



# ***Wantage Neighbourhood Plan***

**First Report**

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# Wantage Neighbourhood Plan 2015 - 2031

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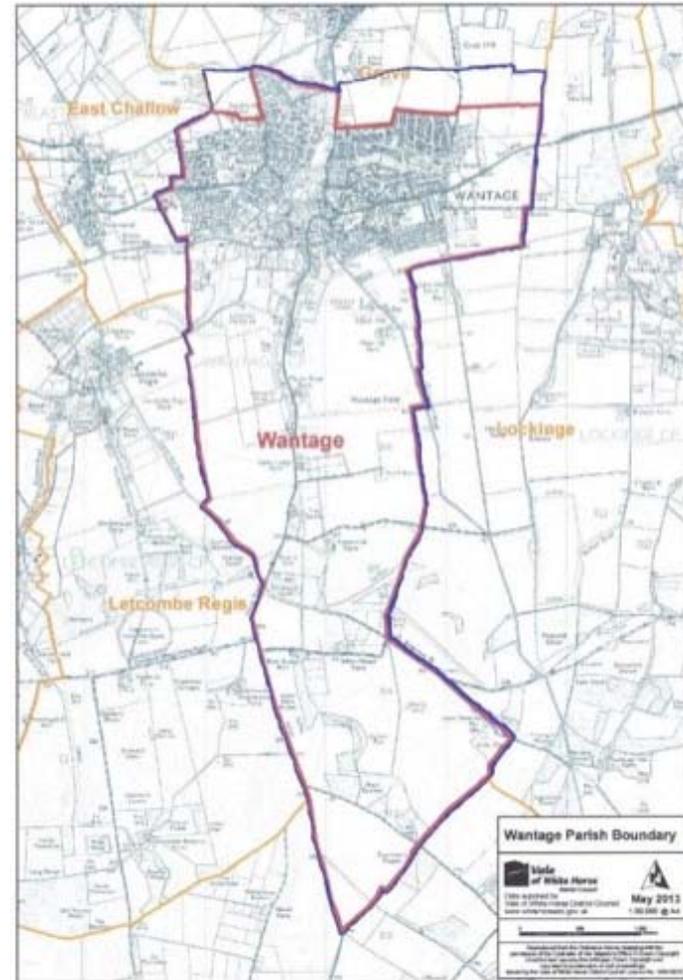
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## Introduction

1.1 Wantage Town Council is preparing the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) to cover the period 2015 to 2031. Vale of White Horse District Council (VWHDC), the local planning authority, designated a Neighbourhood Area for the whole of Wantage Town (including developments approved or recommended for approval to the north of the Town) on the 13 December 2013. This enables the Town Council, as the 'qualifying body', to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan.

1.2 The purpose of this First Report in the preparation of the WNP is to summarise the key evidence base and the context within which it will be prepared. It is a statement of fact and summarises the current government rules and regulations as well as the saved policies from the Vale of the White Horse District Council 2011 Local Plan and the new policies included in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1: Strategic Sites and Policies which will replace most of the saved policies when it is adopted. It also includes a summary of the work performed by the Neighbourhood Planning team to date especially the recent surveys.

1.3 The map in plan A shows the WNP plan boundary in blue, and how it relates to the Town boundary in red and to the surrounding Parishes. The designated area for the neighbourhood Plan consists of the whole of the Town and the smaller areas to the north of the Town in the neighbouring village of Grove. The area is cut through by the A338 road and the A417 and much of the Town to the south of the Town



*Plan A: Wantage Neighbourhood Plan area*

lies in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## **Neighbourhood Development Plans**

1.4 Neighbourhood Plans are a new part of the development planning system created by the 2011 Localism Act. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) of 2012 states:

*"... neighbourhoods should: develop plans that support the strategic development needs set out in Local Plans, including policies for housing and economic development; plan positively to support local development, shaping and directing development in their area that is outside the strategic elements of the Local Plan". (para 16)*

*"Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development they need. Towns ... can use neighbourhood planning to set planning policies through neighbourhood plans to determine decisions on planning applications." (para.183).*

*Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure that they get the right types of development for their community. The ambition of the neighbourhood should be aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.*

*Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan. Neighbourhood plans should reflect these policies and neighbourhoods should plan positively to support them. Neighbourhood plans and orders should not promote less development than set out in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies." (para.184)*

*Outside these strategic elements, neighbourhood plans will be able to shape and direct sustainable development in their area. Once a neighbourhood plan has demonstrated its general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan and is brought into force, the policies it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in the Local Plan for that neighbourhood, where they are in conflict". (para.185)*

## **The Plan Preparation Process**

1.5 The process of preparing and seeking final adoption of the WNP is in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan Regulations 2012 and has been agreed by the Town Council. A Steering Group has been formed and has been delegated responsibility by the Town Council to oversee the completion of the project. The Town Council will approve final versions of the Pre Submission and Submission documentation prior to their publication.

1.6 The intention is to submit the Plan to the District Council in summer 2015 so that it can be examined and taken to

referendum before the end of the year. The process of preparing the Plan to submission comprises three main stages:

- First Report – this report, which summarises the planning context and evidence on which the Plan will be based
- Pre-Submission WNP – the draft version of the Plan that will comprise the draft vision, objectives, policies, proposals and map of the plan for a statutory six week public consultation period
- Submission WNP – the final version of the Plan that will take into account the representations received on the draft Plan during the public consultation period and will be amended as necessary for submission to the District Council

1.7 As part of the preparation of the Pre Submission Plan, the Steering Group will hold an initial workshop with representatives of key stakeholders to identify the areas where policies may be required based on the information in this report. Following the workshop, The Steering Group will identify the necessary actions to proceed to either a Draft Plan or Pre Submission Plan. They may choose to consult informally on policy options. If so, this is likely to be done in the form of a Draft Plan to test local opinion on those options and to engage with statutory consultees, for example other public bodies.

1.8 A screening opinion will be requested from the VWHDC to determine if a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is needed. The screening opinion may state that an SEA would

be required, in which case an SEA scoping report will be produced in a separate document. The SEA will be produced alongside the plan, if required, firstly as a draft with the Pre-Submission Plan and later as the final SEA with the Submission Plan.

1.9 Once submitted, the WNP will be subject to a further six week publicity period prior to its independent examination. Any recommendations made by the Examiner will be considered by WTC and VWHDC and the plan amended as necessary before being approved for a local referendum. If supported by a majority vote at the referendum, the WNP will be made by VWHDC as planning policy for the Town.

## 2. The Neighbourhood Plan and the Vale of White Horse Development Plan

2.1 The Town lies within the Vale of White Horse District in the County of Oxfordshire. There are a number of adopted and emerging policies and proposals at a national and local level that have a significant influence over the strategy and detailed content of the WNP.

### National Planning Policy Framework

2.2 The NPPF contains a number of key policy principles that will shape the WNP. These are itemised below:

- The presumption in favour of sustainable development (para. 14)
- The role of Neighbourhood planning (16)
- Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes (50)
- The quality of development (58)
- Promoting healthy communities (69)
- The designation of Local Green Spaces (76/77)
- Protecting Green Belt Land (79-92)
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment (109-115)
- Conserving and enhancing the historic environment (126-141)
- Neighbourhood plans (183-185)

2.3 The principles in section 4.4 are those of most relevance to the WNP but many other principles in the framework will have

some bearing on the preparation of the document in due course.

### Planning Practice Guidance

2.4 The PPG was published in March 2014 and contains a series of guidance statements of importance to the preparation of neighbourhood plans, notably:

- What communities can use neighbourhood planning for (ID 41-002)
- What should a neighbourhood plan address (ID 41-004)
- Must a community ensure its neighbourhood plan is deliverable (ID 41-005)
- What evidence is needed to support a neighbourhood plan (ID 41-040)
- How should the policies in a neighbourhood plan be drafted (ID 41-041)
- Should a neighbourhood plan consider infrastructure (ID 41-045)
- What is meant by general conformity (ID 41-074)
- What is meant by strategic policies (ID 41-075)
- Local Green Space designation (ID 37-005 – ID37-022)

2.5 The PPG has replaced the majority of previous planning practice guidance and it is expected that it will be regularly updated. Again, the list of references above is not exhaustive but identifies those that are likely to be the most relevant for preparing the WNP.

## The Vale of White Horse Development Plan

2.6 The current development plan providing the planning policy framework for the Vale of White Horse District comprises the saved policies of the 2011 Local Plan. Most of the saved policies are consistent with the NPPF apart from those relating to housing land supply.

2.7 The most likely relevant policies are listed below. Those marked with a \* are considered to be of strategic status, in relation to informing the judgement of 'general conformity' with the 'strategic policies' basic condition:

- TR5 – Cycleway and Footway routes
- TR6 – Public car parking
- HE1 – Preservation and enhancement of conservation areas (the Wantage and Charlton Conservation Areas are shown on the Proposals Map)\*
- L2 and L3 – Existing urban open space (a number of spaces are shown on the Proposals Map)\*
- L3 – Green Corridor (the Letcombe Brook area is shown on the Proposals Map)
- NE10 – Important Open Land (land to the west of the town is shown on the Proposals Map)\*
- CF2 – Community facilities
- S8 – Limborough Road (this area of retail warehouses is shown on the Proposals Map)
- S12 – Local Shopping Centre (the small precinct at Barnards Way is shown on the Proposals Map)

2.8 It is expected that these policies will be replaced by the 'Vale Local Plan Part 1: Strategic Sites & Policies' (LPP1) once it has been adopted later in 2015. The LPP1 is expected to be submitted for examination to the Secretary of State in February 2015 and the WNP will therefore relate its policies to the framework provided by LPP1 as well as the saved 2011 policies.

2.9 The Spatial Vision of LPP1 for the district where it relates to Wantage is as follows:

*“By 2031 the Vale of White Horse will have thriving and prosperous communities that have benefited from economic growth and our strength in science and innovation continue to be internationally recognised ... New residential and economic growth will have been focused on the Science Vale area and will have delivered balanced and sustainable growth that has made a significant contribution to delivering important infrastructure. Strategic road and rail improvements will have been implemented, including those ... Wantage.”*

*“The Vale’s main settlements will provide healthy and sustainable communities where everyone has a decent place to live and work with good access to leisure and community services and facilities. The service centre roles of ... Wantage will have been maintained and enhanced.”*

*“New development will have respected the local character of the Vale, protecting its outstanding and distinctive natural and built environment and will continue to conserve and enhance its important heritage. High design and environmental standards will have been achieved through new development, which will be resilient to the likely impacts of climate change.”*

2.10 The spatial strategy shows Wantage being within the South East Vale of the district. The Settlement Hierarchy in Policy CP3 identifies Wantage as the Market Town in the Sub-Area. As such it has the facilities, services and employment to offer a sustainable living. The sub area strategy in relation to Wantage can be found in Policy CP15: Spatial Strategy for the South East Vale Sub-Area:

*“Wantage and Grove will be places where people are proud to live and work and recognised as a vital part of the Science Vale area. Growth in these settlements will have been balanced alongside the delivery of community facilities. This will have included new schools and significant highway improvements, including the Wantage Eastern Link Road and the Grove Northern Link Road. The area will benefit from improved public transport and strategic growth in these settlements will have provided more local job opportunities.”*

*“The ecological value of the Letcombe Brook as an important wildlife habitat will have been enhanced. The strategic development sites will have successfully extended the network of green spaces in the area for both recreation and wildlife benefits. The town centre in Wantage will have been protected and enhanced and the local centre in Grove will have been strengthened.”*  
(p68)

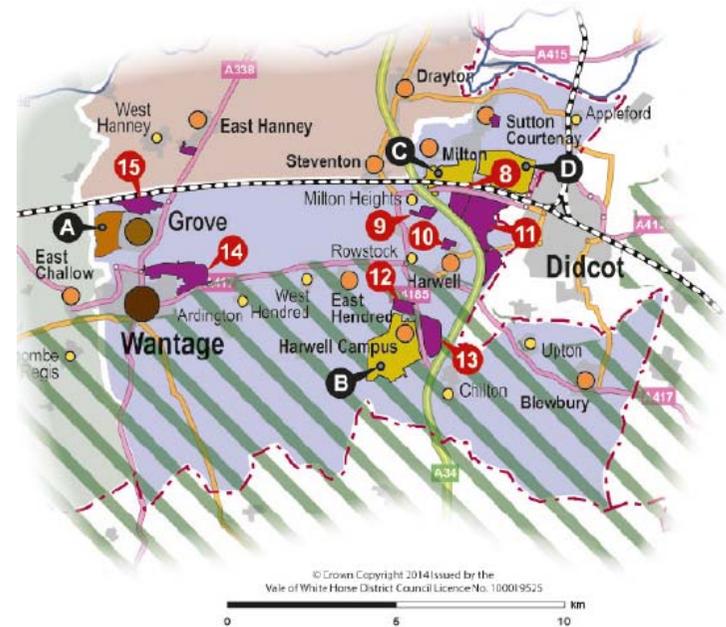
2.11 There are a series of other policies that provide the framework for the WNP, namely:

- CP4: Strategic Housing Allocations - identifies 1,500 new homes at Crab Hill (North East of Wantage and South East of Grove and defines the development boundary of Wantage
- Policy CP6: Strategic Employment Land – identifying the strategic employment site at Grove Road for safeguarding for employment uses
- CP15: Spatial Strategy for the South East Vale Sub-Area – identifying a need for a nominal number of additional housing allocations within Part 2 of the Local Plan or neighbourhood plans
- CP17: Transport Delivery for the South East Vale Sub-Area – identifying a new link road at NE Wantage between the A338 and A417 (‘the Eastern Link Road’) and other route improvements to the A417 east of Wantage

- CP18: Safeguarding Land for Transport Schemes – including the Western Relief Road to support the Crab Hill strategic development area
- CP19: Re-opening of Grove Railway Station – with connectivity for Wantage
- CP28: New Employment Development – providing for new development on unallocated sites in town centres
- CP29: Change of Use of Existing Employment Land – protecting employment land from a loss to other uses
- CP31: Visitor Economy – supporting new development within the built up area boundary for conference facilities, hotels etc
- CP32: Town Centre Policy Area and Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages - Wantage Town Centre identified on the Proposals Map to manage new retail and other town centre uses proposals
- CP39 – Conservation Areas – Wantage and Charlton Village identified on the Proposals Map
- CP44: Landscape – identifying the North Wessex Downs AONB and its setting for conservation and enhancement

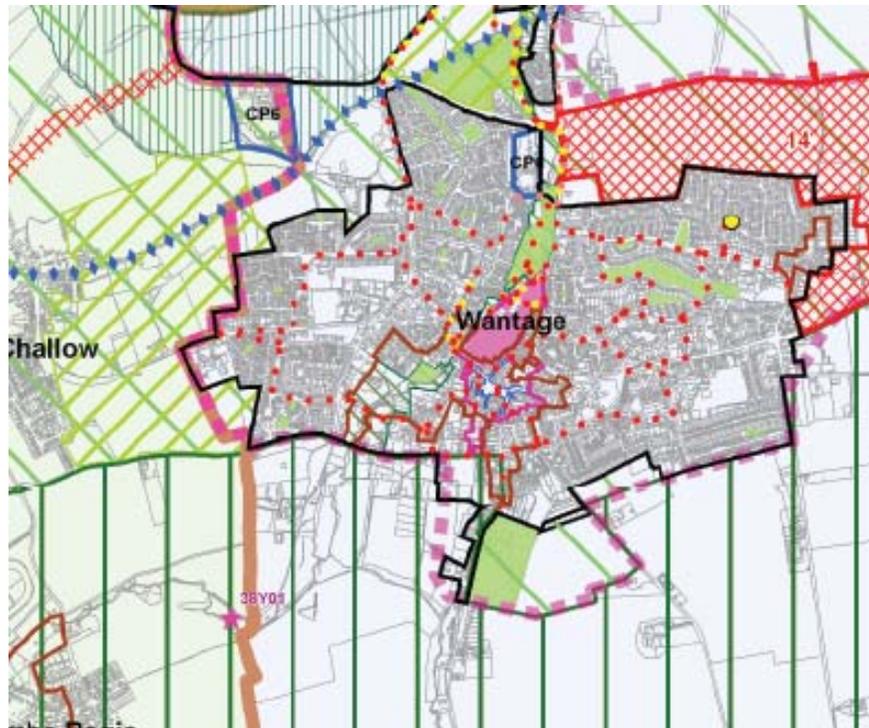
2.12 The LPP1 policies provide a clear strategic planning framework for the WNP. It proposes significant growth in housing over the plan period on the edge of the town and at its close neighbour, Grove, and seeks to ensure the local transport and social infrastructure are upgraded accordingly. Whilst the economic development focus on the LPP1 is elsewhere in the ‘Science Vale’, it does establish the

importance of Wantage maintaining its role as a successful Market Town and source of employment opportunities.



*Plan B: Vale Local Plan 2031 South East Vale Sub-Area Strategy*

2.13 However, the LPP1 does not provide all the answers for how this growth will be managed in relation to the existing town over the plan period and it does not specifically address local development needs, some of which may themselves be shaped by the major changes planned.



### 2031 Policies

- District Boundary
- Development Boundary (CP4)
- Strategic Housing Allocations (CP4)
- Ring fence area (CP5)
- Strategic Employment Sites (CP6)
- Large Campus, Rural and Multi User Emp. Sites (CP6, CP29)
- Bury Street and Charter Areas (CP10, CP32)
- Botley Central Area (CP11, CP32)
- Land Safeguarded for Highways Improvements (CP12, CP17, CP18, CP19, CP21)
- Oxford Green Belt (CP13)
- Land Safeguarded for Reservoir (CP14)
- Science Vale (CP15, CP16, CP17, CP18)
- Didcot A Power Station (CP16)
- Upgraded/new roundabout (CP18)
- Primary Shopping Frontage (CP32, S2, TR6)
- Secondary Shopping Frontage (CP32, S3)
- Town Centre Policy Area (CP32, TR6, S4, S5, S6)
- Conservation Area (CP39)
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (CP44, NE6)
- National Nature Reserve (CP46)
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (CP46)
- Special Area of Conservation (CP46)
- Ancient Woodland (CP46)
- ★ Local Wildlife Sites (CP46)

### Saved Policies

- Existing Cycleway Route (TR5)
- New or Improved Cycleway Route (TR5)
- New or Improved Footpath Route (TR5)
- Local Shopping Centre (TR6, S12)
- A34 Service Areas (TR10)
- Historic Park and Gardens (HE8)
- North Vale Corallian Ridge (NE7)
- Lowland Vale (NE9)
- Area for Landscape Enhancement (NE11)
- Important Open Land (NE10)
- Grove Airfield (H5)
- Great Western Park (H7)
- Proposed Cemetery (CF3, CF4)
- Existing Urban Open Space (L2, L3)
- Green Corridor (L3)
- Ridgeway National Trail (L11)
- Thames Path National Trail (L12)
- ◆◆◆ Line of Wilts and Berks Canal (L14)
- Proposed New Route of Wilts and Berks Canal (L15)
- Area South of Marina Proposed for Informal Recreation Uses (L18)
- Steventon Storage Facility (E15)
- Limborough Road Area (S8)
- Ock Street Policy Area (S10)

*Plan C: Vale of the White Horse District Proposals Map 2014 - Wantage*

2.14 There are concerns within the local community that most local amenities and facilities are operating close to full capacity or over capacity e.g. schools, highways, car parking, leisure facilities etc. New facilities and amenities are

to be provided from S106 contributions from existing and new developments. There is concern locally that infrastructure provision in the past has not kept pace with historical housing development.

2.15 It is possible that the WNP could assist in ensuring that there is appropriate infrastructure delivery to support the proposed growth. It may also ensure that facilities and amenities provided in new developments in the wider community, should complement those existing within Wantage Town and not duplicate or compete. This may, however, mean that in certain circumstances facilities within the Town may need to be redeveloped for other purposes in order for newer and better facilities elsewhere to thrive e.g. Leisure Centre.

2.16 Should the LPP1 examination require it to be significantly revised or withdrawn and therefore its timetable is extended, the WNP policies will be justified in respect of the relevant 2011 Local Plan policies.

## Evidence Base

2.17 There have been a number of reports published in the evidence base of the Vale Local Plan in November 2014.

### Retail and Town Centre Study: Addendum

2.18 The Study of October 2014 provides an up-to-date view of the future retail needs of the District. The report assesses there is a requirement for around 4,200 sq.m net of additional convenience and comparison goods floorspace within Wantage/Grove over the Plan period to 2031, in addition to the new local centre at Grove Airfield as shown in the extract below:

Table 4.1: Convenience Goods Retail Floorspace Projections

Location	Commitments / Proposals sq.m net	Additional Retail Sales Floorspace sq.m net			
		2014-2021	2021-2026	2026-2031	Total 2014-2031
Abingdon	2,730	805	940	532	2,277
Wantage/Grove	800	1,117	465	241	1,823
Botley	3,424	- 608	294	148	- 166
Faringdon	-	533	225	137	895
Other VOWH	-	157	152	91	400
Science Vale/ West of Didcot	1,235	316	315	276	907
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,189</b>	<b>2,320</b>	<b>2,391</b>	<b>1,425</b>	<b>6,136</b>

Table 4.2: Comparison Goods Retail Floorspace Projections

Location	Commitments / Proposals sq.m net	Additional Retail Sales Floorspace sq.m net			
		2014-2021	2021-2026	2026-2031	Total 2014-2031
Abingdon	1,470	622	2,954	1,985	5,561
Wantage/Grove	500	668	1,029	639	2,336
Botley	3,510	- 357	297	153	93
Seacourt Tower Retail Park	10,818	- 4,074	720	393	- 2,961
Faringdon	-	241	139	93	473
Other VOWH	-	195	111	73	379
Science Vale/ West of Didcot	309	3,221	558	453	4,232
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,607</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>5,808</b>	<b>3,789</b>	<b>10,113</b>

2.19 The analysis of the data states,

*“As indicated above, even taking into account the potential reoccupation of vacant units within Wantage town centre and commitments/proposals, the residual floorspace requirement for Wantage at 2031 is around 5,700 sq.m gross. The former Police Station and Magistrates Court occupies a site of 0.28 hectares. The site is within a relatively secondary shopping street (Church Street) but has reasonable links to the Market Place via Victoria Cross Gallery. The site could be redevelopment for a mix of uses including Class A1 to A5 (up to 1,000 sq.m gross, 750 sq.m net) on the Church Street frontage.*

*Land to the west of Limborough Road could be assembled to create a development site of about 0.5 hectares. The site is occupied by a vacant industrial building, a council car park, a cleared and vacant plot and a small industrial unit occupied by Bushbuy. This area provides an opportunity to extend the Kings Park retail development. It could accommodate at least 2,000 sq.m gross (1,700 sq.m net) of large format retailing. Again, if Wantage cannot accommodate the floorspace projection within the town centre, then the Council could seek to allocate sites elsewhere within the District to accommodate the long term projections.”* (pp14-15)

*There are potential edge of centre sites within Wantage that could be configured to accommodate the retail*

*floorspace requirements in the short to medium term. The reoccupation of vacant shop units could also absorb some of the growth up to 2021. If the longer term retail requirements for Wantage/Grove cannot be accommodated within the centres, this floorspace should be diverted to new, large housing developments in close proximity, in order to meet the needs of new local residents.”* (p22)

#### Leisure & Sports Facilities Study

2.20 This study contains potentially important recommendations for the Plan. It states,

*“Although there appears to be almost sufficient sports hall capacity across the Vale as a whole to cater for all of the additional demand from the housing growth, the natural population growth and increase in participation, there is actually a specific need around Wantage and Grove. The Wantage Leisure Centre has insufficient capacity to cater for the additional demand which will arise from the housing growth at Grove Airfield, Monks Farm and Crab Hill plus the other smaller developments within the catchment. At least one new large size 4 court sports hall is therefore required in the Wantage/Grove area.”* (p45)

2.21 In its recommendations, it proposes,

*“A new wet/dry leisure centre with 4 court hall should be developed in the Wantage/Grove area as proposed by the Vale of White Horse District Council. When the site has been determined this may require an appropriate policy within the Local Plan to enable built sports facilities on the site. There is a need to confirm the design and facility mix for the proposed new leisure centre in the Wantage/Grove area, including pool, sports hall, and health and fitness, to confirm the funding requirements and expectations on both the Council and developers. The objective should be to open the facility by 2019. Developers’ contributions from the catchment area of the proposed new leisure centre in the Wantage/Grove area should be directed towards this facility. The existing sports hall at the Wantage Leisure Centre should be transferred to the school but community use retained for weekday evenings and weekends on a block booking basis. Funds secured from developers for housing growth around Wantage/Grove, and those arising from the developments within Vale which are within the Didcot Leisure Sub Area may be directed towards the proposed new Wantage/Grove leisure centre.” (p79)*

#### Infrastructure Delivery Plan

2.22 The Plan identifies the infrastructure necessary to support the delivery of the Vale Local Plan document. In respect of the Wantage and Grove area, it identifies that new transport infrastructure will support movement between the western and eastern parts of the wider South East Vale Sub Area. This includes junction improvements at Rowstock and at the junction with Featherbed Lane.

2.23 The Wantage Eastern Link Road will provide a strategic link to the north east of the town, alleviating pressure on the roads in the town for traffic travelling towards Harwell and Didcot. Improvements along the A338 and at the Frilford Lights junction will improve the connection from Wantage and Grove to Oxford City.

2.24 It expects that new primary schools will have been provided in Wantage (at Crab Hill) and on the Grove Airfield site, and the Grove Church of England Primary School will have been expanded to accommodate all of the new children in Wantage and Grove. A new secondary school on Grove Airfield will have been built to accommodate children in the local area.

2.25 Leisure facilities for the area will have been improved through refurbishment of the existing leisure centre in Wantage or a new leisure centre. Increased doctors’ facilities will have been provided to accommodate the health needs of the new residents. The capacity of sewage treatment works in the area will have been upgraded. It also notes that

the Crab Hill scheme will make a financial contribution of over £2m towards the off-site costs of new or improved cricket pitches, rugby pitches, swimming pools, sports halls, artificial grass pitches, tennis courts and health and fitness.

### **Supplementary Planning Documents**

2.26 The Residential Design Guidance and the Sustainable Design and Construction were both adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) in 2009. These documents give more detailed guidance on how development should take form. They do not hold statutory planning weight but are material consideration in planning applications and appeals.

2.27 The new Vale Design Guide published in October 2014 for consultation will replace this current guidance. It contains a wide range of design principles to inform planning applications across the District. The Town forms part of 'Character Zone 3: Rolling Farmland Villages' but there is no other area-specific guidance. Rather, the guide contains the principles of landmarks, vistas, edges, density, landscape structure, local spaces, materials, parking, building design, boundary treatment and apartments, amongst many others, which the Neighbourhood Plan may choose to translate into specific areas of the town and its edges.

### **Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas**

2.28 There are 132 listed buildings in the Neighbourhood Area, the vast majority of which lie within designated Conservation Areas. Of these, there is one Grade I building (St.Peter & St. Paul Church) and two Grade II\* buildings (32/33 Market Place and Ham House).

2.29 The WNP comprises of two conservation areas. The Town Centre of Wantage was the first conservation area designated in 1970 and later amended in 1985. It covers an extensive part of the town well beyond its historic Market Square to include clusters of Georgian and Victorian buildings off Mill Street over Letcombe Brook, south down Manor Road, north along Grove Road and east along Charlton Road. The Area therefore comprises almost all the retail and commercial areas of the town, extensive residential areas and open land either side of Letcombe Brook. There has been no Conservation Area Appraisal undertaken so far.

2.30 The Charlton Conservation Area was designated in 1984 and its boundary has remained unaltered. The Area is tightly defined around the cluster of buildings on Charlton Village Road, some of which are listed.

### 3. Town Profile & Community Engagement

3.1 Wantage is a medium sized traditional market town. It has a population in the region of 11,000. The built up area of the town is concentrated in the northern part of the Town. Immediately to the south of the built up area is land which forms part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

3.2 Over the years, the built up area of Wantage, outside the AONB, has grown to a point where there is little capacity for development on new sites within the Town itself, although some development could be accommodated through rebuild or change of use. Wantage, however, is viewed as the principal amenity provider for a large number of nearby villages, including Grove, bringing the population relying on its facilities and amenities closer to 30,000. The number of jobs locally available is insufficient to support this level of population and therefore a high proportion of the population is obliged to commute for employment. Those commuting mainly travel to the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, Milton Business Park, Oxford and by train to London.

3.3 The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and the various working groups have begun the process of considering the scope of the WNP. The working groups established are: Town centre businesses, economy and technology; Heritage, environment, conservation and design; Transport, infrastructure, education and health; and Youth, leisure, sport and art. These groups identified a number of potential policy

ideas which have been tested in a Residents Survey, the summary outcome of which is included below. These policy areas may trigger further planning issues and/or spin off stand-alone projects.

3.4 The top ten strengths of Wantage which have been identified by the working groups are:

- An attractive place to live
- The rich cultural heritage of the town
- Good road access (even if there are some capacity issues)
- Easy access to attractive countryside
- Breadth of skills, experience and expertise among local people
- Good schools
- Harmonious architecture and strong design character
- Good range of clubs and societies
- Regular markets and a good range of independent shops
- A high quality natural environment worthy of preservation/enhancement

3.5 The groups have also considered the most important topics to be addressed in the Neighbourhood Plan:

- Allocating land for additional public car parking in the town centre
- Adopting minimum standards for residential parking in new housing schemes

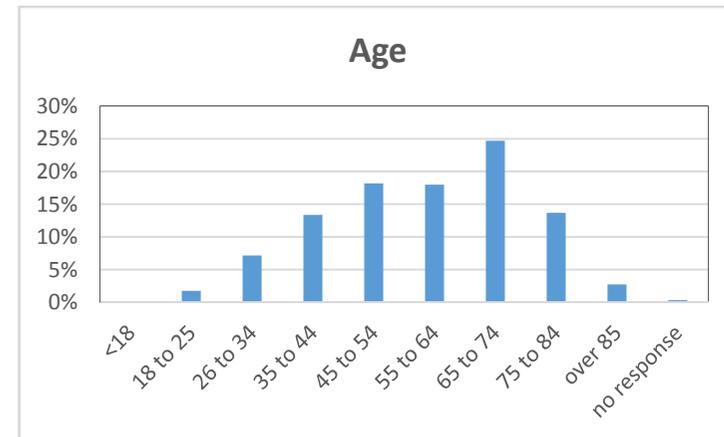
- Using development schemes to connect and to improve footpaths
- Increasing road capacity
- Using development schemes to connect and to improve cycleways
- Maintaining and increasing the amount of commercial space in the town centre
- Maintaining and improving the character and attractiveness of the town for shoppers, visitors and tourists
- Ensuring infrastructure improvements meet the pace of strategic and local housing development
- Protecting and improving the natural assets of the town, especially Letcombe Brook and other local green spaces
- Improving public transport services, especially bus services and a new Grove station

### Resident Survey

3.6 The Resident Survey of November/December 2014 was sent to all households in the OX12 postcode area (those most likely to use the facilities in Wantage) and had a return rate of 1,580 surveys in total. This represents approximately 14% of all households in the OX12 area.

3.7 The age profiles demonstrate a good spread of responses from the area. There is a higher concentration of responses from those 35 years and over which is not unusual in questionnaire-based engagement of this sort. The steering

group might consider whether there is scope to engage with the younger residents, perhaps through a face-to-face setting and perhaps once the proposals are in a more drafted form.



### General Views on Wantage

3.8 The key reasons that attracted residents to come and live in Wantage were overwhelmingly the local countryside, the historic character of the town and the quiet, peaceful environment. This suggests that these are important qualities to retain in terms of future development. Family connections to Wantage also came out fairly strongly, mentioned by a third of respondents, as did the availability of local employment and housing at an affordable price. Easy access to Oxford was noted by many as a key strength of the town as well as the Science Vale and the Berkshire Downs. In addition the quality of the local schools was noted as a positive attribute.

3.9 On the other hand, a variety of not so good points were flagged by residents with the most frequently mentioned issues as follows: car parking (availability, cost), lack of variety in shopping offer, poor condition of roads and congestion, lack of a railway station and concerns about losing facilities/insufficient facilities for expanding community.

3.10 Aspirations for the future centred on a vibrant, well-planned town with good community facilities and transport links, a thriving town centre and any housing built sympathetically and in-keeping with the existing historic nature of Wantage. All of this also presumes the background of a continuing well-preserved rural setting that promotes interaction with the environment.

Town centre businesses, economy and technology

3.11 69% of residents felt that the space for business/ retail sites should expand proportionately to the proposed growth in housing. Provision of local employment opportunities was deemed important by many but only as long as the infrastructure (in particular roads) can support this growth.

3.12 In terms of residential development in and around the current town centre, 51% resisted this. 43% indicated that the commercial centre of the Town could possibly expand past the Beacon to the south of the Portway and Ickleton Road. 71% felt that some of the existing businesses which do not need to be in the Town centre should perhaps be allowed to move to sites otherwise not intended for development to encourage them to move out of the town centre. There were

a number of comments encouraging any new retail/employment sites should be developed on previously developed land, or land away from the smaller roads and protected landscape areas.

3.13 91% felt that there would be a need for more employment opportunities locally in the next 20 years. Again comments relating to this flagged the need for improvement to infrastructure to support road commuting, a call for the station to be reopened and more local jobs, albeit balanced by a general consensus that commuting out is inevitable.

3.14 In terms of the sort of employment sites that might be developed in Wantage in the future, the following were flagged:

	Yes	Possibly	No	Don't know
<b>Office</b>	<b>64%</b>	31%	2%	3%
<b>Light industrial</b>	<b>60%</b>	33%	4%	3%
<b>Factory</b>	18%	37%	<b>39%</b>	6%
<b>Storage</b>	12%	35%	<b>46%</b>	8%
<b>Business centre</b>	<b>38%</b>	48%	7%	7%

3.15 A large number of respondents suggested that Grove Business Park could be put to better use to fulfil some of the expected employment growth, with many making particular note of the fact that a business centre already exists there. Indeed the majority of respondents felt it preferable to cluster any new employment with existing employment. Self-employed and home workers were also mentioned as an area for possible expansion in the future, linking into the findings in the Housing section regarding a majority support for new homes to have office space within/attached.

3.16 Small business/incubator units for growing small businesses that might begin at home were mentioned. One respondent, a B&B owner mentioned here (and several times elsewhere) the lack of guesthouse accommodation in the town and the fact that more could be helpful.

3.17 Respondents were asked to share their views on what would encourage them to make greater use of central Wantage. Many residents alluded to the fact that they will often choose to travel further afield to larger towns and cities (eg. Newbury and Oxford) to access the range of retail and other services that they want.

3.18 With regards home working, residents were asked to state which facilities or services they felt would be important:

	Important	Not Important
Local business banking	59%	25%
<b>Local post office</b>	<b>82%</b>	9%
Local source of office supplies	44%	39%
<b>Good broadband</b>	<b>90%</b>	3%
<b>Good mobile signal</b>	<b>89%</b>	4%
Hot desking facilities in town	22%	49%
Meeting room / conference facilities in town	44%	36%
Parking for visitors near my home	48%	34%
Parking near the business facilities in town	61%	23%
Local overnight accommodation	36%	43%

3.19 The majority of people talked about having a better selection of shops (independents, especially clothes and shoe shops and specialist food shops but also a supermarket and some big name stores) and, to a lesser extent, restaurants.

Many wished to see fewer charity shops. Evening entertainment opportunities were welcomed with many citing a cinema as a potential attraction to the centre of town. Traffic and congestion was another prominent issue within the comments. Pedestrianisation of all/some of the Market Place was raised with numerous people mentioning their desire for the centre to become a more pleasant and safer environment for people on foot. A continental style 'café culture' was mentioned numerous times as having appeal.

3.20 Some respondents called for greater car parking availability suggesting that the Beacon Centre car park was often filled at peak times. Provision of more short-stay (30 minutes) parking was specifically mentioned numerous times.

3.21 Currently there are weekly markets held on a Wednesday and Saturday and a monthly farmers market. Stalls are located in part of the central parking area in the Market Place. 59% of respondents felt that the market footprint could be expanded to fill the same area as the fair when it is in town – a larger area of the Market Place including part of the road. 66% wished to see more speciality markets and 81% were keen that the existing weekly markets expand their offering beyond food and drink to include arts and crafts for example.

3.22 A great number of comments about the types of stalls that could find a place on the market were received. Many people talked about the desire to have a larger market and cited that it used to be larger in the past. Some talked about the difficulties in finding parking close to the market. The fair

was mentioned both in terms of whether it might be better sited away from the centre of town and into fields between Wantage and Grove.

#### Heritage, environment, conservation and design

3.23 Almost all respondents (96%) wished to preserve a sense of character and distinctiveness for Wantage through the use of strategic green gaps between Wantage and its neighbouring settlements. This chimes with the fact that Wantage was seen by a great majority as a peaceful, historic, town surrounded by attractive countryside.

3.24 Green, open space is important to the people of Wantage. In particular protecting Letcombe Brook corridor, protecting the AONBs and having a Green Spaces Plan to manage and promote these open space generally.

3.25 62% of all respondents specifically wanted to protect Letcombe Brook corridor (and 81% of all respondents wanted to enhance this asset to provide local water, a green corridor for people and wildlife and to help prevent flooding). The Platt, The Old Wilts and Berks Canal route, Manor Park, Mably Way Playing Fields, Willow Nature Reserve and the allotments were all mentioned by over a third of respondents when asked about putting in measures to protect specific open spaces. The majority of respondents to this question commented that they would like to have ticked all the boxes and not just their top 5.

3.26 Additional green spaces stated in addition to those provided included (with most mentions): Charlton cricket pitch/fenced green space, protection of the AONBs surrounding Wantage (backed up by a separate question which found that this was important to 76% of respondents), the Convent grounds, all playing fields (with suggestions that if these were in danger, alternative sites should be sought). Only 16% however wished to have more allotments in the town. This reflects the fact that there are sufficient allotments to meet the need at the current time.

3.27 Specific comments added additional support to the protection of green spaces in the town and maintaining a strategic green gap around Wantage including between Wantage and Grove. A call for green screening generally between closely located properties was made. The Willow Walk area was viewed as a potential opportunity for creating a more pleasurable open space. One respondent talked about the intent of the Wilts and Berks Canal to divert from its historic route to avoid Mably Way and the opportunity to create a green corridor from Challow to Grove, thus protecting the old route and the new route from adverse development.

3.28 There was some comment about whether the footpath from the Betjeman Millennium Park to Locks Lane should be preserved for public access, echoing a number of other respondents who talked about a desire to be able to walk 'off-road' around the town and to other nearby settlements.

3.29 The questionnaire asked people about the provision of equipment and other facilities within parks and open spaces. 60% of people wanted to see more walking routes (including wheelchair accessible), and 52% calling for greater friendly cycle path provision (noted once as being integrated into the road network rather than pavements) to separate pedestrians from cyclists.

3.30 With the environment mentioned by many as an attraction to living in Wantage, not surprisingly there was strong support (51% of respondents) for increased infrastructure for wildlife (eg. hedgerows, bird boxes, wildflower meadows) and also the planting of more trees (39%), with trees along roads and provision of communal orchards mentioned specifically. The provision of benches to enjoy open spaces featured prominently. Indeed 39% of respondents felt that more benches generally would be welcome.

3.31 Fitness equipment for adults was the least supported option at 16% although Manor Road playground was mentioned as a possible location for this. Additional play equipment for under-fives did not figure highly in comparison to the other available options although still attracted 20% of local support. Notably play equipment for older children, 5 to 12 years old, attracted more support at 27%, rising to 32% for equipment for teenagers.

3.32 Residents were asked if they would like any assets within Wantage to be safeguarded into the future, potentially with a

view to adding them to a List of Local Assets. The Vale and Downland was mentioned by 75% of respondents with other notable assets including Wessex Mill (49%), The Old Town Hall (37%), The Bear Hotel (37%), The Almshouses (37%) and the Post Office Vaults (30%).

3.33 The indication from the responses were that most assets listed should be safeguarded for future generations as few received very little support and many respondents felt they would have liked to tick all they wanted to safeguard as opposed to just their top five. A host of additional assets were also named under 'other' including: the market place in general including King Alfred's Statue received a lot of mention, gardens and open land around St Katherine's, the cricket pitch, playing fields, the parish church, areas in and around Willows Walk Nature Reserve, the local canals, Betjeman Millennium Park, and various buildings of historical importance. A number of people mentioned their sadness at potentially losing the Convent site, described by one respondent as 'a jewel in the town', to housing or other uses and felt it should be retained for the community.

#### Transport, infrastructure, education and health

3.34 The road network was rated most in need of attention by respondents with 47% rating it poor and 45% as adequate. When asked for more detail, 65% mentioned the need for a Western Relief Road from Mably Way to East Challow, and over half mentioned the Eastern Relief Road from Grove Road

roundabout to the A417 (included in the Infrastructure plans in LPP1). Comments about all roads included the need for roads to be properly repaired. The narrowness of certain streets was noted as was the need to add cycle lanes where possible.

3.35 There were some comments about the potential impact that additional housing development would have on the existing road network, in terms of both wear and tear and congestion and a need to ensure that this is taken into account when planning new sites.

3.36 37% wished to see greater traffic calming measures incorporated, although a more (53%) disagreed with this. Neither speed bumps nor the narrowing of entrances/exits proved widely popular. 519 comments were made on where traffic calming measure might usefully be employed with many mentioned the areas around schools, but a whole range of other locations talked about too. 71% of respondents were content with pedestrian crossings as they are.

3.37 77% of respondents called for greater enforcement of on-street parking restrictions. A great number of individual comments were made highlighting various streets requiring attention with a focus on the need to maximise safety of pedestrians particularly around schools, a call for additional short-stay spaces in the town centre, residents' parking/parking permits for developments where parking spaces are limited, a greater number of spaces, including disabled parking spaces, in the town square. A lot of respondents highlighted the problems of parking around

schools. 52% called for more secure cycle parking facilities in the town.

3.38 The need for a bus route between Wantage and Oxford city centre was overwhelmingly (80%) followed by routes to Didcot Station/town centre (62%) and the Oxford hospitals (48%). 22% used buses to get around the local Wantage area. Only 4% stated that they do not use buses. Least popular destinations included Hungerford (2%), Grove Technology Park (2%) and Faringdon (3%).

3.39 The majority of respondents felt that the main bus stop/"station" should be located outside, but near to, the Market Place (39%), closely followed by the Market Place itself (33%). 60% felt that buses should not be encouraged to 'wait' in the centre of town. Sainsbury's and the Old Police Station were also mentioned a few times as potential locations to site a main bus stop. A warm waiting area for buses was welcomed.

3.40 Residents were questioned about how they would use Grove Station should it reopen. 44% said they would or would possibly use it for getting to work against 53% stating that they wouldn't. 67% said they would use it for leisure trips, rising to 93% when including those who also said they would possibly use it for leisure reasons.

3.41 Specific comments included a call for adequate car parking around any renewed railway station, the bonus of a station reducing road congestion, but also some scepticism about whether it might even be feasible to reopen the facility

and if it were, what the cost would be and whether this would need to come from new housing development (and if so the negatives associated with that).

3.42 Further pedestrianisation of the Market Place in Wantage has been a topic of discussion for some time in the town. The questionnaire received many conflicting and strongly worded views on the subject. Currently pedestrian-only access is limited to outside the Bear Hotel/Greggs and around the King Alfred Statue. 64% of respondents felt that more space for pedestrians would be a good thing for the Market Place.

3.43 Almost a third suggested that there were too many cars which distracted from the attractiveness of the central area and led to a crowded and possibly dangerous environment. Many however felt the opposite with concerns raised about whether or not the surrounding roads would have the capacity to take on the resulting greater amount of traffic. Overall the majority of respondents, 57%, felt that traffic should not be wholly excluded from the Market Place.

3.44 More than half the respondents wished to see less parking in the Market Place allowing more room for other facilities. 45% felt that there was sufficient space for disabled car parking. The only taxi rank in Wantage is located in the Market Place and 58% felt it important that it should remain here.

3.45 Residents were asked to rate the quality of services in Wantage. Those deemed mostly good to adequate included: schools, health services, electricity supply, gas supply,

telephone and land lines and broadband. The following received notably poorer ratings: roads, drainage, telephone mobile signal, parking and public transport.

3.46 In terms of health and well-being facilities, over half of the respondents felt that the community hospital should be improved or expanded. GP and dental services were generally felt to be adequate. Comments however indicated a concern that any new housing development would have a detrimental impact on existing service provision and that this should be taken into account.

#### Youth, leisure, sport and art

3.47 58% of those answering the question felt that there was adequate provision for the public for the visual arts, performance and arts and crafts in Wantage. 42% however disagreed. Drilling into further detail of the quality of provision of specific activities revealed a majority of respondents either answering 'don't know' or simply not responding. This could be interpreted as them not using the facilities or, as some additional comments suggest, not being aware of what facilities are currently available. The majority of all facilities were rated as needing improvement, with only drama, dance, painting and choral, orchestral and popular music facilities deemed 'ok'.

3.48 A great number of comments were received regarding the types of additional facilities relating to arts and culture

that could be provided. Overwhelmingly these focussed on the need for a cinema, a theatre/performing arts centre, and a gallery /arts centre. Many respondents talked about the desire to have a centre like the Cornerstone in Didcot. In addition to these facilities, numerous people also mentioned that space for those producing and selling crafts would be welcomed, as well as further shared community space at affordable rates.

3.49 The Beacon Centre was mentioned on a number of occasions in terms of potentially filling a gap in providing performance arts space and display space for local artists and makers.

3.50 The District Council is planning a new leisure centre in Wantage/Grove. 87% of respondents wanted to see an indoor swimming pool incorporated into the development with 59% requesting a children's pool too. Other facilities rated highly were a sports hall, multi-use courts/games area, adult gym equipment and a running track. This question attracted a great number of comments with many seeing the new facility as an opportunity to upgrade the current more run-down leisure centre.

3.51 Both Abingdon and Bracknell's swimming pools were noted as good examples of what might be achieved in Wantage. Squash courts were mentioned a number of times, providing further detail to the 60% calling for multi-use courts. A fair number of respondents also mentioned steam and sauna facilities as well as a crèche facility.

3.52 With regards sports facilities in the town the majority of options were rated as being 'ok' or 'in need of improvement'. Standing out as being on the poorer side were the swimming pool at Wantage Leisure Centre where 35% felt it was in need of improvement or replacement as well as a number of facilities at the existing leisure centre such as the sports hall (22%), the gym (20%) and the tennis courts (19%).

3.53 Specific comments included Abingdon swimming pool being better equipped for families (and heated), a call for all-weather football pitches, an all-year round running track, basketball facilities and better studios for classes.

### Housing

3.54 Residents were asked about the style of housing they would like to see in any new housing developments. In terms of housing type the following was revealed, with figures for those not supportive of the particular type shown where this was to be a fairly high proportion:

3.55 Garden space is important to the residents of Wantage. Whilst 55% felt that some/most housing with small gardens would be acceptable 38% were not in favour of this. Similarly communal gardens were not supported by 30%. 87% were in favour of all/some new housing having larger gardens.

Single storey (Bungalow)	86% supported
Two-storey	95% supported
Three storey	55% supported
Flats/apartments	79% supported
Terraced	87% supported
Semi-detached	95% supported
Detached	91% supported
Homes with work space	83% supported
Homes with annexe	81% supported
Life-time homes	70% supporting
Supported housing	66% supporting

3.56 Almost 95% of respondents wanted some or most new homes to have off-street parking and garages; and comments about parking including the need for garages and/or at least two car parking spaces per house. Many comments were made about the lack of residential parking on existing roads in the town.

3.57 The comments reflected a desire for a mix of housing within individual developments; the need to avoid 'identikit' styles and instead develop styles sympathetic to historic

Wantage; ensure that new homes have sufficiently sized room and storage space. A handful of comments related to the need for housing to be accessible and sustainable.

3.58 The emerging local plan for the Vale of the White Horse includes a policy that sets a minimum of 30 dwellings per hectare unless specific local circumstances indicate a lower density is appropriate and that most of Wantage and Charlton (Stockham Park, Charlton Heights, Elizabeth Drive etc.) are approximately 25 homes per hectare. Residents were asked whether they agree that there is a strong argument for invoking a lower minimum density for new developments on the fringes of Wantage/Charlton. 79% of respondents agreed. Comments backed this up with residents flagging the need for green space between properties, concerns about higher densities bringing more cars together and creating conditions of overcrowding.

3.59 Of the 68% who answered the question about the types of property on a new development that they might be interested in. The majority 27% wanted a home that is more energy efficient, with 17% interested in downsizing to a property on a single level (i.e. flat or bungalow).

3.60 On the other hand, some respondents who did not have an issue with the local plan policy felt that more common, shared space was more important than lower density housing. A number of responses stated that setting a maximum level would be preferable to a minimum level.

3.61 In terms of standard design features felt important in new housing developments, the following was uncovered through the survey:

<b>Sympathetic landscaping</b>	<b>71%</b>
Design that helps local wildlife	34%
Use of local materials	38%
<b>More car parking spaces</b>	<b>56%</b>
Use of local building skills	38%
Following local style guide	48%
Design deterring criminals	44%
<b>Eco-friendly design</b>	<b>53%</b>
Use of eco materials	28%
Parking spaces with free-draining surfaces	49%

## Commercial Survey

3.62 A questionnaire aimed at the business community of Wantage was put together and emailed to businesses operating in the town. 46 organisations completed the questionnaire and this document sets out the key findings from this sample. The full set of data and comments is detailed in a separate report in the evidence base.

3.63 The most predominant issues mentioned in the survey can be summarised as follows:

- A call for a more integrated, better planned Market Place including better signage
- The need for any new development in the town to be supported by improvements/ additions to the infrastructure – roads (condition, capacity) were mentioned a great deal; broadband and mobile coverage needs to be improved.
- Access – in particular more car parking/ cheaper car parking; possibly a park and ride to reduce cars into the centre of town; the opportunities that having the railway station would bring; potential to pedestrianise part of the Market Place
- Availability of larger, modern units to attract larger businesses and enable expansion

- Raising the profile of Wantage – to increase footfall, attract inward investment, introduce night-time economy, reduce anti-social behaviour.

3.64 46 businesses responded to the survey. Responses came primarily from small to medium sized enterprises with 36 of the businesses responding having 10 or fewer employees while seven had more than 20 and just one with more than 50. Collectively the businesses employ 335 people.

3.65 33% of the respondents have been in Wantage for more than 15 years. The second largest group of respondents (30%) had been in the town for 3 to 5 years. In terms of location, the town centre was the most represented area with 35% located in the town centre and 28% on the edge of the of the town centre. A handful of respondents were located on the industrial estate, at home and out of town, with three answering from their locations in Grove.

### Business premises and facilities

3.66 17 of the businesses were shops/restaurants. 10 were home-based businesses, 7 office based and 6 located within a workshop. 'Other' locations listed were a market stall, the old cinema, the library and a practice.

3.67 In terms of the quality of premises the following was expressed:

	Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent	No response
Quality of premises	0	13	17	13	3
Quality of location	2	12	15	16	1
Quality of environment	4	10	25	7	0

Comments relating to this question were quite varied and included:

- poor condition of roads and pavements (in particular Post Office Rd mentioned) and narrow/congested roads exacerbated by delivery lorries;
- inadequate signage directing people to the shops;
- poor parking (Church Street mentioned);
- the potential problems that nearby new residential developments might cause.

3.68 The majority of respondents (80%) felt that their current premises were about the right size for them. 6 respondents felt that they did not have enough space, 3 had spare space.

In terms of difficulties faced finding premises, 12 of the respondents had faced this and made some comment about what exactly was difficult including: rents/land costs too high, difficult to find units large enough including on the Market Place and a lack of modern facilities.

3.69 To overcome the challenges faced with finding or expanding premises, the following suggestions were made: build homes with home-working space, offer better broadband, could 'affordable' shops be provided (rather like affordable housing is provided) for independent traders, lifting the planning restrictions in the AONBs, provide more units on existing business sites such as those in Challow and Stanford.

3.70 17 of the respondents (37%) expect to have to expand in the next 5 to 10 years. Of those suggesting where they might expand to 6 suggested they would expand on their existing site, 6 would move elsewhere in Wantage and 3 would local elsewhere in the District (Milton Park in South Oxfordshire was mentioned). 27 businesses did not respond to this question.

3.71 Respondents were asked to rate the importance of various factors to them in their decision to stay in Wantage:

	Not important	Quite Important	Very Important	Not Applicable	No response
Availability of skilled labour	8	13	11	10	4
Availability of premises	2	7	21	12	4
Affordable rents	2	9	24	9	2
Accessibility	5	19	18	2	2
Location	10	14	12	7	3
Proximity to Customers	6	9	24	4	3
Broadband	4	15	22	1	4

3.72 Other factors mentioned included: better car parking provision (one noted this relating particularly to staff parking) and reliable mobile and landline coverage. 38 of the 46 businesses did not use external facilities. Those that did

mentioned predominantly the museum and often for a few hours per week (some mentioned specifically for meetings). The Beacon was mentioned once.

3.73 12 of the businesses stated that other people use their premises for a mixture of reasons including for meetings, to share office space and for the toilet.

3.74 When asked about whether or not the business premises facilities were sufficient, the following was expressed, illustrating that the businesses were on the whole content in the short term.

	Yes	No	Not Applicable	No response
For now	32	1	3	10
In 2 Years	26	4	3	13
In 5 Years	21	8	6	11
In 10 Years	13	8	9	16
In 20 Years	9	8	12	17

3.75 Given the likely growth in Wantage's population, businesses were asked to give their three main priorities for action. Again, the full table is included in the separate report. However issues that were raised most frequently were: car parking issues; better quality, less congested roads, access to

larger premises, improved public transport links and better mobile and broadband coverage.

3.76 The survey asked respondents to rate the services to their businesses in Wantage and the following was found:

	Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent	No response
Roads	19	16	6	0	5
Public Transportation	14	17	8	0	7
Parking	20	10	8	2	6
Drainage	6	21	10	1	8
Sewage disposal	2	20	14	2	8
Refuse disposal	8	15	16	3	8
Electricity	1	15	17	5	8
Gas	0	11	18	4	13
Telephone land lines	2	20	11	6	7
Mobile signal	15	13	9	1	8

3.77 Mirroring comments received elsewhere in the survey, respondents focussed on roads (deemed insufficient for new housing in the future), public transport (bus links between Wantage and Didcot mentioned specifically), car parking (availability) and mobile signal (including the lack of fibre optic at Grove Technology Park). One respondent mentioned the lack of business banking opportunities in Wantage.

#### Travel and Transport

3.78 When asked what percentage of the workforce needs transport to get to work, the following was found:

% workforce	Respondents	% of respondents
0 (ie None)	12	26%
1% - 29%	6	11%
30% - 59%	3	6%
60% - 89%	4	9%
90% - 100%	12	26%
No response	9	20%

3.79 In terms of transport used to get to work, the majority (14 of the 46) mentioned that the car was the predominant form of transport, often in combination with other modes of transport such as bicycle and walking.

3.80 The majority of respondents (27 out of the 46) did not feel that alternative forms of transport were necessary for their workforces. Of the 12 who said they would welcome other forms of transport, the following comments were made: more car parking (presumably to assist those arriving by car), a park and ride facility (for those travelling into the town from elsewhere) and more cycle routes. One respondent mentioned the need for a bus route between Wantage and Grove Technology Park.

#### What respondents liked most about being based in Wantage

3.81 40 businesses answered this question raising a host of benefits to Wantage as a business location. In particular many mentioned the friendliness of the town, the lively, market town ambience, a loyal, affluent customer base, the proximity to their homes in the town creating a good work/life balance, and the proximity to larger towns that provide business opportunities.

3.82 The question about the two best things that being in Wantage provides your business prompted a series of comments that largely reflected those mentioned above. Most frequently raised issues were: the convenient location

with a nice environment and community ambience, proximity of a loyal, affluent customer base and having a local and Post Office locally.

#### What respondents liked least about being based in Wantage

3.83 41 businesses answered this question. Car parking – lack of, cost and location – was mentioned a great deal. The number of taxis in the town centre was deemed too high. The poor quality of the roads (surfaces) was also noted. The retail offer in the town was felt to need improving in terms of quality and breadth of shops and services with a need to perhaps introduce some ‘magnets’ to Wantage. Poor mobile phone coverage was also mentioned again. Some respondents were concerned about the levels of housing development in the town and other shopping areas as part of this.

3.84 When asked about the two biggest problems for their businesses in Wantage, a variety of issues were raised, some echoing comments made elsewhere in the survey, such as car parking, road conditions (including congestion and lack of space for deliveries), lack of broadband and too many charity shops/lack of diversity of retail offer. Other issues mentioned frequently included the decreasing footfall felt in the town as well as the lack of suitable staff available for employment locally. One respondent mentioned the ‘slow’ housing development perhaps eluding to the fact that greater numbers of houses might provide a greater client

base. Antisocial behaviour was mentioned as was the lack of night-time economy.

3.85 When asked about factors that might prompt a decision to relocate away from Wantage, 17 respondents mentioned a variety of such issues including: car parking (cost/availability), increasing road congestion, availability of more suitable or less expensive accommodation elsewhere that might be closer to the core customer base. Potential solutions to these concerns included: cheaper parking for workers in the town, cheaper rent, avoid giving charity shops prime locations in the Market Place, encourage larger retailers to the town by offering bigger units, halt the conversion of shops into houses, plan new developments to include a mix of retail, housing and commercial.

#### Future development in Wantage

3.86 The survey asked what views people had on how Wantage should develop over the next 20 years and a range of comments were given. The predominant view was that any development should take place slowly and selectively.

3.87 Beyond that the most raised issues were, in order of frequency:

- the need to enhance the retail offer of the town, linking in with raising the profile generally of Wantage as a place to visit or locate;
- improving the conditions and capacity of the existing road network (prior to any new development) (one

mentioned the need for a relief road to get from the A338 to the A417, while another mentioned that these roads were also used by cyclists which was helping to slow down traffic;

- the desire to reopen Grove Railways station;
- the need for additional supporting infrastructure to support any future development and a call for all/part of the Market Place to be pedestrianised.

#### Support for Businesses

3.88 Respondents listed a range of areas that they felt would help their businesses. The most frequently mentioned issue related to infrastructure, ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is in place to support any new development in the town, be it car parking, road capacity, the railway station and education, health and leisure facilities.

3.89 Many mentioned a desire to improve local civic pride in Wantage, reducing anti-social behaviour and instilling a 'Shop Local' ethos among the local community. Some respondents would welcome more links between businesses, perhaps through a newsletter or business group. Indeed one respondent wished to flag the existence of a free local community website in Wantage ([www.wantage.com](http://www.wantage.com)) that could be made more use of.

3.90 A handful of final comments were received including a call to maintain the unique character of historic Wantage, the need for more home-working facilities, and the desire for a map and directory of businesses on the Market Place.

### Survey of Educational Organisations in Wantage

3.91 11 responses were received to the questionnaire aimed at educational organisations in the town. Whilst not a significant number, the responses do offer a different perspective that is worth taking into account alongside the residential and commercial survey findings.

3.92 The following key issues emerge from the survey comments taken collectively:

- Those representing educational establishments want early involvement in planning policy and decision making as schools represent a critical facility to support a growing population.
- A rise in population is likely to result in the need for additional classroom space in existing establishments as well as the need for further/improved outdoor (all weather) play areas, and further facilities for young families.
- General agreement on the appeal of Wantage as a historic, market town with a good sense of community spirit and reasonable local employment prospects.
- Concerns highlighted were traffic congestion, noise and lack of car parking, which might be exacerbated with new development. A call for planning to be undertaken to include provision for supporting

infrastructure – eg. school places, leisure and community facilities.

- An improved retail offer on the high street called for.

## 4. Towards a Neighbourhood Plan

4.1 The analysis of the information contained in this report begins to provide an indication of the likely focus on the local planning policy opportunities for the Neighbourhood Plan. These opportunities are a result of either clear signals from strategic policy – essentially the vision and policies of the forthcoming Vale Local Plan as they affect Wantage – and/or from the desire of the local community for the Plan to address specific issues in the town.

4.2 These opportunities can be summarised as follows (in no particular order):

- A town centre strategy bringing together a range of commercial, cultural and parking land uses and development management policies to grow the town centre and its range of uses - including land at Limborough Road, Church Street, Portway and Newbury Street – and to conserve its heritage assets
- A series of site-specific policies to promote and control future changes of use and development schemes, e.g. The Police Station, Royal Mail, Broadway Motors, KA East site, The Convent and The Mill
- Allocating land for new employment (B1-B8) uses  
Providing for the reconfiguration of local schools provision and the reuse of existing education land
- Shaping decisions on future leisure facilities provision and their location in the town

- Translating the forthcoming Vale Design Guide into specific guidance for all or parts of the town
- Establishing a green infrastructure plan to improve people and habitat connectivity within, through and beyond the town and to protect important green spaces and gaps

4.3 Conversely, and unusually for a neighbourhood plan, there appears desire or need for the Plan to consider housing allocations. The task of planning for housing development beyond the town boundary has been undertaken by the forthcoming Local Plan and there is no expectation that the Plan will need to do any more in that respect.

4.4 However, there may be opportunities for the Plan to support housing uses either alone or as part of mixed use development schemes on one or more sites currently in other uses within the town.

4.5 These and other policy ideas will be explored, developed and tested with stakeholders in the next stage of the project leading to the preparation of the Pre Submission Plan for formal public consultation in by the summer 2015.

## APPENDIX A

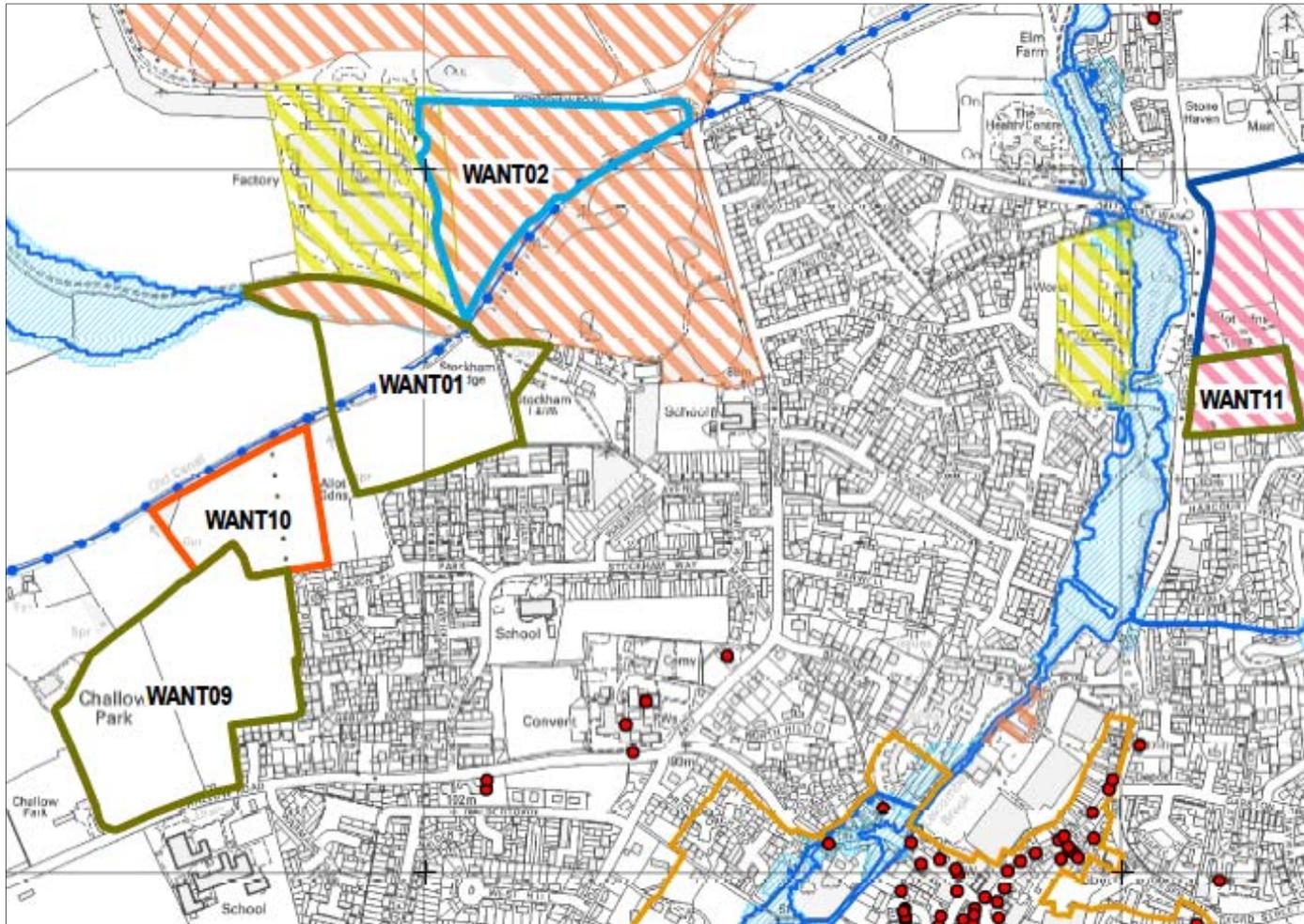
### Evidence Base

- Vale Local Plan Part 1: Strategic Sites & Policies (2014)
- Vale Local Plan Part 1: Strategic Sites & Policies – Topic Papers 4, 5, 8 and 9 (2014)
- Vale of White Horse Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment: Appendix 24 Wantage (2014)
- Vale of White Horse District Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2013)
- Vale of White Horse District Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2014)
- Vale of White Horse District Design Guide (2014)
- Vale of White Horse District Retail & Town Centre Study: Addendum (2014)
- Wantage & Grove Healthcheck (2007)
- Wantage Neighbourhood Plan Residential Survey (2014)
- Wantage Neighbourhood Plan Working Group SWOT Analysis (2014)
- Wantage Neighbourhood Plan Stakeholder Surveys (2014)

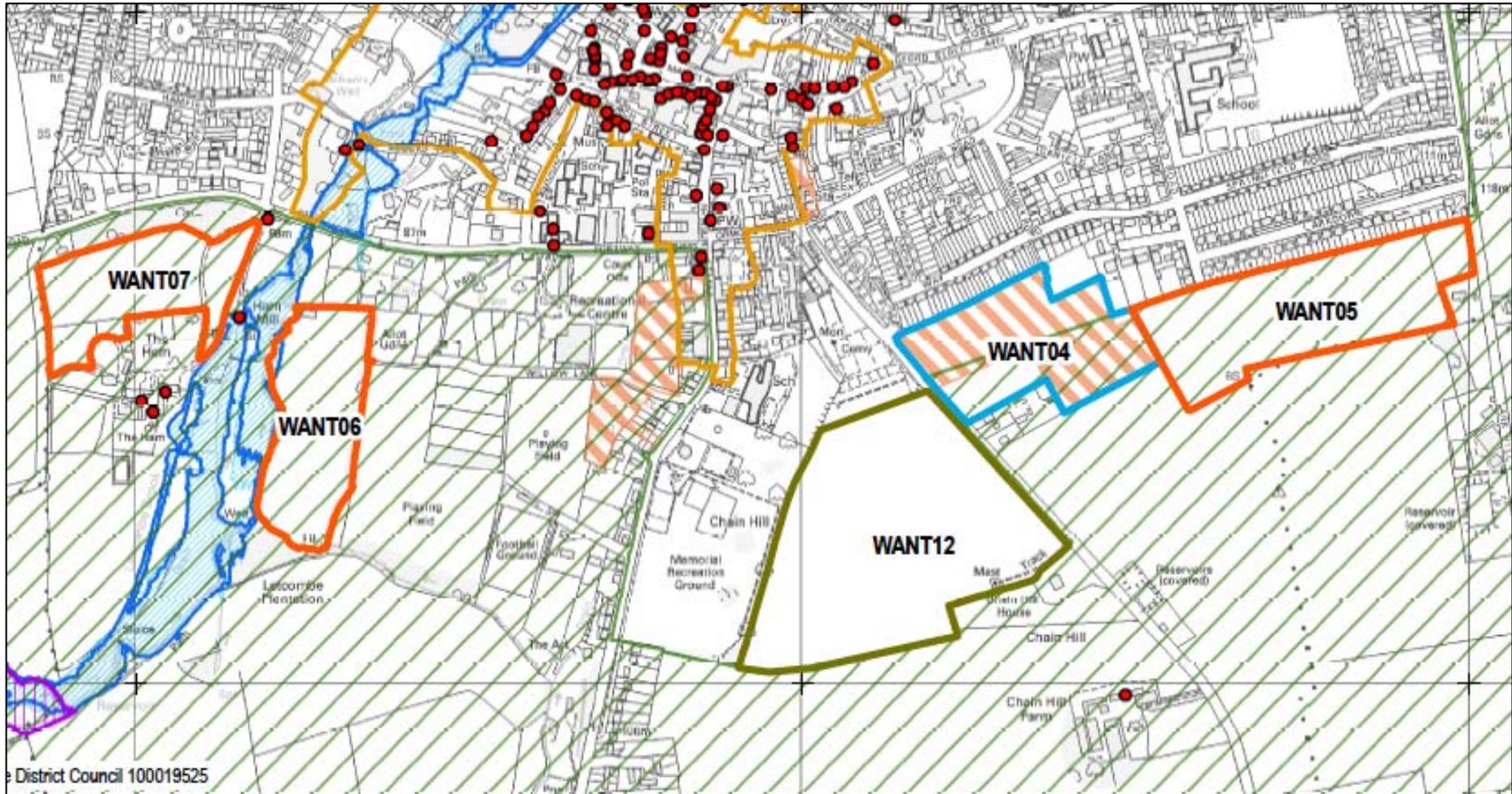
## **APPENDIX B**

### **Constraints Maps**

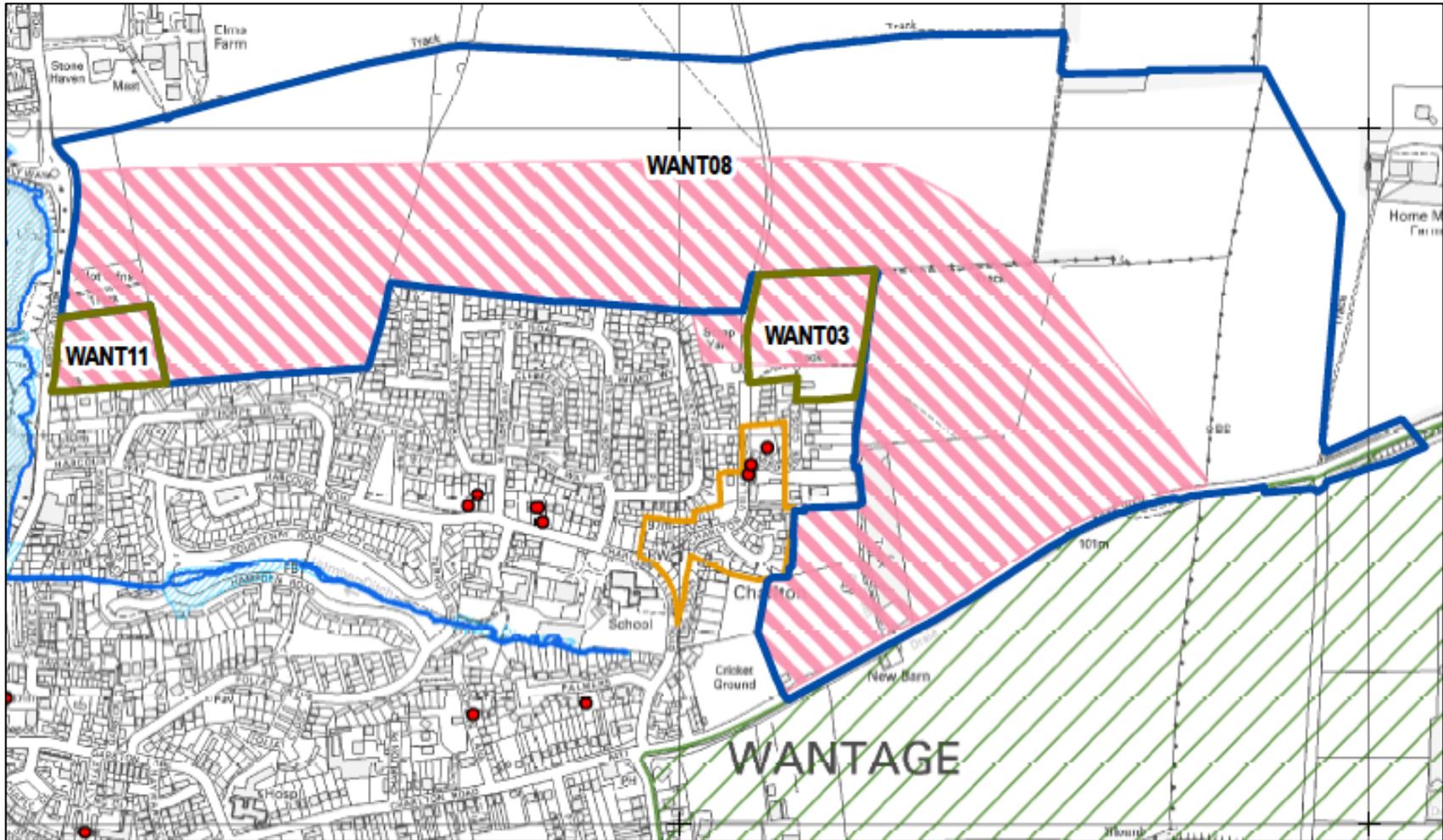
The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) document of February 2014 contains a series of maps that helpfully identify all of the main environmental constraints in the town, as well as the sites assessed for potential housing development. They are included below to inform the Plan in respect of the availability of land in and round the town for development and of the likely environmental issues – heritage and natural – that will need to be fully considered.



Map D: Vale of White Horse District Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Extract 1



Map E: Vale of White Horse District Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Extract 2



Map F: Vale of White Horse District Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Extract 3



Vale of White Horse District Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment – Plan Key

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