

# **Steventon Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2031**

**A report to Vale of White Horse District Council on  
the Steventon Neighbourhood Development Plan**

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## **Executive Summary**

- 1 I was appointed by the Vale of White Horse District Council in February 2024 to carry out the independent examination of the Steventon Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2 The examination was undertaken by way of written representations. I visited the neighbourhood area on 19 March 2024.
- 3 The Plan is a good example of a neighbourhood plan. It includes a variety of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. It includes policies on environmental and landscape issues and to safeguard community facilities.
- 4 The Plan has been underpinned by community support and engagement. All sections of the community have been engaged in its preparation.
- 5 Subject to a series of recommended modifications set out in this report, I have concluded that the Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.
- 6 I recommend that the referendum area should coincide with the neighbourhood area.

**Andrew Ashcroft**  
**Independent Examiner**  
**17 June 2024**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the Steventon Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2031 ('the Plan').
- 1.2 The Plan was submitted to Vale of White Horse District Council (VWHDC) by Steventon Parish Council (SPC) in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012, 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2023. The NPPF continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.
- 1.4 The role of an independent examiner is clearly defined in the legislation. I have been appointed to examine whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions and Convention Rights and other statutory requirements. It is not within my remit to examine or to propose an alternative plan, or a potentially more sustainable plan except where this arises indirectly from my recommended modifications to ensure that the plan meets the basic conditions and the other relevant requirements.
- 1.5 A neighbourhood plan can be narrow or broad in scope and can include whatever range of policies it sees as appropriate to its designated neighbourhood area. The submitted Plan has been designed to be distinctive in general terms, and to be complementary to the existing development plan. It seeks to provide a context in which the neighbourhood area can maintain its character and appearance, and safeguard identified community facilities.
- 1.6 Within the context set out above, this report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the basic conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.
- 1.7 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case and that referendum results in a positive outcome, the Plan would then be used to determine planning applications within the neighbourhood area and will sit as part of the wider development plan.

## **2 The Role of the Independent Examiner**

- 2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.
- 2.2 I was appointed by VWHDC, with the consent of SPC, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of both VWHDC and SPC. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.
- 2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. In previous roles, I have 41 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level and more recently as an independent examiner. I have significant experience of undertaking other neighbourhood plan examinations and health checks. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral System.

### *Examination Outcomes*

- 2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:
- (a) that the Plan as submitted should proceed to a referendum; or
  - (b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
  - (c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.
- 2.5 The outcome of the examination is set out in Section 8 of this report.

### *Other examination matters*

- 2.6 In examining the Plan, I am required to check whether:
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
  - the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and
  - the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.
- 2.7 I have addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.6 of this report and am satisfied that they have been met.

### 3 Procedural Matters

- 3.1 In undertaking this examination I have considered the following documents:
- the submitted Plan.
  - the seven appendices.
  - the Basic Conditions Statement.
  - the Consultation Statement.
  - the SEA/HRA screening reports (June 2020).
  - the representations made to the Plan.
  - SPC's responses to the clarification note.
  - the adopted Vale of White Horse District Local Plan Parts 1 and 2.
  - the Vale of White Horse Local Development Scheme (September 2023)
  - the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023).
  - Planning Practice Guidance.
  - relevant Ministerial Statements.
- 3.2 I visited the neighbourhood area on 19 March 2024. I looked at its overall character and appearance and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan in particular.
- 3.3 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations made to the submitted plan, I concluded that the Plan could be examined by way of written representations. I was assisted in this process by the comprehensive nature of many of the representations and the way in which the Plan has been developed.
- 3.4 The NPPF was updated in December 2023 after the Plan had been submitted. For clarity I have assessed the Plan against the December 2023 version of the NPPF for the way in which it has regard to national policy.

## 4 Consultation

### *Consultation Process*

- 4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such the regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended), SPC prepared a Consultation Statement. It is proportionate to the neighbourhood area and its policies. It sets out key findings in a concise report. Tables 1 and 2 summarise very effectively the approach which SPC took on consultation and engagement as the Plan was being prepared.
- 4.3 Section 3.2 of the Statement provides specific details on the consultation processes that took place on the pre-submission version of the Plan (October to November 2021).
- 4.4 The Statement also provides the details of the ways in which the Plan was refined because of this process and the detailed comments made by SODC. This helps to describe the way in which the Plan evolved.
- 4.5 I am satisfied that consultation has been an important element of the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation. From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I can see that the Plan has promoted an inclusive approach to seeking the opinions of all concerned throughout the process. VWHDC has carried out its own assessment that the consultation process has complied with the requirements of the Regulations.

### *Consultation Responses*

- 4.6 Consultation on the submitted plan was undertaken by VWHDC. It ended on 1 February 2024. This exercise generated representations from the following organisations:
- Vale of White Horse District Council
  - Network Rail
  - Thames Water
  - Natural England
  - National Gas
  - National Grid
  - Gleeson Land Limited
  - Oxfordshire County Council
- 4.7 Comments were also received from a parishioner.

- 4.8 I have taken account of all the representations in preparing this report. Where it is appropriate to do so, I refer to specific representations on a policy-by-policy basis.

## 5 The Neighbourhood Area and the Development Plan Context

### *The Neighbourhood Area*

- 5.1 The neighbourhood area is the parish of Steventon. Its population in 2011 was 1485 persons living in 663 households. It was designated as a neighbourhood area on 16 November 2015. It lies on the south side of the Thames Valley, three miles west of Didcot and four miles south of Abingdon.
- 5.2 The village is based around the junction of Abingdon Road and Hanney Road. The GWR line runs through the southern part of the village in an east to west direction. The ancient Causeway, the old village centre and the Ginge Brook run from south-west to north-east. The Causeway intersects the High Street at right angles and runs for nearly one mile from the church at the south-western edge of the village towards Milton to the north-east. The village has two separate conservation areas.
- 5.3 The remainder of the parish is primarily in agricultural use. To the west of the village there is a significant solar farm (to the north of Hanney Road) and a self-storage facility (to the south of Hanney Road)/

### *Development Plan Context*

- 5.4 The Vale of White Horse Local Plan (Part 1): Strategic Sites and Policies was adopted in December 2016. It sets out the basis for future development in the District up to 2031. All the policies in this part of the Local Plan are strategic policies of the development plan. The Vale of White Horse Local Plan (Part 2): Detailed Policies and Additional Sites was adopted in October 2019. It is this broader development plan context against which I am required to examine the submitted Neighbourhood Plan.
- 5.5 The following policies in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 are particularly relevant to the submitted Plan:

Core Policy 3	Settlement Hierarchy
Core Policy 7	Providing Supporting Infrastructure and Services
Core Policy 37	Design and Local Distinctiveness
Core Policy 39	The Historic Environment
Core Policy 40	Sustainable Design and Construction
Core Policy 44	Landscape
Core Policy 45	Green Infrastructure

In addition, the following policies in the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 are particularly relevant to the submitted Plan:

Development Policy 23	Impact of Development on Amenity
Development Policy 37	Conservation Areas

- 5.6 Steventon is identified as a Larger Village within the Abingdon and Oxford Fringe Sub-Area in Local Plan Part 1 (Core Policy 3). Larger Villages are the third of four sets of



settlements in the local hierarchy and are defined as settlements with a more limited range of employment, services, and facilities. Core Policy 3 comments that unallocated development will be limited to providing for local needs and to support employment, services, and facilities within local communities.

- 5.7 The Basic Conditions Statement usefully highlights the key policies in the development plan and how they relate to policies in the submitted Plan. It provides confidence to all concerned that the submitted Plan sits within its local planning policy context. The submitted Plan has been prepared within its wider development plan context. In doing so it has relied on up-to-date information and research that has underpinned existing planning policy documents. This is good practice and reflects key elements in Planning Practice Guidance on this matter.
- 5.8 VWHDC is working with South Oxfordshire District Council on a Joint Local Plan for the two districts. Once adopted it will replace the existing development plans. The Local Development Scheme (September 2023) anticipates that the emerging Plan will be adopted in December 2025.

*Visit to the neighbourhood area*

- 5.9 I visited the neighbourhood area on 19 March 2024. I approached it from the A34 to the east. This helped me to understand its position in the wider landscape in general and its accessibility to the strategic road network.
- 5.10 I looked initially at High Street. I saw the Co-op store, the veterinary surgery, the Cherry Tree public house and the Fox Inn.
- 5.11 I then looked at the green areas around the junction of High Street, Hanney Road and Abingdon Road. I also saw the significance of the Village Hall. I looked at the various interesting buildings around The Green.
- 5.12 I took the opportunity to walk along The Causeway to the west up to the railway line. In doing so I saw the attractive open space and allotments to the north. I then saw the importance of the Primary School and the North Star PH. I looked at the interesting collection of timber-framed buildings opposite the School.
- 5.13 I walked on beyond the railway line to the Church. I saw that the part of the village to the south of the railway line had a more open character than that to the north of the railway line. I walked back into the main part of the village along Castle Street and Stocks Lane.
- 5.14 I then drove into the residential areas off Hanney Road. I saw the way in which the modern houses off Barnett Road had been incorporated into the wider village.
- 5.15 I then drove to the west along the Hanney Road to the Storage Depot.

- 5.16 I left the neighbourhood area on the B4017 and drove to Drayton and Abingdon. This part of the visit helped me to understand the relationship between the various settlements.

## 6 The Neighbourhood Plan and the Basic Conditions

- 6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted neighbourhood plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped in the preparation of this section of the report. It is an informative and well-presented document.
- 6.2 As part of this process, I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:
- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
  - contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
  - be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan in the area;
  - not breach, and otherwise be compatible with, the assimilated obligations of EU legislation (as consolidated in the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 (Consequential Amendment) Regulations 2023; and
  - not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

I assess the Plan against the basic conditions under the following headings:

### *National Planning Policies and Guidance*

- 6.3 For the purposes of this examination, the key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework December 2023 (NPPF).
- 6.4 The NPPF sets out a range of land-use planning principles to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following are particularly relevant to the Steventon Neighbourhood Development Plan:
- a plan-led system - in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031;
  - building a strong, competitive economy;
  - recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving local communities;
  - taking account of the different roles and characters of different areas;
  - highlighting the importance of high-quality design and good standards of amenity for all future occupants of land and buildings; and
  - conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.
- 6.5 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 13 of the NPPF indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic

needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.

- 6.6 In addition to the NPPF I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy, including Planning Practice Guidance and the recent ministerial statements.
- 6.7 Having considered all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance subject to the recommended modifications in this report. It sets out a positive vision for the future of the neighbourhood area. It includes a series of policies on development and environmental matters. It recognises the importance of the commercial facilities in the village centre, and its community facilities
- 6.8 At a more practical level, the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraph 16d). This was reinforced with the publication of Planning Practice Guidance. Paragraph ID: 41-041-20140306 indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. Policies should also be concise, precise, and supported by appropriate evidence.
- 6.9 As submitted the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. Most of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan fully accords with national policy.

*Contributing to sustainable development*

- 6.10 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the contribution that the submitted Plan makes to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social, and environmental. The submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. In the economic dimension, the Plan includes a policy for new residential development (Policy 1). In the social dimension, it includes policies on community facilities (Policy 2b) and on transport and connectivity (Policy 3). In the environmental dimension, the Plan positively seeks to protect its natural, built, and historic environment. It has four policies on landscape and environmental matters (Policies 4a to 4d). This assessment overlaps with the details on this matter in the submitted Basic Conditions Statement.

*General conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan*

- 6.11 I have already commented in detail on the development plan context in the District in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of this report.
- 6.12 I consider that the submitted Plan delivers a local dimension to this strategic context and supplements the detail already included in the adopted development plan. Subject

to the recommended modifications in this report, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan.

#### *Strategic Environmental Assessment*

- 6.13 The Neighbourhood Plan (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 require a qualifying body either to submit an environmental report prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 or a statement of reasons why an environmental report is not required.
- 6.14 In order to comply with this requirement, VWHDC undertook a screening exercise in June 2020 on the need or otherwise for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be prepared for the Plan. The report is thorough and well-constructed. It concludes that the Plan is unlikely to have a significant effect on the environment and therefore does not require a Strategic Environment Assessment.

#### *Habitats Regulations Assessment*

- 6.15 VWHDC also prepared a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan at the same time. It assesses the potential impact of the Plan's policies on the following protected sites:
- Cothill Fen SAC;
  - Hackpen Hill SAC;
  - Little Wittenham SAC; and
  - Oxford Meadows SAC.
- 6.16 The HRA concludes that the neighbourhood plan will not give rise to likely significant effects on these protected sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, and that Appropriate Assessment is not required.
- 6.17 Having reviewed the information provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that a proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various regulations. None of the statutory consultees have raised any concerns regarding either neighbourhood plan obligations. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with this aspect of the regulations.

#### *Human Rights*

- 6.18 In a similar fashion I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. There has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. On this basis, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

### *Summary*

- 6.19 On the basis of my assessment of the Plan in this section of my report I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications contained in this report.

## 7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 7.1 This section of the report comments on the policies in the Plan. It makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that the various policies have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.
- 7.2 The recommendations focus on the policies in the Plan given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended changes to the associated supporting text.
- 7.3 I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan is fit for purpose. It is distinctive and proportionate to the Plan area. The wider community and SPC have spent time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that they wish to be included in their Plan. This sits at the heart of the localism agenda.
- 7.4 The Plan has been designed to reflect Planning Practice Guidance (ID:41-004-20190509) which indicates that neighbourhood plans should address the development and use of land.
- 7.5 I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted Plan.
- 7.6 For clarity, this section of the report comments on each of the policies in the Plan.
- 7.7 Where modifications are recommended to policies they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

### *The initial parts of the Plan (Sections 1 to 3)*

- 7.8 The Plan is well-organised and presented. It makes an appropriate distinction between the policies and their supporting text. The initial elements of the Plan set the scene for the policies. They are proportionate to the neighbourhood area and the subsequent policies.
- 7.9 The Foreword/Introduction define the Plan period and the neighbourhood area (in Figure 1). The Plan period indicated on the front cover of the Plan (2030) differs from that used elsewhere in the Plan (2031). I recommend that this tension is resolved by modifying the Plan period on the front cover to 2031. That date coincides with the plan period for the Local Plan.

### *On the front cover replace '2022 to 2030' with '2022 to 2031'*

- 7.10 The Introduction also comments about:
- the wider planning system;
  - the location and history of the parish; and
  - the way in which the Plan was prepared.
- 7.11 Section 2 sets out the vision and objectives for the Plan. It makes a strong functional relationship between the various issues and, in several cases, they set a useful context for the resulting policies. The Vision neatly summarises the approach taken as follows:

*‘Continue as a thriving village and to protect and enhance our rural heritage and natural environment by supporting high quality sustainable development which meets the needs of residents at different stages in their lives, conserves natural resources and improves biodiversity.’*

- 7.12 Section 3 comments about the broader concept of sustainable development. It also sets out a strategy for the Plan.
- 7.13 The remainder of this section of the report addresses each policy in turn in the context set out in paragraphs 7.5 to 7.7 of this report.

Policy 1 - Housing design and character

- 7.14 This is an important policy. It seeks to shape the continuing evolution of the village by ensuring appropriate design and layout of any additions to reflect the dominant characteristics of the Parish, its heritage, local styles and particularly its conservation area. It has three related elements
- 7.15 The elements of the policy indicate that residential development proposals will be supported. Whilst this is a positive approach to the matter, the policy fails to acknowledge that other factors may affect the outcome of planning applications. As such, I recommend that the policy sets out requirements for residential development rather than offering support for such development. I also recommend that the second part of the policy relates to all residential proposals and not simply to large-scale proposals.
- 7.16 Finally, I recommend the deletion of the reference to the Design Guide in the policy as one has not been produced.
- 7.17 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

**Replace the policy with:**

**‘Development proposals should make a positive contribution to the village character through innovative design which has been tailored to the local area and has had regard to the Steventon Character Appraisal.**

**The layout and massing of residential development proposals should respond positively to the historic grain of development within the existing village.**

**Development proposals should demonstrate that detailed consideration has been given to the balance of built form and green infrastructure. Where practicable, development proposals which deliver beyond the minimum open space requirement set out in Development Policy 33: Open Space of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 2 will be supported.’**



### Policy 2a – Local Facilities and Economy

- 7.18 This policy responds to the range of facilities in the village centre and their importance to the community. It comments that proposals that support the village centre by diversifying and enhancing the range of local shops and related commercial services for the local community will be encouraged.
- 7.19 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach to this matter and has regard to Section 6 of the NPPF. However, I recommend that it is modified so that it better explains its purpose and uses wording more suited to a development plan document. In this context ‘encouraged’ has little weight in the development management process.
- 7.20 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

**Replace the policy with: ‘Proposals that would consolidate the role of the village centre by diversifying and enhancing the range of local shops and related commercial services for the local community will be supported.’**

### Policy 2b – Protection of existing community facilities

- 7.21 The policy seeks to protect community facilities. In doing so it acknowledges their local importance.
- 7.22 The policy advises that development proposals that will result in either the loss or significant harm to a community facility will not be supported, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the operation of the asset, or the ongoing delivery of the community value of the asset is no longer financially viable, it is surplus to requirements or it will be replaced by a facility of at least equivalent value, utility, and ease to the local community.
- 7.23 In the round I am satisfied that the policy takes a positive approach to these matters and has regard to Section 8 of the NPPF. It recognises the importance of community facilities on the one hand, whilst acknowledging that their use and/or viability may change in the Plan period on the other hand.
- 7.24 As such, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

### Policy 3 – Transport and Connectivity

- 7.25 This policy comments about transport and connectivity. It has two related elements. The first is that development proposals should ensure that any significant impacts from the development on the transport network or on highway safety, can be effectively mitigated. The second is that new development should maximise opportunities to walk and cycle, including between Steventon and neighbouring villages.
- 7.26 In general the policy takes a positive approach to these matters. It seeks to address the accessibility issues highlighted in Section 7 of the Plan.

- 7.27 I recommend two modifications to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. The first is to the specific wording in the first part of the policy. The second will allow VWHDC to apply the second part of the policy where it is practicable to do so, and on a proportionate basis.
- 7.28 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

**In the first part of the policy replace ‘significant’ with ‘unacceptable’**

**At the beginning of the second part of the policy insert: ‘Wherever practicable, and as appropriate to their scale, nature, and location,’**

Policy 4(a) – Landscape and Environment

- 7.29 This is the first of four policies on landscape and environmental matters. In this case it has a general application. It advises that as appropriate to their scale and nature development proposals will be supported where they meet a series of criteria.
- 7.30 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach which has regard to Section 15 of the NPPF. The criteria are appropriate and locally-distinctive
- 7.31 In this wider context, I recommend that the policy sets out requirements for development proposals rather than offering support. This acknowledges that other development plan policies will have a bearing on the outcomes of planning applications. I also recommend grammatical changes to the criteria so that they flow more naturally from the opening element of the policy. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

**Replace the opening element of the policy with: ‘As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should respond positively to the following principles:’**

**In the first and third criteria replace ‘It’ with ‘They’**

Policy 4(b) – Landscape and Environment - Biodiversity

- 7.32 This policy continues the landscape and environment theme. In this case its focus is on biodiversity. It comments that as appropriate to their scale and location development proposals should maintain and enhance the local biodiversity including the maintenance and creation of wildlife corridors.
- 7.33 The policy takes a positive response to this matter and has regard to Section 15 of the NPPF. It carefully avoids repeating national policy on biodiversity net gain. In this context, I recommend the deletion of the unnecessary reference to Section 15 of the NPPF in the second part of the policy. I also recommend that the second part of the policy is modified to acknowledge that a detailed environmental survey will not always be needed.

- 7.34 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

**Delete ‘having regard to the requirements of section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework’**

**At the beginning of the second part of the policy insert ‘Where appropriate,’**

Policy 4(c) - Landscape and Environment – Views and Vistas

- 7.35 This policy continues the landscape and environment theme. In this case its focus is on views and vistas. It advises that development proposals which would have an unacceptable impact on the local character of an identified important view (as set out in Appendix 5) will not be supported.
- 7.36 I am satisfied that the six views and vistas identified are appropriate. Appendix 5 has been prepared in a proportionate way and the views help to define the character and appearance of the parish.
- 7.37 As submitted, the policy has a negative format. In this context, I recommend that an additional element is incorporated into the policy to set out the requirements for development proposals. This will acknowledge that the identification of views is not a barrier to appropriate development coming forward.
- 7.38 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

**At the beginning of the policy (as a separate element) insert:**

**‘The layout, design, and massing of development proposals should respond positively to the identified important views (as set out in Appendix 5).’**

Policy 4 (d) - Landscape and Environment – Flooding

- 7.39 This policy continues the landscape and environment theme. In this case its focus is on flooding
- 7.40 It comments that as appropriate to their scale and nature development proposals will be supported provided where it is demonstrated that proposed sustainable drainage infrastructure is appropriate to the specific drainage and groundwater conditions of the development site
- 7.41 I recommend that the policy sets out requirements for development proposals rather than offering support. I also recommend specific modifications to the wording used to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

**Replace the policy with: ‘As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should incorporate sustainable drainage which is**

**appropriate to the specific drainage and groundwater conditions of the site concerned.'**

#### Monitoring and Review

- 7.42 Section 9 of the Plan addresses the monitoring and review process in a positive way. This is best practice.
- 7.43 Section 5 of this report has commented about the relationship between the submitted Plan and the emerging Joint Local Plan for the District and South Oxfordshire District. The current Local Development Scheme anticipates the adoption of that Plan in December 2025. Given the importance of the adoption of the emerging plan on the planning policy context in the neighbourhood area, I recommend that Section 9 of the Plan is expanded so that it provides guidance to residents and the development industry alike about the way in which the Plan will respond to the adoption of that Plan.
- 7.44 The recommended wording has been designed to recognise that where there is a conflict between different elements of the development plan, the conflict must be resolved in favour of the policy which is contained in the last document to become part of the development plan. Plainly a review of a made Plan will have the ability to keep its contents up-to-date and to be aligned to the wider development plan throughout the Plan period.

*Include an additional paragraph (107) to read:*

*'The eventual adoption of the Joint Local Plan (currently anticipated to be December 2025) could bring forward important changes to local planning policy. In this context the Parish Council will assess the need or otherwise for a full or partial review of the neighbourhood plan within six months of the adoption of that Plan.'*

#### Other Matters - General

- 7.45 This report has recommended a series of modifications both to the policies and to the supporting text in the submitted Plan. Where consequential changes to the text are required directly because of my recommended modification to the policy concerned, I have highlighted them in this report. However other changes to the general text may be required elsewhere in the Plan because of the recommended modifications to the policies. Similarly, changes may be necessary to paragraph numbers in the Plan or to accommodate other administrative matters. It will be appropriate for VWHDC and SPC to have the flexibility to make any necessary consequential changes to the general text. I recommend accordingly.

*Modification of general text to achieve consistency with the modified policies and to accommodate any administrative and technical changes.*

#### Other Matters – Specific

- 7.46 VWHDC has made a series of helpful comments on the Plan. I have included them in the recommended modifications on a policy-by-policy basis where they are required to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions.

- 7.47 I also recommend a general modification to the text of the Plan based on VWHDC's comments insofar as they are necessary to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions. In the main, they relate to factual corrections and typographic errors. For clarity I use the reference numbers in the VWHDC's representation.

*The incorporation of the suggested changes to the general elements of the Plan as suggested by VWHDC other than items 1, 8, 13 (which have already been addressed in this report) and item 29 (which is not necessary to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions).*

## 8 Summary and Conclusions

### *Summary*

- 8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2031. It is distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community to safeguard the character and setting of the neighbourhood area and its heritage assets.
- 8.2 Following the independent examination of the Plan, I have concluded that the Steventon Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.

### *Conclusion*

- 8.3 On the basis of the findings in this report, I recommend to Vale of White Horse District Council that, subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report, the Steventon Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed to referendum.

### *Other Matters*

- 8.4 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood area. In my view, the neighbourhood area is entirely appropriate for this purpose and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved by the District Council on 16 November 2015.
- 8.5 I am grateful to everyone who has helped in any way to ensure that this examination has run in a smooth manner. The responses to the clarification note were detailed and informative.

**Andrew Ashcroft**  
**Independent Examiner**  
**17 June 2024**