

South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2033

Second Preferred Options Consultation

**Woodcote Parish Council
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INTRODUCTION

Woodcote is a village of some 2500 people located entirely within the Chilterns AONB and visible across the Thames Valley from the West Berkshire AONB.

Key issues are:

- an ageing population and the resulting strain placed on local health services;
- a lack of places at the local schools which serve a wide area around Woodcote, including Goring;
- relatively poor public transport services leading to high levels of car ownership, traffic congestion, parking problems and road safety issues;
- poor, and reducing, local services;
- the village's location between Pangbourne and the M40 making the Goring Road, which runs through the centre of the village, a rat-run linking the M4 and M40.
- high house prices that continue to increase rapidly and well beyond the means of young families, couples and singles;
- the rapid rise in house prices in Reading (the highest nationally last year) triggered by the Cross Rail project;
- Woodcote's location within the Chilterns AONB which surrounds and flows through the entire village;
- Woodcote's location on the Chiltern escarpment with views into the village from the North Wessex Downs AONB; and
- some 85% of the parish being classed as areas of very high or high biodiversity.

The community has embraced localism and in 2014 Woodcote became one of the first dozen communities in England to have a Made Neighbourhood Plan (WNP). The Woodcote effort is viewed as a national flagship and promoted as a case study of good practice. Communities across the country now use the Woodcote Neighbourhood Plan as a model and continue to look to, and contact, Woodcote for advice and guidance.

Woodcote has delivered on the commitments made in the WNP. Of the five sites allocated for development:

- one has 14 occupied new homes on it;
- a second has planning permission for 24 new homes; and
- applications for 29 new homes on two more have been submitted, with the support of the Parish Council, to SODC.

This represents 85% of the development commitment.

The Examiner, in his report on the WNP, noted his conviction that the consultation carried out 'comfortably exceeded' the requirements. The community views expressed in the WNP consultations, together an all-village survey conducted in January 2017 and initial work on a second Woodcote Neighbourhood Plan provide the evidence for the views expressed in this response to the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2033 – Second Preferred Options.

1. KEY POINTS

1.1. Vision

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports** the Council's vision of South Oxfordshire remaining a beautiful place to live and an attractive place for people to work and spend their leisure time. In so saying the Parish Council believes it essential to achieving that vision that:

- greater emphasis must be given to protecting the natural environment. Woodcote Parish Council considers the protection of the Chilterns AONB and views into the District from the North Wessex Downs AONB to be of the highest priority. Insensitive development in the AONBs will seriously degrade the environmental and landscape quality.
- development should be more dense than that proposed in the current Core Strategy and focused on the towns. Woodcote Parish Council believes that high density housing, perhaps 50/hectare, will take up less precious land and provide less expensive houses.

As such Woodcote Parish Council **strongly support** the intent (paragraph 3.7) to protect and enhance the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty but is **concerned** about a lack of differentiation between areas within the AONBs and those outside.

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly support** the vision statement (paragraph 3.9) of South Oxfordshire as an area that attracts visitors but note that the landscape and natural beauty that is a major attraction is at risk of damage if, as is suggested, settlements within designated landscapes are treated the same as those outside such areas.

1.2. Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Greenhouse gas emissions pose an existential threat to humanity and all development decisions should focus on reducing those emissions. While energy generation moves to renewables and homes are better insulated, emissions from motor vehicles continue to increase. Woodcote Parish Council believes it essential to locate as much new development as possible close to, or within, existing urban centres and major areas of employment to reduce travel for employment, recreation, shopping health and education services and to improve the access to public transport.

1.3. Ageing Population

Where the population is ageing then new development should focus on providing new homes for young families, couples and singles. Furthermore, provision for an aging population must be concentrated in the larger towns where significant facilities are accessible without the use of a car.

1.4. Affordable Housing

High house prices and low levels of affordable housing combine to accelerate the ageing of the populations of the villages with the corresponding loss of community vitality. Affordable housing must be a priority with a greater share of new developments being affordable and within that a greater share of the affordable homes being part-rent/part-buy than that currently proposed by the Preferred Options policies. Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports** lower price houses and starter homes for local people rather than larger homes for commuters.

5. Settlement Hierarchy

Woodcote Parish Council believe that the current settlement hierarchy to be flawed. Although bureaucratically convenient, the settlement assessments are overly simplistic and fail to recognise the very different levels of sustainability enjoyed by the 12 larger villages within the hierarchy. Inclusion by size does not reflect the substantial differences in services, public transport and other facilities. In addition, no account is taken of constraints such as location within nationally designated areas such as an AONB.

Woodcote Parish Council **recommend** that this hierarchy be reviewed and restructured to reflect the differences in services and constraints on development.

6. Neighbourhood Plans

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports** Neighbourhood Plans and believes that they provide the best evidenced input to the Local Plan. As such their output should be given substantial weight when constructing the Local Plan. Equally, Made Neighbourhood Plans should be treated seriously and supported by the Local Planning Authority if communities across South Oxfordshire are not to see them as a waste of effort, time and money.

Woodcote Parish Council **welcome**, therefore, the support given to Neighbourhood Plan in the Preferred Options document but are **concerned** that the Preferred Options document positions Neighbourhood Plans only as a means of locally realising the arithmetically derived number of new homes in communities as distinct from the broader view promoted by the DCLG and enshrined in the NPPF.

2. POLICY REVIEW

2.1 Objectives

Woodcote Parish Council would like to see a stronger and more explicit commitment to the protection of the AONB;

Woodcote Parish Council **does not support** Objective OBJ 1.1 -Support the settlement hierarchy, the growth and development of Didcot Garden Town, the delivery of new development in the heart of the District, the growth of our market towns and the vitality of our village.

It **wrongly asserts** that the 12 larger villages are the same and fails to take note of the substantial difference in services (of all kinds) and constraints deriving, for example, from their location in an AONB. The Settlement hierarchy must be revised to recognise these material differences.

Woodcote Parish Council **support** the following objectives:

- OBJ 1.2 Support rural communities and “their way of life”, recognising that this is what attracts people to the District.
- OBJ 1.3 Meet identified housing needs by delivering high-quality, sustainable, attractive places for people to live and work.
- OBJ 2.1 Deliver wide range of housing options to cater for the housing needs of our community (self-build, older person’s accommodation).
- OBJ 2.2 Support the regeneration of housing and facilities to strengthen communities, and address identified poverty and social exclusion.
- OBJ 2.3 Support meeting the economic and housing needs of the county as a whole, reflecting the special character of South Oxfordshire.
- OBJ 3.1 Improve employment opportunities and employment land provision, providing high quality local jobs to help retain more of its skilled residents in the local workforce.
- OBJ 3.2 Support business growth, especially in locations close to existing business areas, transport connections and broadband provision and which provide the opportunity to reduce commuting distances.
- OBJ 3.3 Ensure economic and housing growth are balanced, to support sustainable journeys to work.
- OBJ 3.4 Support the retail and service sectors as well as low and high-tech industries.

- OBJ 3.5 Create the conditions whereby world-renowned and cutting edge industries choose to locate and grow their businesses here, contributing to a strong and successful economy, in line with the Strategic Economic Plan for Oxfordshire.
- OBJ 3.6 Inspire the next generation of workers by planning for high quality education facilities.
- OBJ 3.7 Encourage tourism by protecting our built and natural assets, such as the Thames, and providing services and facilities for visitors.

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly support** the following objectives:

- OBJ 1.4 Focus growth in Science Vale through delivering homes and jobs, retail and leisure
- OBJ 4.1 Ensure that essential infrastructure is delivered to support our existing residents and services as well as growth.
- OBJ 4.2 Make sustainable transport an attractive and viable choice for people, whilst recognising that car travel and parking provision will continue to be important in this rural District.
- OBJ 5.1 Deliver high quality, innovative, well designed and locally distinctive developments in sustainable locations.
- OBJ 5.2 Support development that respects the scale and character of our towns and villages, enhancing the special character of our historic settlements and the surrounding countryside.
- OBJ 6.1 Champion neighbourhood planning, empowering local communities to direct development within their area and provide support to ensure Neighbourhood Development Plans are deliverable, achievable and sustainable.
- OBJ 6.2 Provide access to high quality leisure, recreation, cultural, community and health facilities.
- OBJ 6.3 Ensure all communities have access to the services and facilities they value, supporting the health and wellbeing of everyone.
- OBJ 7.1 Protect and enhance the natural environment, including biodiversity, the landscape, green infrastructure and our waterways, placing particular importance on the value of the Oxford Green Belt, our two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the River Thames.
- OBJ 7.2 Conserve and enhance our rich and varied historic assets and their settings, celebrating these as some of our strongest attributes.
- OBJ 8.2 Minimise carbon emissions and other pollution such as water, air, noise and light, and increase our resilience to the likely impact of climate change, especially flooding.

2.2 Strategy

Woodcote Parish Council **support** the Overall Strategy (STRAT1) with the **exception** of the strategic element that *'supports and enhances the roles of the larger villages Benson, Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Chinnor, Cholsey, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring, Nettlebed, Sonning Common, Watlington, Wheatley and Woodcote as local service centres'*. This element glosses over the significant differences between the villages classified as 'larger'.

Woodcote Parish Council **do not support** STRAT 2 - The Need For New Development In South Oxfordshire. Woodcote Parish Council accept the need for development in the District but continue to believe that 17,050 is an over estimate derived from a flawed Strategic Housing Market Assessment that uses an unrealistic and unfeasible projection of high economic growth which, for example, had no regard for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Community.

Woodcote Parish Council is **concerned** about policy STRAT3 - The Unmet Housing Requirements from Oxford City. The Parish Council notes that the Oxford Green Belt is 60 years old and believes that it should be reviewed to maintain continuing relevance. Selective use of some Green Belt land, such as that south of Grenoble Road, to relieve the Oxford overspill, would reduce the need for development in the AONB. Allowing Oxford overspill into South Oxfordshire does not avoid the urban sprawl that Green belts were designed for. It merely places the sprawl in other, rural, areas.

Woodcote Parish Council **supports** the following policies

STRAT4	Didcot Garden Town
STRAT5	Strategic allocations
STRAT6	Culham Science centre
STRAT7	Land adjacent to Culham Science centre
STRAT8	Land at Berinsfield
STRAT9	Land at Chalgrove airfield
STRAT10	Land at Wheatley campus, Oxford Brookes University
HEN1	The Strategy for Henley
TH1	The Strategy for Thame
WAL1	The Strategy for Wallingford

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports** the location of new housing close to employment development to reduce private car travel and to support public transport, cycling and walking to work.

2.3 Housing Supply

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly opposes** Policy H1 – Delivering New Homes.

The Parish Council **strongly supports** housing development on sites that are allocated by Neighbourhood Development Plans but **strongly opposes** housing development on sites that are adjacent to the existing built-up areas of towns and larger villages. Where a made Neighbourhood Plan applies then housing development should not be allowed on any sites, other than previously developed land, that are not allocated in the made Neighbourhood Plan.

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports** :

Policy H2	New Housing in Didcot
Policy H2i	Didcot A
Policy H2ii	Didcot Gateway
Policy H2iii	Hadden Hill (Didcot)

Woodcote Parish Council **supports** Policy H3 – Housing in the towns of Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford.

Locating new housing in Didcot, and the market towns, the major locations of employment in the District, will reduce car journeys to work, will be attractive to public transport, will make cycling and walking to work, schools and shops more likely and:

- attract new commercial activities and service suppliers;
- attract, because of the greater variety of housing and house prices, new employers;
- be sufficient to support services and an infrastructure appropriate to today's needs;
- allow eco-development on a community-wide scale both reducing the impact on climate change and allowing the inclusion of climate change mitigation measures;
- make better use of the infrastructure installed for the new employment areas; and
- protect the AONBs.

Woodcote Parish Council remains **cautious** about Policy H4 - Housing in Larger Villages. Not only have these communities borne the brunt of the new housing required for the Core Strategy 2027 but also this approach denies the opportunity to develop the more environmentally sensitive, low-carbon, affordable, housing, close to employment sites, that new large settlements offer.

Woodcote Parish Council also notes that those villages labelled as larger differ significantly in size, sustainability (the facilities and services locally available) and ability to expand - constrained, as some are, by the AONB. Larger villages with few services and facilities **cannot** act fully as service centres as required by the emerging Local Plan.

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly support** the:

- requirement (paragraph 5.17) that development in the larger villages should be proportional, appropriate and dependent on existing infrastructure; and
- proposal that the most appropriate mechanism for allowing housing in villages is by preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan .

The Parish Council **does not support** the view that a degree of development in the villages will help to support local services and facilities and result in a more sustainable distribution of development that would have a more balanced impact on infrastructure. Some villages are less sustainable than others and development of the degree required by the emerging Local Plan will strain existing, often over-loaded, local services but not be of sufficient scale to attract new, or extend existing, services.

Woodcote Parish Council **welcome** the recognition (paragraph 5.27 and 5.28) that the arithmetically based distribution process does not take account of social, economic and environmental factors that may limit a settlement's ability to accommodate the calculated amount of growth, nor take into account the availability of suitable deliverable sites, nor allow for the fact that some villages are constrained by factors such as location within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty that make it impossible to achieve a 15% growth.

Woodcote Parish Council remain **cautious** about Policy H4 (Housing in Larger Villages) because of specific constraints in some of the larger villages.

Woodcote Parish Council **support**:

Policy H5	Contingency Policy for Larger Villages
Policy H6	Land to the west of Priests Close, Nettlebed
Policy H7	Joyce Grove, Nettlebed
Policy H8	Land to the east of Benson Lane, Crowmarsh Gifford
Policy H9	Land to the south of Newnham Manor, Crowmarsh Gifford

Woodcote Parish Council **supports** Policy H10 -Housing in Smaller Villages. Many of the 58 villages categorised as 'Smaller' would benefit from additional housing to help sustain local communities. The Parish Council notes the increase in older people in the District, particularly in the villages, and believes that the ageing population and high house prices make it imperative for affordable housing and smaller units geared to those wishing to downsize but remain in their community be made a priority in the smaller villages if vibrancy and amenity are to be maintained.

Affordable Housing

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports** Policy H11 - Affordable Housing. House prices in Reading and the south of the District have increased faster than anywhere else in the country in anticipation of the arrival of Crossrail. Young people born and brought up in the District are, therefore, forced to go further afield for housing and the communities continue to age at the expense of local vitality and local health services.

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports** the requirement that where there is a net gain of 6 or more in a development in the AONB at least 40% of the dwellings must be affordable housing.

Woodcote Parish Council **supports** Policy H12 - Exception Sites but believes the policy must specify more closely what constitutes a small-scale housing scheme.

Woodcote Parish Council is **sympathetic** to the Council's desire (paragraph 5.46) to increase the stock of affordable housing but believes that any such scheme must be within the policies of any made Neighbourhood Plan covering the area.

Woodcote Parish Council **supports**:

- Policy H13 Meeting Housing needs.
- Policy H14 Self-Build and custom Housing)
- Policy H15 Specialist Housing for Older People).
- Policy H16 Provision for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, but believes it should include a provision that such sites be identified in Neighbourhood Plans, where they exist.
- Policy H17 Safeguarding Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites.

Woodcote Parish Council:

- **cautiously supports** Policy H18 - Infill Development, but believes that a better definition of what constitutes a satisfactory infill site and an indication on the limit of the number of new homes in an infill site is required; and
- **strongly supports** a windfall limit of 4 new homes per development in the larger villages.

Woodcote Parish Council **supports** Policy H19 - Sub-division and conversion to Multiple Occupation. The sub-division of dwellings and conversions to multiple occupations can add to the stock of smaller and less expensive dwellings and thus provide starter homes for young people.

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports**:

- Policy H20 Replacement Dwellings, but believes that replacement dwellings in the AONB must be treated the same as those in the Green Belt and thus should not be materially larger than the original dwelling – as defined in section (iv) of the policy.
- H21 Extensions to Dwellings, but believes that extensions to dwellings in the AONB must be treated the same as those in the Green Belt.
- Policy H Loss of Existing Residential Accommodation in Town Centres.

2.4 Employment

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports**:

- Policy EMP1 The Amount and Distribution of New B-class Employment Land
- Policy EMP2 Range, Size and Mix of Employment Premises
- Policy EMP3 Retention of Employment Land
- Policy EMP4 Employment Land in Didcot
- Policy EMP5 New Employment Land at Henley
- Policy EMP6 New Employment Land at Thame
- Policy EMP7 New Employment Land at Wallingford
- Policy EMP8 New Employment Land at Crowmarsh Gifford
- Policy EMP9 Employment at Culham Science Centre
- Policy EMP10 New Employment Land at Chalgrove
- Policy EMP11 Development in the Countryside and Rural Areas

Woodcote Parish Council note the important economic contribution of inward tourism (paragraph 6.33) and that tourists are attracted to South Oxfordshire by features that include the District's attractive countryside and pretty villages. Woodcote Parish Council **support** the encouragement of tourism but **note the danger** of development in the AONB and villages degrading the District's attractiveness.

Woodcote Parish Council **supports**:

Policy EMP12 Tourism

Policy EMP13 Caravan and Camping Sites

Policy EMP14 Visitor Accommodation

2.5 Infrastructure

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports** the statement (paragraph 7.1) that good connections and high quality infrastructure are essential to quality of life and **support** the requirement that new development must be served and supported by appropriate on- and off-site infrastructure and services.

The Parish Council believe that the current level of carbon dioxide emissions poses an existential threat to humanity, notes the current economic constraints on infrastructure expenditure, and believes that:

- it is essential to locate new development in areas well served by public transport and on a scale to attract new public transport services;
- development must be located close to, or along, existing major public transport services and railway stations;
- development must be located such that nearby facilities are accessible by foot or bicycle;
- development must not worsen existing local parking problems; and
- the infrastructure needs of all residents, particularly the elderly, are met.

Woodcote Parish Council **support**:

- Policy INF1 Infrastructure Provision, but **note** the difficulty of applying this outside the towns;
- Policy TRANS1 Supporting Strategic Transport Investment, but **note** the omission of infrastructure investment in the larger villages and, in particular, measures to relieve the impact of the substantial increase in traffic in the south of the District that would result should Reading's bid for a third bridge be successful;
- Policy TRANS2 Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility;
- Policy TRANS 3 Safeguarding of Land for Strategic Transport Schemes, but **note** the lack of attention to communities in the south of the District;
- Policy TRANS5 Consideration of Development Proposals;
- Policy TRANS6 Rail;
- Policy TRANS7 Development Generating New Lorry Movements; and
- Policy TRANS8 Community Facilities and Rural Transport.

Woodcote Parish Council **agree** with the assertion (paragraph 7.28) that sustainable means of transport and access to services and employment can be more difficult for rural residents who do not have access to a car and **note** that many rural bus services have recently been closed as a result of cuts in public funding and that existing transport links between settlements other than the market towns are at best impractical, at worst, non-existent.

Woodcote Parish Council **support:**

- Policy INF2 Electronic communications;
- Policy INF3 Telecommunications Technology;
- Policy INF4 Chinnor reservoir; and
- Policy INF5 Water Resources.

2.6 Natural and Historic Environment

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly supports** the statement (paragraph 8.1) that South Oxfordshire has a beautiful natural and built environment, which not only makes the District an attractive place to live and work but also attracts visitors from near and far who contribute significantly to the local economy.

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly support:**

- Policy ENV1 Landscape and Countryside and the Council's expressed intent (paragraph 8.9) to give great weight to conserving and enhancing the intrinsic character and beauty of our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection.
- Policy ENV2 Biodiversity - Designated Sites, Priority Habitats and Species.
- Policy ENV3 Biodiversity – Non Designated Sites, Habitats and Species). The Parish Council would suggest that those areas identified by the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study as having a Very High or High level of biodiversity be specifically included in the policy.
- Policy ENV4 Watercourses.
- Policy ENV5 Green Infrastructure in New Developments.
- Policy ENV6 Historic Environment.
- Policy ENV7 Demolition of Listed Buildings.
- Policy ENV8 Alteration of and Extension to Listed Buildings.
- Policy ENV9 Conservation Areas.
- Policy ENV10 Archaeology.
- Policy ENV11 Historic Battlefields, Registered Parks and Gardens and Historic Landscapes
- Policy ENV12 Pollution - Impact from neighbouring and/ or Previous Land Uses on New Development (Receptors).
- Policy ENV13 Pollution - Impact of Development on Human Health, the Natural Environment and/or Local amenity (Sources) and believe that pollution from motor vehicles should be specifically included in the policy.
- Policy EP1 Air Quality.
- Policy EP2 Hazardous Substances.

Woodcote Parish Council **support** Policy EP3 - Minerals Safeguarding

2.7 Built Environment

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly support:**

- Policy DES1 Delivering High Quality Development
- Policy DES2 Enhancing Local Character and believe that the Chilterns Design Guide should be mentioned in respect of development within the Chilterns AONB
- Policy DES3 Design and Access Statements and believe that the Chilterns Design Guide should be mentioned in respect of development within the Chilterns AONB
- Policy DES4 Masterplans for Allocated Sites and Major Development
- Policy DES5 Outdoor amenity Space
- Policy DES6 Privacy and Daylight
- Policy DES7 Efficient use of Resources
- Policy DES8 Promoting Sustainable Design
- Policy DES9 Renewable Energy
- Policy DES10 New Buildings or Structures in the Countryside and Rural Areas. This policy should include a requirement that any new building or structure should accord with Chilterns Design Guide
- Policy DES11 Re-use of Rural Buildings. This policy should include a specific reference to sites in the AONB.

2.8 Town Centres and Retailing

Woodcote Parish Council is **cautious** about Policy TC1 - Retail and Town and Larger Village Centres. Whilst supporting retailing in the towns and those villages with established high streets the Policy does not recognise that all larger villages are not the same. Some have very little retailing, little parking, an infrequent bus service and are not attractive to retailers.

Woodcote Parish Council **support:**

TC2	Amount and Location of New Retail Floor Space
Policy TC3	Retailing in Henley
Policy TC4	Retailing in Thame
Policy TC5	Retailing in Wallingford
Policy TC6	Primary Retail Frontages

2.9 Community and Recreational Facilities

Woodcote Parish Council **strongly support:**

- Policy CF1 Safeguarding Community Facilities
- Policy CF2 Provision of Community Facilities and Services Proposals. Woodcote Parish Council suggest that the words '*subject to there being no conflict with the other policies in this plan*' should be replaced by '*subject to there being no conflict with the other policies in this plan or an appropriate made Neighbourhood Plan*'.
- Policy CF3 New Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities
- Policy CF4 Existing Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities
- Policy CF5 Open Space, Sport and Recreation in New Residential development