

Wantage Town Council

Response to examiner's questions

Dear Mr Ashcroft,

Thank you for your review of the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan and for your constructive feedback. Below are our responses to the points raised in your clarification note. We appreciate the opportunity to ensure the Plan is clear, proportionate, and aligned with planning policy.

Policy 1: Town Centre Policy Area

We acknowledge that the format of Policy 1 differs from other policies. This was unintentional, and we are happy to amend it for consistency. We would appreciate any guidance on how best to structure it in line with the standard policy format used elsewhere in the Plan.

Policy 2: Protection of Employment Sites

Likelihood of redevelopment proposals

Yes, there is a likelihood of such proposals arising. Recent planning applications (P22/V1206/FUL, P21/V2489/FUL, and P21/V1591/FUL) demonstrate instances where employment land within the town centre has been lost or reduced due to redevelopment into residential use. These examples highlight the pressure on employment sites and the importance of having a policy in place to support their retention.

Inclusion of additional uses

We are open to allowing additional uses on employment land, provided employment remains a core function of the site. We would be willing to refine the policy wording to reflect this flexibility.

Focus on employment levels vs. existing uses

Our priority is to retain employment opportunities rather than rigidly protecting specific employment uses. We acknowledge that employment needs evolve and that a change in use may still maintain or even increase employment levels. We are open to refining the wording to clarify that the policy supports the retention of employment land, while allowing for shifts in the type of employment use where appropriate.

Just to note - Over recent years there has been a large amount of residential development with little increase in employment sites. Wantage has already gained some of the characteristics of a dormitory town and would not want to lose more employment sites. This would exasperate the problems as it would impact on the town's vibrancy and could potentially have a negative impact on sustainable travel in the future.

Policy 3: Design Principles

We agree that this policy should be applied proportionately to ensure that minor and domestic proposals are not unnecessarily burdened. We are happy to revise the wording to make this clear.

Policy 4: Design and Character Areas

We were attempting to describe particular areas within Wantage that have a distinctive character and are recognisable to residents (see policy map 2 inset 1). The six areas we were attempting to describe were:

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1. Wantage Town Centre (which is also a conservation area).
2. North West Wantage
3. West Wantage
4. South West Wantage
5. South East Wantage
6. Charlton (Which also includes a conservation area within it)

Policy 6: Green Infrastructure Network

Intended meaning of the first criterion

The intention is not only to safeguard but also to enhance the Green Infrastructure Network. We are happy to clarify this in the policy wording.

Potential duplication of the second criterion

We originally felt that the second criterion was necessary, but we acknowledge your concern about repetition. We are open to revising or removing it if it is deemed redundant.

Policy 7: Biodiversity and Letcombe Brook

The policy aims to ensure that development both protects Letcombe Brook from harm and actively improves biodiversity. We see these as separate points, as it is possible for a development to enhance biodiversity while still negatively impacting parts of the area. We are happy to adjust the wording to make this distinction clearer.

Policy 10: Infrastructure Investment

We are trying to explain that if larger scale development proposals do not take into account or address the impact of greater demand on our infrastructure they will not be supported. We were also trying to address the same issue for development outside of our parish that would increase demand or the use of Wantage and its infrastructure - for example the development at East Challow.

Responses to Representations

Delancey (Representation 6). We remain committed to protecting employment sites in Wantage. We believe the retention of employment land is essential to maintaining economic sustainability in the town. It is not our intention to dictate what form that employment takes.

Pye Homes (Representation 13). We disagree with Pye Homes' representation and maintain that the policies in the Plan support sustainable development while ensuring Wantage retains its character and infrastructure capacity. We do not rule out sympathetic development.

Oxfordshire County Council (Representation 14)

Regulation 14 Consultation: Oxfordshire County Council states they were not consulted at Regulation 14. They were consulted and they did not respond at the time.

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Highways Land in Green Spaces: We do not understand their concerns.

Parcel B, Betjeman Millennium Park: Our green space for the park appears to not cleanly end and we may have inadvertently included highway. We have noted that we had included a private garden in part of the Betjeman park plan. This needs to be amended. While we regret OCC's request to remove their land from the green space designation, we acknowledge that this is their prerogative and do not believe we can object.

Parking Standards: We do not intend to contradict OCC's parking standards and would welcome advice on how to revise the wording to address their concerns. We were trying to tackle feedback and concerns raised regarding moving parking out of the Town Centre - hence the use of the word alternative (it does not mean additional).

We believe this plan would work well with the emerging local plan and note the work being undertaken by the County in developing the LCWIP. This has not yet been concluded.

Generally, on the specific requests to alter policy wording. We have worked closely with the District Council and revised large amounts of wording during earlier phases. We are concerned that if we alter as per Oxfordshire County Councils wishes we would introduce more queries and comments from the District. If it would be possible to address them in collaboration with District and County at the same time we would be happy to work through them so as to address any contradictions or disagreements that may arise at the time.

District Council (Representation 7)

We note the helpful comments and points of clarification and are happy to work with the district to address their comments.

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to refine the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan and ensure it meets the basic conditions for adoption. We remain open to further discussions on modifications where necessary.