

6. EMPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION

Objections 294/459, 460, 578/1237

Issues

- (a) Whether the plan’s approach to the provision of employment land conflicts with that taken to the provision of housing.
- (b) Whether the plan should encourage the provision of sheltered workshops.

Conclusions

6.1 I set out my conclusions regarding the housing strategy and the location of new housing (Policies H4 to H10) in Chapter 5. My recommendations regarding those policies will have implications for the policies in this chapter principally relating to the classification of settlements and the re-use of buildings.

6.2 The general strategy relating to the location of new employment is set out in the Council’s Employment Topic Paper (*CD1/104*). The approach is similar to the housing strategy in that a significant proportion of new employment land is directed to Witney and, in the rural area, new growth is to take place on the edge of the key service centres.

6.3 Outside the allocations in Policy E1, new estates are directed by Policy E2 to group C settlements. My recommendation R5.18 splits group C settlements and includes the key service centres in a new group D. However, limiting the provision of new industrial estates to group C and D settlements would accord with the employment strategy as set out in paragraph 3.1 of *CD1/104* and be generally consistent with the housing strategy. (1237) I shall recommend that policy E2 be amended accordingly. This approach would comply with the aims of PPG13 and PPS7 although I do not consider that the restrictions in Policy E2 should apply to Witney. There is no duly made objection in this regard but I would urge the Council to look carefully at the role of Witney and the other key service centres when preparing their core strategy DPD.

6.4 I say in paragraph 5.104 that smaller group B settlements (redefined as group A in Figure 5.2, as recommended to be modified) should accommodate only limited development. This in part is due to poor public transport accessibility and I consider the same principle should apply to employment. However, provided Figure 5.2 is modified as I recommend, there is no need to modify the settlement category in the second paragraph of policy E3 or to delete the second part of paragraph 1.11. (1237) The first paragraph should be modified to include groups B, C and D.

6.5 Amendment no. 141 addresses the concern of one objector that the plan should acknowledge that increasing numbers of people work from home. (459) Sheltered workshops are not specifically referred to in the plan but would not be precluded as the first objective under paragraph 1.15 seeks to provide a diversity of job opportunities. (460)

RECOMMENDATIONS

6.6 R6.1 Make no modification to the plan with respect to the inclusion of a reference to sheltered workshops.

6.7 R6.2 Make no modification to paragraph 6.1.11.

POLICY E1 – EMPLOYMENT ALLOCATIONS – OMISSIONS

ENSTONE AIRFIELD

Objection 522/833

Issue

Whether Enstone Airfield should be identified in the plan as a specific employment allocation.

Conclusions

6.8 Enstone Airfield is identified as Employment Proposal 1 in the adopted local plan and there is an inset proposals map. It may well be that the site is not yet fully developed but the council maintain that the capacity is primarily through extensions to existing businesses or redevelopment which is covered by policy E7.

6.9 I have indicated elsewhere that it is not normal practice to include sites as ‘proposals’ in a plan once they have planning permission, let alone are substantially developed. Unless there is a sizeable area without permission there is nothing to be gained by identifying it in the plan. Apart from that, much has changed since the last plan and it would not accord with the structure plan, or national planning guidance, to focus new employment development in a rural location such as Enstone.

RECOMMENDATION

6.10 R6.3 Make no modification to the plan in respect of Enstone Airfield.

EXTENSION TO NORTH LEIGH BUSINESS PARK

Objection 171/279

Issues

- (a) The appropriateness of an allocation of this size on the edge of a ‘category B’ settlement;
- (b) The effect of further development on the landscape.

Conclusions

6.11 Issue a. The objection seeks an allocation to the north of the existing North Leigh Business Park. The site has been reduced in size slightly to 1 ha. on an enclosed area which is not in agricultural use. North Leigh is included in figure 5.2 as a ‘category B’ village and thus policy E2 does not apply.

6.12 The approach taken in developing the employment strategy in the plan, as explained in *CD1/104*, is to concentrate employment development in those towns and larger villages with the greatest range of services and facilities and the best public transport services. Such an approach accords with the guidance in PPG13 and the County Structure Plan. I think it significant that there is a high level of employment opportunity in West Oxfordshire with low unemployment rates and that, consequently, the emerging structure plan (policy E2) continues a policy of restraint outside the key centres. Indeed, the additional wording in amendments 144 and 145 in the revised deposit draft plan is a response to an objection by the County Planning Authority concerned that local plan policy E2 might permit too much employment development in smaller centres. I do not accept the objectors’ view that the hierarchical approach of settlement classification is only appropriate in deciding priority locations for housing development. It is equally as relevant for employment provision. It is entirely logical to focus new employment on the major centres.

6.13 Nevertheless, I agree with the objector that North Leigh is conveniently located relative to the Witney North East Development Area along the distributor road link to the A4095. Development here would, therefore, provide an alternative avoiding the need to travel across Witney. Public transport is, however, limited and there is, as yet, no bus service through the new estates. I agree with the council, based in the research they have done (*CD1/35&1/47*) that this site has the characteristics of a rural location where the majority of the workforce is likely to travel by car. The small number of jobs which would result from this allocation would not justify any change in public transport provision.

6.14 It also seems to me that the plan provides sufficient flexibility through policies E3 and E7 to enable the relocation and expansion of small businesses serving the rural area of the type described at the Inquiry, such as plumbers and taxi firms.

6.15 Overall, I support the restrictive approach taken to (B1) employment provision away from the key service centres and main villages. I am not convinced that there are sufficient grounds on the basis of local demand for an allocation to be made here contrary to the overall strategy and the structure plan policy of restraint.

6.16 Issue b. I accept that the tree planting to the north and east of the site has thickened since the last local plan Inquiry in 1996 and that additional screen planting could be carried out along the site perimeter. However, it remains a fact that this area is on ridge which is seen from distant vantage points to the north and thus may be regarded as sensitive in landscape terms. There are footpaths both to the north and east. I also consider that little weight should be given to the fenced off nature of the site and its state of disuse. The fact remains that an allocation would result in the encroachment of employment uses onto a green field site. It cannot be regarded as “rounding off”. Added to the policy considerations above I conclude that it would be wrong to make an allocation in this location.

RECOMMENDATION

6.17 R6.4 Make no modification to the plan in respect of land to the north of the North Leigh Business Park.

LAND ADJACENT TO DUCKLINGTON ROUNDABOUT (FORMER CARAVAN SITE)

Objection 505/767

Issues

- (a) The justification for an employment allocation on this site;
- (b) The effect of any employment development on the integrity of the open gap between Witney and Ducklington, subject to policy NE2.

Conclusions

6.18 Issue a. There is no dispute that the objection site is previously developed land in so far as it has been in use as a caravan site and the concrete hard standings are still in evidence. I understand that a permanent permission for such use was given on appeal in 1984.

6.19 It seems to me that there would be no policy objection, as such, to the employment use of the site because it is on the edge of Witney and within easy reach of a sizeable population by foot or by cycle, even if the direct bus service is limited. However, I do not consider that there would be any need to make a specific allocation because the site is below the size threshold of 1 ha. which might be permitted under the provisions of policy E2. The policy would permit a consideration of the overall supply of employment land in the locality.

6.20 Issue b. It is the effect any development here would have on the objectives of policy NE2 which seeks to retain a buffer area between the existing development around the roundabout and Ducklington. I agree that a lot of development has already taken place here with the service station and small shop to the north, motel to the east, A40 over bridge to the north and the edge of Ducklington village to the south. But this does not mean that the site is surrounded by existing development, rather it remains as the only relatively open sector on the south-western side of the roundabout and, with the extensive frontage hedgerows, it links visually to the allotments and open countryside to the south, on the western side of the A415.

6.21 The caravans have been gone for some time but I agree with the council that the permitted use for the site would be significantly less low key than the sizeable buildings which would inevitably result from an employment use, or for that matter any of the other more intensive uses suggested at the Inquiry (not in the duly-made objection). I, therefore, agree with the conclusions of those who have considered previous proposals for this site, including the last local plan inquiry Inspector, about the significance of this site in maintaining an open buffer between Ducklington, the A40 and Witney itself. Consequently, I consider it should remain subject to policy

NE2 in the plan with any development proposals considered against that and other applicable policies through the development control process. No allocation is warranted.

RECOMMENDATION

- 6.22 **R6.5 Make no modification to the plan in respect of the former caravan site to the south-west of the Ducklington roundabout which should remain subject to policy NE2.**

LAND AT BUCKLAND ROAD, BAMPTON

Objection 559/1072

Issues

- (a) The justification for an allocation in Bampton to improve the balance of population and local employment;
- (b) The locational characteristics of the objection site.

Conclusions

6.23 Issue a. The approach the council have taken to the identification of new sites for employment purposes is outlined in the topic paper *CDI/104*. As I indicate elsewhere, I think it significant that Oxfordshire is an area of restraint on employment provision because of the healthy employment position generally. There is no pressing need to provide more employment land although, clearly, there is an imbalance between housing and employment provision in certain localities.

6.24 Although the objector criticises the application of policy E2 it seems to me that this provides the opportunity for small sites (under 1 ha.) to be brought forward through the development control process which will assist in providing new employment opportunities in the more rural settlements. Bampton is included in the draft plan in category C and so the policy applies but it is significantly smaller than the key service centres and has fewer facilities and services. The local plan strategy does not look to make new housing allocations in such locations (I do not support Housing Proposal 5 partly because it would be inconsistent with the strategy) and I am in full agreement with the approach which puts new employment in those locations, such as Witney and Carterton, where most new housing development is expected to take place.

6.25 It is only since the publication of the draft plan that the council have granted planning permission for small-scale employment provision at Fairacres, a site closer than the objection site to the village. This should assist in meeting some of the local employment needs. In the circumstances, I do not consider that there is any justification for the allocation of the objection site in this plan.

6.26 Issue b. I recognise that the site is adjacent to a sewage works and opposite a floodlit all-weather pitch and sports pavilion with nursery buildings in the vicinity but it is some 440 m. from the centre of the village with no bus service past the site. Bus

services are hourly during the day between Bampton, Carterton, Witney and Oxford but it seems to me that the relative distance from the route to this site would almost certainly mean that the majority of employees would come by car. I, therefore, agree with the council that this would be less than an ideal location for significant employment provision.

RECOMMENDATION

6.27 R6.6 Make no modification to the plan in respect of the provision of an employment site off Buckland Road, Bampton.

LAND AT SOUTHFIELD, STANTON HARCOURT ROAD, EYNHAM

Objection 566/1097, 1099

Issues

- (a) Whether Eynsham is a sustainable location for additional employment.
- (b) Whether the omission site is a suitable location for development.

Conclusions

6.28 Policy E2 of the plan would allow the development of a small estate adjoining the village of up to 1ha. The Council accepted at the Inquiry that Eynsham is a sustainable settlement and a suitable location for new growth.

6.29 One of the objectives of the employment strategy is to maintain a reasonable balance between jobs and workforce within the District. The West Oxfordshire Business Directory (June 2004) lists 202 businesses in Eynsham employing 3211 people. The 2001 census shows that the numbers of people between 16 and 74 in employment in the village to be 2554. A crude analysis would seem to indicate that additional employment land would only exacerbate the existing imbalance.

6.30 However, if one applies the findings of ‘Reducing the need to travel’ (CD1/37) to all residents one can assume that only about a quarter of villagers work in the parish. This may be due to a number of factors including a mismatch between the skills needed by local companies and those on offer in the village. The Council conceded at the Inquiry that more choice may lead to fewer people commuting to Oxford and agreed that businesses contributed to the economic viability of the settlement.

6.31 The main employment area in the parish lies south of the village proper and is separated from it by open fields. The site adjoins an existing industrial estate and comprises a flat, open field which measures about 3.3ha. The existing utilitarian buildings have little to soften their impact and development of the omission site could incorporate a sympathetic planting scheme. However, whatever benefit may accrue would not outweigh the harm resulting from the expansion of the industrial estate into the open countryside.

6.32 Part of the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and the remainder contains cropmark features which are related to it. The objector argues that development would provide the opportunity for the Ancient Monument to be investigated. However, I see no reason why this could not be done anyway. To allocate this site before an investigation is carried out and the implications are known would conflict with the advice in PPG16.

6.33 To conclude, Eynsham is a sustainable and suitable location for new employment but my findings in this regard are outweighed by the adverse site specific consequences of development described above.

RECOMMENDATION

6.34 R6.7 Make no modification to the plan in respect to the allocation of land at Stanton Harcourt Road, Eynsham.

LAND NORTH OF NEW ROAD, BAMPTON

Objection 573/1143

This objection is considered in paragraphs 5.316-28 together with others concerning Housing Proposal 5.

EXTENSION TO THE LAKESIDE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, STANDLAKE

Objection 574/1144

Issues

(a) Whether special provision should be made in the plan by the allocation of the objection site for B2/B8 uses.

Conclusions

6.35 The objection seeks the allocation of the remaining 1.9 ha. of land within a much larger area of industrial uses, mainly within use classes B2 or B8. I agree that the site in question is highly contained within this industrial area and even though the south-western boundary is relatively open at present there is screen planting which will mature further over time. I am satisfied that the development of this remaining area would not result in any intrusion within the countryside. It is a very different site to the much larger area, including a separate area to the north-east, which was considered at the last Local Plan Inquiry. Development on adjacent land also appears to have continued since then, not always obviously in accordance with policies in the existing local plan. It is difficult to envisage that the land would have any positive use but for employment purposes.

6.36 I find myself in agreement with the objectors’ case that the site is particularly suitable for general employment and ‘bad neighbour uses’ in part because the access to the site, along the A415, does not pass through any residential areas. The plan makes no specific provision for this kind of use although the council maintain that the

Downs Road and Long Hanborough sites are suitable. The main disadvantage of this site is that it is not in a sustainable location in terms of its proximity to, or access by sustainable modes of transport from residential areas. It is 1 km. from the nearest houses in Standlake and 3 km. from the village centre. Standlake itself is also only a ‘group B’ village in the plan, not one where further employment development would normally be envisaged under the plan strategy. The nearest bus route, the hourly X15 between Witney and Abingdon, does not pass the site but turns towards Standlake about 400 m. to the north with no separate pedestrian way along the busy A415. I agree with the council that most employees would probably come by car, as they do now.

6.37 In general, I strongly support the priority the council have put on the allocation of sites only in the key service centres. I also agree that allocation is a form of encouragement to development. However, I think it important to ensure a full range of different employment opportunities and, if the use of this site were to be restricted to B2 and B8 uses it seems to me that it would meet a need which is not obviously catered for in the plan. I find the suggestion that development proposals might be considered ‘on merit’ to be unsatisfactory, especially as the criterion based policies E2, E3 and E7 do not obviously cater for this kind of site either. The fact that the effect on the countryside would be so minimal leads me to the view that an exception to the general approach might be made without seriously undermining the overall priority to seek sustainable locations.

RECOMMENDATION

6.38 R6.8 Modify policy E1 to include an additional site for 1.9 ha. at the Lakeside Industrial Estate, Standlake, restricted to B2 and B8 uses only, with consequent amendments to the supporting text and proposals map.

CHARLBURY QUARRY, CHARLBURY

Objection 579/1251

This objection is considered in chapter 5 of this report together with objection 1252 which seeks an housing or mixed use allocation on this site, see paragraphs 5.122-33. My recommendation (R5.24) is that the site should remain named under policy E1 but there is a consequential amendment to paragraph 6.2.2.

CROMWELL PARK, CHIPPING NORTON

There is an inconsistency in the approach taken to the mixed use allocation at Cromwell Park in that the former highways depôt is shown on the deposit plan proposals map (Inset No. 1) as a B1 allocation but it is not listed under policy E1. As I do not recommend that the site be subsumed within a larger mixed use area my recommendation 5.29 is that the site be listed under policy E1.

GROVES TIMBER YARD, MILTON-UNDER WYCHWOOD

Although there are no objections to this allocation the Council will note that I recommend the deletion of Housing Proposal 4 (R5.23) because the site is under development. As employment uses on the timber yard already exist there appears to be little point in the inclusion of the site under policy E1. However, it seems to be that paragraph 5.3.24 contains the essence of a site-specific policy.

POLICY E2 – NEW EMPLOYMENT SITES IN TOWNS AND LARGER VILLAGES

Objections 577/1210, 510/3368, 511/3610, 84/3622

Issues

(a) Whether amendment no. 145 would prevent an adequate supply of employment land being provided in Chipping Norton.

(b) Should there be a strong statement that land allocated for employment uses will not later be reallocated for residential development?

Conclusions

6.39 The closure of the Parker Knoll factory in Chipping Norton led the council to re-appraise the balance of the housing and employment elements within the mixed use site at Cromwell Park (PIC 5.5) (see paragraphs 5.139-49). In addition, the Council have resolved to permit a redevelopment of the Parker Knoll factory which would include 2ha for employment use.

6.40 P A Turney argue that there is insufficient employment land in Chipping Norton. However, in support of the proposed allocation of their site in Station Road for housing, they contend that there is employment land available in the town (paragraph 5.192). There is little evidence to support either claim but if it is shown that there is a shortfall, Policy E2 allows for the provision of additional employment land. (3368, 3610)

6.41 Amendment no. 144 addresses the concerns of the County Council. (1210) Unless it can be shown that it would conflict with PPG3, the Council’s housing strategy or that there is a need for employment land, PPG3 (*Supporting the Delivery of New Housing, January 2005*) encourages the redevelopment of employment sites for housing. A statement that land allocated for employment would not be used for housing would undermine this objective. (3622)

RECOMMENDATION

6.42 **R6.9 Modify Policy E2 by inserting ‘and D’ in the parentheses in the first sentence of the policy.**

6.43 **R6.10 Make no modification to paragraph 2.5 (amendment no. 145).**

POLICY E3 – INDIVIDUAL PREMISES

Objections 559/1073, 644/1494

Issue

Whether the policy is unduly restrictive.

Conclusions

6.44 Policy E6 of the Structure Plan directs employment sites to appropriate locations and says nothing about whether they should be in or outside settlements. However the Structure Plan, like this plan, was written before the publication of PPS7. PPS7 advises that plans should make provision for limited development in, or next to, rural settlements which are not designated as rural service centres.

6.45 I see little difference in terms of sustainability between a site in or on the edge of group B, C or D settlement as defined in the modified Figure 5.2. Indeed, the ‘mixed use’ allocations at North Curbridge, Woodstock and Chipping Norton all lie on the edge of the existing settlements. Issues of visual impact are dealt with by other policies. In addition, there may be good reasons, particularly relating to residential amenity, why an employment use should not be located within a settlement. As drafted, I consider that the policy is unduly restrictive and I recommend that it be modified in line with the advice PPS7. (1073)

6.46 Northmoor Parish Council are concerned that whilst it is very difficult to secure planning permission for a house in the village it seems far easier for businesses to expand. My recommendation with regard to this policy will not affect Northmoor because there is no distinction in the draft plan between group A villages and the open countryside. I am satisfied that the second part of policy E3, which deals with small villages and the open countryside, accords with national guidance. (1494)

RECOMMENDATION

6.47 R6.11 Modify the first paragraph of Policy E3 by indicating that the development of new sites will be allowed ‘within or next to settlements listed in group B, C and D in Figure 5.2 in Chapter 5’.

POLICY E5 – RE-USE OF NON-VERNACULAR FARM BUILDINGS

Objections 509/778, 589/1325, 595/1370, 589/3448

Issues

- (a) Whether the policy should refer to rural rather than farm diversification.
- (b) Whether the word ‘genuine’ is ambiguous, hard to define and unnecessary for the intent of the policy.
- (c) Does the policy conflict with advice in PPS7 regarding the visual impact of buildings?

(d) Would requiring applicants to demonstrate that a building was erected to serve an agricultural need before permitting a re-use be an unreasonable burden?

Conclusions

6.48 The policy addresses the re-use of farm buildings and it is not clear what is meant by rural diversification. Farm rather than rural diversification is the term used in PPS7 and is more generally understood. (778) However, the plan should reflect the advice in PPS7 regarding the importance of non agricultural activity to the viability of many farm enterprises.

6.49 I agree that ‘genuine’ is ambiguous and I do not agree with the Council (CDI/27) that it serves any useful purpose. (1325) I note that genuine appears in Policy E3(b) and I suggest it is deleted there also.

6.50 PPS7 advises that account should be taken of the impact on the countryside of the re-use of rural buildings and I do not consider that criterion (a) (amendment no. 146) goes further than that. (1370) Any proposal to erect a new agricultural building will be subject to prior notification procedure or require planning permission. Any concerns that the building is not designed for agriculture should be addressed then and any abuse of the system dealt with. In my view criterion (e) (amendment no. 146) conflicts with the advice in PPS7 which urges a supportive approach to farm diversification.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6.51 **R6.12 Delete ‘genuine’ from Policy E5(b).**

6.52 **R6.13 Delete Policy E5(e)**

6.53 **R6.14 Replace PPG7 with PPS7 in paragraph 2.13 and modify paragraph 2.14 to reflect the advice in PPS7 regarding the importance of non agricultural activity is vital to the viability of many farm enterprises.**

POLICY E6 – CHANGE OF USE OF EXISTING EMPLOYMENT SITES

Objections 520/823, 528/872, 552/972

Issues

(a) Should the first part of the policy be amended to read ‘will be allowed if’?

(b) Whether the policy should also allow the change of use of existing premises and sites with an established use to non-employment uses where it can be demonstrated that the supply of alternative employment sites in both qualitative and quantitative terms would not be adversely affected.

Conclusions

6.54 I agree with the Council that it would be difficult to show that the loss of a small site would have an adverse impact on the overall supply of land or premises in an area (CDI/27). The District’s strong economy is no doubt due in part to the operation of similar policies in past plans. To modify the policy as suggested could lead to a creeping loss of sites which is likely to have an adverse impact on job opportunities and lead to increased commuting. I consider it is important not to relax this policy, particularly in an area where, were it otherwise, residential land values may prove too difficult to resist.

6.55 The policy seeks to retain existing factories and business premises in employment use and so, where they are in towns, employees will be able to continue to take advantage of public transport and other facilities. (972) I agree with the Council (CDI/27) that there is nothing to choose between the existing wording and that suggested by the objector. (823)

RECOMMENDATION

6.56 **R6.15 Make no modification to Policy E6.**

POLICY E7 – EXISTING BUSINESSES

Objection 84/118

Issue

Does the policy provide assistance to businesses that wish to relocate in the same town?

Conclusions

6.57 Carterton Town Council’s comment in relation to paragraph 2.19 is more of a query than an objection. The policy makes provision for business to expand on site or on land adjacent to their existing premises. Paragraph 2.20 recognises that this may not be possible and in such cases a business may need to relocate in order to expand. Whether it is in the same town or not will depend on the circumstances of each case.

RECOMMENDATION

6.58 **R6.16 Make no modification to Policy E7 or paragraph 2.19.**