

Hearing Statement:

Matter 6 - the Settlement Hierarchy, the Spatial Strategy and preliminary questions on the Housing Site Selection Process and Five Year Supply

(Policies OS1 and OS2)

6.1 Is the proposed settlement hierarchy (Table 4.1 of the plan) based on robust evidence and, in principle, justified and effective? And in particular:

- Is West Oxfordshire Garden Village appropriately designated as a Rural Service Centre?

Answer to 6.1:

The proposed designation of the so-called “West Oxfordshire Garden Village” as a Rural Service Centre (WODC updated draft Local Plan, November 2016, paragraph 2.3a) is divorced from reality, for the following reasons:

(i) The proposed development is immediately adjacent to the existing community of Eynsham (with 1974 households, and a population of 4,648, according to the 2011 census). Eynsham is already recognised as a Rural Service Centre (WODC Plan, para. 2.5). Facilities there include primary and secondary schools; village hall; library; fire station; police office; medical centre; sports centre; playing fields; three churches; two supermarkets; sub-post office; 25 other shops; pubs and restaurants/cafes; and clubs and societies catering for a range of ages and interests. A full directory of these resources is available on the Eynsham Online website, at <http://eynsham-pc.gov.uk/cats.aspx>.

(ii) According to the WODC’s Expression of Interest in the Government’s Garden Village Scheme (published in July 2016), the proposed housing would be developed in stages between 2018 and 2031. Even on an accelerated time-scale, only the first 50 houses would be completed in 2018/19, the next 220 in 2019/20, leading eventually to a total number of 2,200 new dwellings.

(iii) WODC’s Expression of Interest gives no time-scale for the provision of any of the infrastructure needed to support this new development.

(iv) The initial residents would inevitably look towards the existing community of Eynsham for virtually all basic needs, such as education, health, recreation, shopping, social facilities, etc. Limited new infrastructure would only come later.

(v) It is not possible to justify the development of a second Rural Service Centre immediately adjacent to the existing one (and as a replacement for Long Hanborough, in this category – see WODC plan para. 2.5). Full duplication of (e.g.) shops, pubs, restaurants, and health and recreational facilities, on such a local scale would be financially unviable and also socially undesirable.

(vi) The proposed development therefore fails to deliver on the basic Government requirement for a “Garden Village”, which is that it should be a

stand-alone settlement. The proposal was put together hastily, without any local consultation whatsoever. It has not been thought through in sufficient detail, and ignores the real situation on the ground. It is basically unachievable. A smaller, better balanced, better integrated development of the existing, thriving community of Eynsham is a much preferable strategy for this area.

On behalf of EPIC (Eynsham Planning Improvement Campaign), Nigel Pearce and Sandy Hellig