**South Leigh and High Cogges Parish Council Submissions on the Local Plan**

**Introduction**

Despite a democratically endorsed Neighbourhood Plan the village feels vulnerable. Perhaps we should be cheered by a recent comment by one of the local planners at WODC in connection with an on-going conservation area application, saying that South Leigh “is a village where new [[1]](#footnote-1)development is not generally allowed and as such has been and is likely only to receive very low levels of applications for new housing development.” There would seem to be echoes of that view in the focused consultation that will be referred to below.

However with the nightmare of a large Gladman development of 3000 houses still in the recent memory and three possible sites within the village being considered by Eynsham Park Estate, the AD near High Cogges, one solar farm within the parish and two on its flanks, the suggested railway, Shores Green junction and the dualling of the A40 which will bring the A40 nearer the village, you will understand we are anxious.

So we will continue to use conservation, a revised Neighbourhood Plan and or Village Design Statement plus representations on the local plan to protect the village-not slavishly but hopefully constructively with observations which will at times have relevance to other parts of West Oxfordshire and to other settlements across the area.

We continue to believe that this settlement with its medieval church, Victorian village hall, formerly the school and its extensive buildings from the 19C and its associated fields, historic byways and landscape patterns is worth protecting from a swamp of undistinguished houses.

**Consultation**

As we said both at the meeting at WODC on 18th October and in a subsequent email, we commend the considerable efforts that have been made so far by WODC and that we understand that the 8 scenarios were to provoke and create debate and discussion over the possibilities-some scenarios perhaps more creative than realistic. As you say at 5.11 “to stimulate some broad discussion.” It has and in our view that is healthy.

**Constraints on WODC**

We had not realised fully the consequences of the limits on a District Council who cannot direct financial resources to where they are needed – eg WODC has to wait on the chance of money for A roads and rail links as well as other infra structure or service provision.

One of the problems for WODC therefore will be the clear results of the survey which is that people do not want development before infra structure and one fears that the only infrastructure albeit often inadequate and overstrained is in the larger settlements and certainly not in the villages.

Further it seems to us that one of the consequences of the adoption of Objective 1 and within it the Living local concept (which needs to be redefined since “20 Minute neighbourhood concept” is “no concept” if defined as 20 minute by road) together with 5.7 - 5.9, answers the question because they say

* 5.7  The location of future growth is a vital consideration for the new Local Plan, not least because different approaches will lead to different outcomes.
* 5.8  Thus for example a more ‘dispersed’ pattern of growth is generally likely to increase car use and associated carbon emissions unless coupled with significant improvements in rural public transport and EV charging capabilities.
* 5.9  Conversely, a more ‘concentrated’ strategy focusing new development in locations which have strong public transport availability and pedestrian and cycle access, could help to reduce car use and lower carbon emissions.

Indeed Scenarios 5 and 6 would be wholly incompatible with those principles

**Change since last local plan**

One of the matters that will have to be included in this plan is a policy on green or allegedly green infra structures – solar farms and anaerobic digesters. You will understand that the prospect of an exploding Anaerobic Digester within 250 metres of houses and less from the A40 was something that the PC was anxious to avoid. In earlier letters to each of the WODC councillors the science relating to AD’s was set out - it was sent before the explosion at the AD at Cassington and therefore did not deal with that peril.

However a planning/objective policy must surely be that no planning permission should be granted where there is a real risk to life or limb and where construction is intended within say 250 metres of the nearest habitation, road or footpath and there should be no risk to contamination of the landscape or water-courses.

**General Observations on objectives**

We commend the thought and detail of the 30 objectives.

We wonder whether there is enough emphasis on the green areas of WODC and of policies to encourage recreation in those areas, preserve the green lungs of the historical countryside and recognise the agricultural landowner’s needs - although we do recognise Objective 10

We wonder, for instance, if there is enough effort being devoted to recreational cycle paths not alongside roads but say diagonally from Witney through South Leigh towards both Eynsham and towards Stanton Harcourt. We are sure the other hamlets would have other suggestions.

We would like a planning guidance/objective, which we accept might be ambitious, such that no further development should be allowed where (1) there is not the infra structure to support it (2) it will increase unduly the traffic on roads already stretched (3) there is inadequate medical or dentistry provision (4) no shops, (5) no primary school (6) no bus service and (7) inadequate sewage provision.

Some of that is reflected in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and your current Council plan (2023-2027) which expects, for instance, high-quality development that is properly supported by necessary infrastructure, including excellent digital connectivity. As WODC also say at page 21 of the Focused Consultation

“In response to our initial consultation last year, there was overwhelming support for the Council seeking to ensure that new development and local communities are supported by effective and timely investment in supporting infrastructure with 90% of those replying saying this is important. Concerns were raised about existing local services and facilities (especially in relation to difficulties in getting appointments with GPs and dentists and the paucity of leisure facilities) and the fear that the situation will be made worse by additional development. Even when improvements to infrastructure are planned, there is concern that these will be inadequate and/or come forward too late with a call for infrastructure to be properly secured (e.g. through developer contributions) and provided ‘in-step’ with new development.

Without prejudging the results of this consultation we suspect the democratic will is the same. With respect the time is for a robust statement of policy/objective as a further objective as we state in the paragraph above but also robust use of phasing in any building scheme.

We wonder whether it might be an idea to add an objective that WODC will try and work in partnership with OCC and central government to develop and fund infrastructure requirements and where sensible, say in the case of the transport links between say Carterton and Oxford will form a steering group to oversee road and rail links such as exists within the Council’s climate change strategy.

Chris Hargreaves said[[2]](#footnote-2) he wanted the local plan to be aided by plans and maps – we agree and we see no reason why hard lines on maps showing areas where development should or should not be allowed. Simon Jenkins in Country Life 5 years ago thought that countryside should be listed.[[3]](#footnote-3) That of course is beyond your remit but nevertheless there is no reason why there should not be hatched lines on maps where it is unlikely that housing development will be allowed or definitions of settlements beyond which housing development should not take place – eg 200 metres or 2 miles from a fixed point within a particular settlement. It would as the consultation says at 5.3 “establish a clear pattern of development.”

We also wonder whether it is time to revisit the understanding that the flanking District Councils should take on some of Oxford’s unmet needs. That is a political decision but would have a significant effect on housing numbers for this area. We echo what CPRE say “WODC should also resist accommodating Oxford City housing overspill which would be better tackled by making more efficient use of land within the City”[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Further Observations on Draft objectives**

As suggested in 3.6 and 4.2 of Focus Consultation – Ideas and Objectives – August 2023, we put forward comments these are minor.

We wonder whether it might be sensible to re-order them so that say Objective 5, 15, 25 etc comes before Objective 1ff – it is a political judgment, of course, but we suspect that whilst people recognise the importance of Objective 1 most people, especially now have more mundane considerations and worries.

Objective 6 should have the words “Conserve and enhance” inserted as in Objective 10 but going slightly further so it reads “to create, conserve, protect and enhance environments that support and encourage healthy lifestyles…..” and as we said earlier creating recreational cycleways – we can suggest a very cheap one-closing Barnard Gate Road – especially as it is proposed that the railway should cross it and, as yet, there is no suggestion of a bridge.

Objective 10 should have the word “protect” inserted so it reads “to conserve, protect and enhance….” As “protect” is used in the rationale.

Objective 12 and 13 are thoroughly supported

Objective 14 is again supported but WODC really needs to appoint a Conservation and heritage officer – as we gather there is not one in place - and they can be tasked to assist all communities in a number of different areas which ultimately will save WODC time and money-we are thinking of Neighbourhood Plans which are emphasised again in Objective 19, Conservation areas and Village Design Statements (again referred to in Objective 19).

A large number of the subsequent objectives are beyond our remit as a Parish Council but we welcome the emphasis on housing set out in Objectives 20-24

**Turning to the Scenarios – our views are as follows**

Scenario 1 - Hierarchal approach

Current method and therefore everyone understands it, it has worked well in the past. Good to have most new houses near to services whilst accepting some have to go in the larger villages.  Keeps development contained and doesn’t lead to an urban sprawl.

Scenario 2 - Main Service Centres Focus - building to be more around Carterton, Witney and Chipping Norton

Good that housing will be near services, shops, public transport especially for young and the elderly.  Carterton wants to grow.  It leaves swathes of green land around the service centres for all to enjoy.  Enables Carterton to grow to have its own identity.  Less car journeys.

Scenario 3  Witney Focus

Good for services and access for people both young and old, leaves greener spaces around for everyone to enjoy – costs are kept down and reduces transport along already congested roads

Scenario 4 Carterton Focus

Carterton is a young town – needs and welcomes more housing as it gives it more of a sense of place and more housing means more income which means they can provide better amenities

Scenario 5 - Dispersed Growth –

This could lead to the district being covered in housing and no distinction between the character of different places. Lack of green space losing eco diversity and historic landscapes.

We think the exclusion of South Leigh and High Cogges from 5.45 is the correct view.

Scenario 6 - Village cluster – this is where two villages or more merge by infilling between them. We think that the definition of cluster should have had an explanation on the intent and maybe the use of the word "cluster" needs changing. The officers explained that clusters meant sharing of facilities. This happens naturally with villages however they retain their identity. Interpretation and understanding of what is meant needs to be clearer when the idea is present in consultations. Further we would need to know what provision for a consultation and or vote would be provided to any village potentially identified as a part of a cluster.

It still remains our belief that this will cause the following;

Loss of individual character, falling out between the two villages – "them and us scenario" – covering green space – urbanisation and housing creep.

We agree that it would be wholly inappropriate to include South Leigh and High Cogges in any attempt at clustering.

Scenario 7 New Settlement - One site taking most of the new housing – as in a new town/garden village

Very hard on whichever community it encompasses – using untouched green land – slow to deliver. People wanting new homes and affordable homes have to wait even longer.  A big site could take 10 years to build out with all the accompanying disruptions and traffic chaos.   Covers yet more of the countryside and green space.

8. Public Transport hubs

We rather agree with the tentative way this was dealt with on the slides that were presented to the parish councils on the meeting on 18th October.

Our concern for the parish is that if the railway was built it could encourage a Gladman type development of thousands of houses near or accessible to a station. We want to protect the village from growing beyond its current size and/or disappearing as an identity.

This plan would also encourage we think development along the A40 and the likelihood of the land between Eynsham, South Leigh, Witney and Carterton becoming just one long sprawling development.

However we agree that it might address some of the congestion issues between Witney and Oxford.

On the current proposals with the railway we are concerned with a number of issues – the bowing of the route towards the village leaving a piece of the parish isolated between rail and A40; the crossing of the Barnard Gate Road-which could be addressed by closing that to vehicular traffic and the proximity of the route to High Cogges.

We are also concerned that a local plan could be based on prospective and perhaps speculative and currently unfunded projects of the Cotswold line and the Yarnton to Carterton railway.

On the railway we rather echo what the study by Cadenza said about the question marks over the delivery time which whilst saying It is believed that the first phase of railway would be delivered by 2031, the time scales for delivery “are dependent on assumptions about the time to develop the designs, the consultation approach, planning and procurement strategies, and the availability of funding.”

And we note from the preliminary strategic outline case for the Carterton-Witney-Oxford Rail Corridor (CWORC) which was commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council, following proposals from the [Witney Oxford Transport Group](https://witneyoxfordtransport.org.uk/). The aim was to establish if there is a strategic need for the proposed railway line and to give an indication of the likely investment required. The study has shown that building a rail link would be feasible and could be justified in transport strategy terms *but identifies a number of planning and environmental issues. It also warns about the high financial cost and difficulty involved in undertaking such a project a*nd *it would therefore be a long-term project and would also depend on other rail improvements being funded and completed, including the planned upgrade to the North Cotswold Line.*

However we compliment the imagination and reach of the scheme, we are open to engage discussion which would we hope address the concerns of the parish and we await further talks with Cllr Maynard.

SLHCPC

1st November 2023

1. Tara Hayek to Chair of SLHCPC 10th October 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Chris Hargreaves – Meeting with Parish Councils – 18th October 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Simon Jenkins – see Country Life editorial repeating suggestion – October 18th 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. CPRE Response on the Local Plan 2041 Focused consultation on Ideas and Objectives – 24th October 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)