

NORTH WITNEY ACTION GROUP COMMENTS WODC LOCAL PLAN 2041

1. INTRODUCTION

The North Witney Action Group (NWAG) will FOCUS COMMENTS on why through our factual submissions since 2014 the North Witney SDA is:

BOTH UNVIABLE AND A THREAT TO THE FUTURE WELL BEING AND SAFETY OF WITNEY AND SHOULD NOT BE INCLUDED IN THE LOCAL PLAN 2041.

In doing so and having read all material currently in the public domain, we make the following **strategic comments**.

2. STRATEGIC COMMENTS

- A.** Our **empirical evidence** submitted for the WODC 2031 Local Plan remains as cogent and pertinent in 2023 as it did in 2014 and subsequent years. In all five formal NWAG submissions are on record with WODC.³
- B.** **Thames Water** has, through the positive approach taken by the WODC Coalition, now engaged in the Local Plan process. If they had been encouraged to do so in 2014, we believe the NW SDA would not have been included in the current 2031 plan. This is clearly referenced (*DTS Ref 62826*) in the starkest terms in Thames Water's letter of 17/08/20 to WODC re land west of Hailey Road. (*Planning Application 19/03317/FUL*).⁷
- C.** In 2014 **Witney Town Council** submitted just a two-line comment on the Local Plan despite the overwhelming implications the plan's proposals placed on the urban community. Neither did the town council contribute nor formally attend any of the two weeks of the local plan hearing. At the time the leader of the town council was the deputy leader of WODC, and a 'dual hat' process of inaction was never challenged. In short, there was **no political will or robustness** from the town council to shape the direction or challenge the magnitude of influence the local plan would have on Witney.
- D.** Consistent academic **environmental desk top reports**^{1&2} submitted in support of any development in 2016 was always on a "one in a hundred years" scenario. In just seven years this has been updated to one in a hundred years + climate change of 35% for the Thames Valley basin. The reality for the residents and business owners of Eastfield Road, Hailey Road, West End, Bridge Street, New Bridge Street, Millers Mews, Grangers Place and Riverside Gardens flooding is a haunting possibility each and every year. There is still no plan in place to alleviate these current catastrophic events even before the SDA concretes over 57 hectares of agricultural land all above these urban developments and the Windrush flood plain.

¹ ENV4 WODC. Witney Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, March 2015

² ENV9 WODC. AECOM Strategic Flood Risk Assessment UPDATE, Nov 2016.

3. IDEAS & OBJECTIVES

Following the WODC 'YOUR PLACE YOUR PLAN' format, NWAG makes the following comments on five of the 30 WODC Objectives.

WODC Objective 1

Key Words: Impact on Changing Climate; Reduce Carbon Emissions; Focus on Transport, Housing, Industry, Energy

5.34 *“However, there are known issues relating to any discussion around future growth at Witney, in particular **traffic congestion, air quality and the capacity of existing infrastructure** to absorb further development.”*

NWAG has seen **no new evidence** that changes the conclusion on any of the three issues quoted in **5.34**. Moreover, the situation continues to worsen within Witney as a consequence of Climate Change (flooding incidences), and increased housing numbers (traffic congestion).

The building of the £30m WEL2 bridge would create a significant embodied carbon footprint, as well as channelling additional traffic through the heart of Witney, and in particular West End (B4022), Hailey Road, New Yatt Road and other residential streets in north Witney.³

NWAG has already submitted to WODC several consultation responses³ which have focused on the above problems, including supplying detailed data analysis of NW SDA related documents and demonstrating conclusively that the NW SDA development, its Northern Distribution Road and WEL2 road system, is clearly untenable.

3 [NWAG submissions to WODC](#)

May 2015 Local Plan 2031 Consultation Response

June 2016 submission to the Inspector

May 2019 Application 14/01671/OUT Land NW of Woodstock Road Witney

Sept 2022 WODC LOCAL PLAN 2041 CONSULTATION SUBMISSION

May 2023 EIA Scoping Report NWAG SUBMISSION

WODC Objective 3

Key Words: Consequence of Climate Change; Build Resilience; Reverse Impact

This clearly is, along with traffic on narrow residential roads, the top priority in removing the NW SDA from the local plan (*see point D in Introduction*).

Nothing has been submitted to alleviate the gravity of the situation. This is illustrated by the 'Witney Flood Review 2007' written by the Environment Agency (EA). The threat posed is stated by the EA : *“ The flooding on the Hailey Road should be considered the most significant flooding in Witney, at least for the July 07 event, because it posed the biggest threat to life.”*

In 2007 Witney town centre saw 120 properties flooded and West End 35 properties flooded out of a total of 245 properties flooded. Similar flooding occurred in 2014 and again in 2020 generating the 'Witney Flood Investigation Report Dec 2020'. We understand that as of October 2023 there is no known date for the EA's 'Updated Flood Map' continuing to throw uncertainty in to how the continuing threat from flooding can be managed. Unusually flooding from the NW SDA is compounded by water run-off from above the 100m contour over blue-clay subsoil and into three water courses, creating regular **flash flooding**. Current proposals by the developer is to install **seven open attenuation ponds** in close proximity to residential homes and children's play areas and should be regarded as irresponsible.

NWAG submit that the fragility of the viability of the SDA not only limits the innovative climate change requests of WODC in **Objective 3** but does not allow for innovative carbon reducing materials⁴.

4 OXFORD MAIL, April 19th2023, Gov't Inspector decrees 'no requirement for new homes to be built to net zero carbon standards.'

WODC Objective 5

Key Words: Achieve Thriving Communities

This strong statement to "*achieve thriving communities where people can lead healthy, happy and sustainable lives...*" also relates to the **existing communities of North Witney and Poffley End**. Any development filling the gap between Witney and Hailey as a community will destroy not build this ideal. Increased traffic density and pollution will be inevitable in Woodstock Road, New Yatt Road, Wood Green, Broad Hill, Narrow Hill, Farmers Close and Hailey Road let alone the blighted flood threatened communities around the Windrush flood plain. If Hailey Road becomes part of the Northern Periphery Road^{5&6} then homes and schools will not lead "*healthy happy and sustainable lives.*"

5 NPPF, Sept 2023, Section 14, Climate Change & Flooding, paras 152-169.

6 NPPF, Sept 2023, Section 9, Sustainable Transport, paras 104-113.

WODC Objective 8

Key Words: Healthy Food Environment; Grow Healthy Food Locally

The North Witney SDA is in an inaccessible and problematic location as well as productive agricultural land. In NWAG's May 2015 submission in consultation with the contracted farmer and FWP Matthews millers, the site had a summer yield from 120 to 130 acres of the SDA amounting to **360 tons of corn, equivalent to 464,000 loaves of bread**. The world shortage of grain is referred to in the rationale of the draft Local Plan 2041 and the *Oxfordshire Food Strategy 2022*.

WODC Objective 12

Key Words: Healthy Water Environment; Integrated Water Management; Flood Risk Management

We welcome Thames Water's robust intervention⁷ on not allowing any development water/sewage connections unless the utility company can handle the removal and treatment of discharge. If this had been in place in 2014 the NW SDA as the furthest possible development from the town's sewage treatment plant would not have been advanced within the current plan. Until the demands required by Thames Water are fully satisfied no homes built as part of the SDA can be occupied.

7 THAMES WATER, 19/03317/FUL WODC. From: BCTAdmin@thameswater.co.uk 17/08/2020, to Planning Dept.

5. THE FUTURE PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT IN WEST OXFORDSHIRE

5.16

WODC Key Words: 'SIGNIFICANT IMPEDIMENTS TO DELIVERY '

There are '*significant impediments to delivery*' when WODC considers the NW SDA for inclusion in the 2041 Local Plan.

Since 2014 when "*the principle of development*" was established, significant challenges, **both fiscally and environmentally**, especially over continued **flooding** from **climate change**, the **cost of WEL2 and CIL**, have been revealed. The developer's latest proposal (October 2023), in an attempt to achieve viability, is to remove WEL2 and fall back on a wholly inadequate solution under an OCC guidance on the promotion of "*sustainable active modes of transport...*" which is complete fantasy for integrating 1,250 houses into the Witney community infrastructure given its remote location from centres of employment.

Recorded **flooding events** that demolishes the desk top models; **transport statistics** including the annual publication of the **air quality study** focussed on Witney's AQMA; and the admission that the site is **not viable with CIL** and possible marginally viable with a zero CIL, have severely undermined that statement. We submit that if the fiscal CIL exercise⁹ had been in evidence before the 2017 Public Examination, the Inspector would not have found the NW SDA sound.

Thus, WODC should conclude that under, **5.16 there are clearly "significant impediments to delivery..."**

WEL2

- Escalating costs exceeding £30m to date [ATKINS 2020 Cost Review](#)⁸
- No appetite to commit £30m for WEL2 [2023, North Witney Consortium proposal, Oxford Mail](#).⁴
- OCC cannot assist with funding [OCC May 15 2015 submission to WODC LP 2031, para 21](#)
- Land Ownership issues incl. possible CPO [AECOM 2021 Access to Witney](#)⁸
- Lack of sufficient space for 'higher capacity junctions' [AECOM 2021 Access to Witney](#)⁸
- Potential junction flooding issues [AECOM 2021 Access to Witney](#)⁸
- 62 months build time. [ATKINS 2020 Cost Review](#)⁸
- Outdated 2011 bridge design [ATKINS 2020 Cost Review](#)⁸
- Traffic capacity issues [2014 WYG Witney Development and Infrastructure Strategic Modelling](#)⁸
- Cannot act as 'dual-purpose' facility [WODC WHS Witney Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment](#)¹
- Deliverability [OCC 2017 Witney Transport Strategy Bridge Street Option Generation Study](#)⁸

Clean water, Wastewater and Drainage connection

- Thames Water infrastructure inadequate [THAMES WATER, 19/03317/FUL WODC](#). From: BCTAdmin@thameswater.co.uk 17/08/2020. To Planning Dept. ⁷

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

We reference and endorse Hailey Parish Council's comprehensive and analytical paper of August 7, 2020.

[9 Hailey Parish Council Objection to Zero-Rated CIL 07/08/2020](#)

Traffic Congestion

NWAG, in its five Local Plan 2031 consultation submissions to WODC since 2014, has carried out **detailed analysis of 11 Transport reports**¹⁰. By incorporating Freedom of Information obtained additional **raw data of vehicle movements**, these studies have been exposed by NWAG as being **persistently unable to solve the significant problems** associated with the building of NW SDA with, or without, WEL2.

¹⁰ 2009 Witney Transport Study, Final Strategy, Halcrow

2012 Technical Note 1: Witney Summary of Development and Infrastructure Strategic Modelling

2014 Technical Note: Witney Development and Infrastructure Strategic Modelling

2016 Witney Transport Strategy Refresh: Modelling Summary Technical Note

2017 West Oxfordshire Draft Local Plan Modelling Technical Note, Atkins

2017 West Oxfordshire Draft Local Plan Modelling Technical Note Additional Tests, Atkins

2017 Evaluation of Transport Impacts Technical Note, Atkins

2017 Witney Transport Strategy Bridge Street Option Generation Study

2018 WYG Witney Highways Model Local Model Validation Report RT101212-1-002 Final Rev

2018 WYG Witney Highways Model Future Year Forecasting Report RT101212-1-003

2021 AECOM Access to Witney - TAG Options Appraisal Report Final July 2021

Note: The 'Witney Bridge Street Area Options Appraisal' (2017 Report Update) has been further delayed until 2024.

5.25 WODC Key Words : ‘ACCEPTED AS A SOUND’ APPROACH : ‘ WELL SUPPORTED THROUGH CONSULTATION WHEN THE LAST LOCAL PLAN WAS PREPARED’

Through all our empirical evidence submitted before the 2031 plan, during the Planning Enquiry and since 2014 we maintain the process to pursue this site **was flawed in fiscal viability, traffic, air pollution and flooding.**

Given the political environment at the time, including the pressure from central Government and problematic housing numbers arrived at through the SHMA process, it was found ‘sound’ by an Inspector clearly in a hurry to deliver housing numbers even if they were in the wrong place. The passive involvement of key bodies such as Thames Water, the Environment Agency and Witney Town Council contributed to the wrong decision to the future detriment and threat to Witney. *(See Introduction).*

All evidence points to the affirmation of these critical issues as they are fundamental to why the North Witney SDA is not viable and should be removed from the 2041 Local Plan.

5.34 NOTE : See NWAG comments in WODC Objective One.

5.35 & 5.36 WODC Key Words: “EROSION OF CHARACTER’ : ‘A40 ENHANCEMENT’ : ‘TRAFFIC CONGESTION’ : ‘AIR QUALITY’

Witney is at a critical tipping point.

NWAG has submitted to WODC since 2014 that the **A40 strategically, and for development opportunity, IS the Witney ring road**, and any large development should be in easy access to its junctions. This should also be strategically justified on the 0.7 of a mile between the A40 junction south of Minster Lovell and potential further development of Carterton.

The Witney North SDA is entirely in the wrong place for **employment, access, flooding** and its **proximity to Hailey village**. All of the land is in Hailey parish and all of it is part of The Wychwood Project.

A **northern perimeter road** cannot be achieved through the bottle neck of Hailey Road or the spiralling cost now approaching £30m at 2020 costs of WEL2 which requires eleven dual piles into and across the Windrush flood plain. Access from and through the narrow residential roads of north Witney, including Early Road, New Yatt Road, Vanner Road, Wood Green, West End and Farmers Close are not viable alternatives.

CURRENT POSITION OF THE DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM

This month, October 2023, the North Witney Consortium published their Working Draft proposals for the site. This affirmed that their proposals were : **“ in accordance with the vision and requirement set out in the local plan...”**

However, their **proposals are contrary** to a number of fundamental issues the 2031 Local Plan Inspector laid out for any development of North Witney.

- WEL2 has to be built before the North Witney SDA is built¹¹. The Consortium's spurious claim that it isn't required lays bare the fact that this **SDA is not financially viable** with WEL2 infrastructure costs approaching £30m at 2020 costs. If it is not built the consequences for the existing road network is horrendous. WEL2 and the SDA are inextricably linked. If you can't build WEL2 you can't develop this remote site. **See 5.16** re developer's proposed alternative.
11 WODC Local Plan 2031, WIT2.
- A fundamental reason why this site was originally considered was the belief it could **deliver a Northern Perimeter Road** through to Jubilee Way and Shore's Green. The proposals now show just a **residential estate road** which will encourage motorists to drive back into the town centre by way of Hailey Road, West End, New Yatt Road or Woodstock Road.
- The Inspector requested no development over the **100m contour line** with a significant green barrier in the northeast corner of the site (*LP2031, Figure 4.2d*). This fragile part of the site is now shown to contain the highest density of development to include retail, public services, a public square and four storey buildings.

In reality, the chances of WEL2 ever being constructed continue to recede after each cost review and feasibility study, and consequently NW SDA's likelihood of ever being even started must be approaching slim to non-existent.

WODC FIVE KEY PRINCIPLES SEPTEMBER 2022

*Please note NWAG's contribution to WODC's **Five Key Principles** submitted in September 2022 are consistent with and undergird these comments.*

