans, with no interregnum. Furthermore, we urge evolution rather than revolution. Much of the current Local Plan is entirely fit for purpose and we would wish to see those elements retained, as well as current site allocations carried over.

2. As we have learnt to our cost (including literally), most recently as an unsuccessful Rule 6 Party to Planning Appeal APP/D3125/W/232/3317512, the policy and statutory playing field is currently hopelessly uneven in favour of developers, an advantage compounded by their deep pockets, a situation that rides roughshod over local democracy. Anything that the new Local Plan can do to redress the current greed/democracy imbalance in the planning system would be especially welcome. One small part of that will be to deliver on the consultation's stated aim of 'stronger, meaningful engagement with town and parish councils.'. Our recent experience suggests quite the opposite situation currently prevails.

3. There is no indication in the current consultation of the numbers of houses involved, a critical missing factor and caveat to our response. Such numbers must be made available in the next round of consultation and should not rely on the inflated figures suggested by Oxford City and Cherwell District Councils in the recent HENA Report. We would also welcome an explicit 'brownfield sites first' policy. Mindful of woeful incapacity and state of repair of our sewage infrastructure, developments that rely on drainage into rivers or watercourses, or that add pressure on the sewage system, must not be permitted – with Grampian conditions as enforcement.

4. Turning to the specifics of the Consultation, we consider Section 2, 'The Future Pattern of Development in West Oxfordshire' to be the crux of the issue and have focused our attention, accordingly, informed by public consultation conducted here in the Parish. Our views are summarised as follows. Of the 8 scenarios proposed under this section, the Parish Council is very firmly **against** Scenarios 5 (Dispersed Growth) and 6 (Village Clusters) as it believes they would not only encourage yet more speculative development in the Parish, but would dilute community identity, undermine local democracy and, mindful of already woefully overloaded local infrastructure, be demonstrably unsustainable, including increasing the reliance on private car usage. Endorsing the first 7 (of 8) bullet points outlined in para 5.25 of the Consultation, the Parish Council **supports** Scenario 1, the 'Hierarchical Approach', a tried and tested approach (endorsed by successive planning inspectors) which underpins the current Local Plan 2031. Furthermore, the Parish Council is **supportive in principle** of Scenario 1 being supported by elements of Scenario 7 'New Settlement' and Scenario 8 'Public Transport Focus' but would wish to see more detailed proposals (including housing numbers) before offering its unqualified support.

Original Signed

Copies to: WODC Councillors Charlie Maynard, Lysette Nichols, Dan Levy, and Alaric Smith