

PROPOSED BUILDING OF 800 HOUSES ON ALVESCOT DOWN

Following the Parish Council meeting on 15 September the Council agreed that it will object to the Local Plan proposal. There are several reasons to object to the plan as our submission to the last consultation which saw the introduction of a new Tier 4 class of villages to accept up to 10 houses for future applications. This can still be viewed on the village website.

This time the plan is out for consultation and WODC is asking for objections on the plan as a whole and on technical planning issues but please do not let this stop you submitting your objection.

Here are some of the well-established reasons:

- Destruction of an area of high landscape value and historical importance, causing "significant harm to the character and landscape of the area" (WODC's own phrase when refusing a previous speculative application by the developer).
- Inadequate local road network which cannot sustain the inevitable increase in traffic.
- Significant detriment to wildlife and biodiversity on this site and adjoining sites including a Conservation Target Area and a Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- Increased flood risk on the site and in nearby villages.
- Impact on an inadequate sewage system risking pollution including of Shill Brook.
- Damage to the farming and tourist industries.

The case against building here has been based on these and other reasons. As a result WODC has in the past recognised that it is unsuitable for development, notably when rejecting an earlier application and also in deciding to drop the site from the last Local Plan in 2018 – a decision endorsed by Government Inspectors. Even during an earlier stage of drawing up this Plan WODC referred to the site's landscape, heritage and ecological drawbacks.

Nothing has changed since 2018. But now WODC chooses to ignore the evidence.

The Parish Council have agreed to join with Alvescot Parish Council and together we will contend that the Draft Plan imposes an unjustified and unsustainable total requirement to build 5,500 dwellings on the parishes around Carterton. In addition WODC appears to have failed to produce a robust Draft Plan in line with national Government requirements. Both Parish Councils intend to engage expert planning legal advice to support this opinion.

If you want to play your part in fending off development on Alvescot Down, then there are a few things you can do:

- write to WODC **before 9 October** at planning.consultation@westoxon.gov.uk or Planning Team, Wood Green, New Yatt Road, Witney, OX28 1NB.
- you can go online to read the Plan and add your comments at <https://yourvoice.westoxon.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/west-oxfordshire-pre-submission-draft-local-plan-2043>.
- speak to your friends and neighbours about this and encourage them to lodge their objections. Both Parish Council are engaging with neighbouring parishes who are affected by this, so if you know anyone living in those villages tell them too!

THE DRAFT PLAN IS UNSOUND AND NON-COMPLIANT WITH NATIONAL PLANNING REQUIREMENTS ON THE FOLLOWING GROUNDS:

- No justification is offered as to why Alvescot Down has been included in this Draft Plan when none of the evidence has changed since WODC and Government Inspectors concluded that it was unsuitable for inclusion in 2018.
- The Plan admits to a number of negative impacts but offers no specific suggestions as to how these could be mitigated. Clearly some, such as the loss of landscape, cannot be mitigated. If there are ways of addressing others, no

indication is given of how. For example, overcoming the poor transport connectivity is said to depend on the creation of a "mass rapid transport" system (possibly a railway) encroaching onto the Down. This project, which would cross a Conservation Target Area, is highly speculative and beset by substantial technical and funding challenges which suggest it is unlikely to materialise during the period covered by the Plan, if at all.

- In considering various sites the Draft adopts a subjective approach to evaluating negative impacts which makes comparisons difficult. However, it seems that alternative sites which have been rejected would be less problematic than Alvescot Down.
- Inadequate justification is given for imposing a disproportionate number of homes (5,500 i.e. two thirds of the District's strategic allocation) on the parishes adjoining Carterton, which is likely to be unsustainable for the town and overwhelming for neighbouring villages.
- This is the first and final version of the Draft Plan. The last stage of consultation in 2025 elicited strong evidence against development on Alvescot Down. Since then there has been no communication with parish councils or communities more widely. There has been no opportunity to comment on an emerging Draft and WODC has stated that it does not want any feedback now on sites. This does not meet the standard of community engagement required by national guidance.
- Developing this site would contravene the Draft Plan's own Core Policies on protecting the rural and historic character (CP9) and nature (CP10). It also violates Core Policy CP3 on supporting farming and tourism (CP3).
- if you want to be kept informed about this matter – and other parish news – if you are not already signed up to receive Parish Council bulletins via e-mail or What App, contact the Parish Clerk at clerk@filkinsandbpparishcouncil.gov.uk
- The Parish Council may need to raise funds in the village to meet the joint cost of retaining professional advice. Is this something you would consider?