

# THE GREEN GAP GUIDE TO... THE LOCAL PLAN 2032

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## INTRODUCTION

SODC is currently inviting feedback from residents (and interested parties i.e. developers) on their 'preferred options' for the Local Plan. This document will determine the scale and shape of development in the District. The plan, due to be adopted next year, replaces the current Core Strategy 2012.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

SODC is under a legal obligation to demonstrate they have listened to residents. Developments that come forward that are deemed 'on plan' are significantly more likely to be approved than those that are not. This impacts The Green Gap, East Hagbourne, Didcot and the whole of South Oxfordshire. So it is definitely worth understanding what is being proposed and having a say.

## PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The Preferred Option document is whopping 92 pages. You may therefore not have the time (or inclination) to plough all the way through it. Therefore, we intend to point out the sections that are most relevant to our part of the district. We will provide our perspective on the document. However, it is for you to decide what you think. And whatever that is, we do urge you to let SODC know. At the end of this document we'll let you how to do it.

## LOCAL PLAN CONTENTS

There are 11 chapters in the plan covering the overall strategy, housing, jobs, transport, infrastructure, and retail. And specific proposals for key places like Didcot, the smaller towns and rural communities. We won't cover all of these in detail but if any of these topics are of particular interest then check out the relevant section. At the end of each section, SODC then pose a set of questions about their proposals and respondents can chose to give their comments (or not) on the feedback form on the website.

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## CHAPTERS 1-3: THE OVERALL STRATEGY

It is worth stating that a new plan is required because it has been deemed that Oxfordshire requires more housing than originally thought. This is mainly down to having to accommodate the unmet need from the City of Oxford. The Local Plan is basically an evolution of the existing Core Strategy 2012 document so there are no massive surprises. You will see a lot of fine strategic objectives. These basically add up to making the world (or South Oxfordshire) a better place. It is hard to take issue with them. As we know the challenge is actually to deliver against the objectives.

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## CHAPTER 4: SPATIAL STRATEGY

If you are interested in housing, this is an important chapter. The general approach of Core Strategy 2012 – The Didcot Ring Fence and Rest of District – is continued. However, there is a subtle but important change. The Didcot Ring Fence has now become Didcot & Science Vale (DSV). While it was debateable whether the parish of East Hagbourne was within the Didcot Ring Fence or part of Rest of District, it is very clear that the parish is within the Didcot and Science Vale demarcation.

### *Q1 Is this the correct strategy to deliver the objectives for our district to 2032?*

You may think it is important to endorse the strategy, rather than just object to things that don't work for you. Not least as there will be plenty of developers who will see an unsupported plan as a green light for building in and around Didcot.

### *Q2 Are there any improvements that you can suggest for the strategy?*

The strategy seems to be a continuation of 2012. The issue is that there seems to be a disconnect between the strategy and the actions of the officers who follow a completely different agenda. The current strategy contains no mechanism of measurement or points of accountability. Until there is the fancy objectives risk remaining empty promises.

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## CHAPTER 5: NEW HOMES

The total number of new homes SODC is committed to delivering by 2032 is 19,500. This includes 3,750 from Oxford. This chapter goes on to outline where the housing is planned to go. **They key proposal is that there is no additional housing planned for Didcot and Science Vale.** However, this creates a clear ambiguity as to the status of the Parish which is referred to as both a small village and part of the DSV. Any bets which version developers will favour? As a small village the parish of East Hagbourne will be expected to grow by 5% between now and 2032. This is based on the 2011 census. This means that East Hagbourne's size includes Millbrook snaffled by Didcot in 2015, so the Parish Council will need to get specific clarification on the targets. **Remember you can help shape development in the parish of East Hagbourne by taking part in the Neighbourhood Plan that is being developed right now (see [www.easthagbourneplan.net](http://www.easthagbourneplan.net))** We wont address where the additional houses are planned as this will make this document even longer.

### *Q3 Do you agree with the overall level of housing provision proposed?*

This is a complex and highly charged issue. On the one hand you may agree with the [CPRE's campaign](#) that the need for this level of new housing is being driven by developers; on the other you may be concerned about housing for future generations. Not sure much is going to change. However, if you have a view make sure it is expressed.

### *Q4 Do you agree with the proposed distribution of housing around the district?*

You may feel that Didcot and the surrounding villages can't take any more housing in which case you may wish to endorse the proposed distribution.

### *Q6 Do you agree with our preferred approach, whereby the allocation of most housing sites will be undertaken through Neighbourhood Plans for the towns and villages?*

You may feel that The Neighbourhood Plan means at least local people can direct development to where they would most like it.

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## CHAPTERS 6 & 7: EMPLOYMENT, TRANSPORT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Chapter 6 is all about employment and not one for us today. Chapter 7 is all about transport and infrastructure. This is of interest, not least as many people raised this during The Green Gap defence. You'll be pleased by the number one objective being to improve "movement in and around Didcot". There are also a lot of fine words about transport solutions being "sustainable" (i.e. not cars). The proof of the pudding is SODC's ability to deliver. To be fair to them, given the costs involved that ain't easy. Hand in hand comes "making sure development is accompanied by adequate infrastructure" (i.e. schools, doctors, leisure centres etc). The same issue as transport applies here. We know that developers will always seek to minimise infrastructure contributions. They argue it makes their developments "unviable" (i.e. their profit margin takes a hit.) So in both these areas we need a really strong team of Officers at SODC as it comes down to them to deliver these objectives.

*Q10 Do you agree with our preferred transport strategy? If not, what changes do you suggest?*

You may wish to sign up to a world of free flowing traffic and sustainable transport options. However, you may be concerned about the practicalities of delivering this. To some it may feel like a political election manifesto promise rather than a policy that will happen...

*Q11 Do you agree with our proposed approach towards the provision of infrastructure? If not, what changes do you suggest?*

The main thrust of the policy states that infrastructure needs to be delivered or planning consent will not be given. You may applaud this very sensible approach. However, you may also be concerned that the policy is entirely dependent on SODC's planning officers being strong enough to make sure the policy is enacted. There is little evidence that they have been to date.

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## CHAPTER 8: TOWN CENTRES & SHOPPING

There is a short section on the Orchard Centre but nothing radical.

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## CHAPTER 9: DIDCOT & SCIENCE VALE

This is one of the most relevant chapters. As mentioned above, this represents an expansion of the previous Didcot Ring Fence, although not an increase in the number of new houses. I think there is a general recognition that SODC needs to work super hard to deliver the ones in the existing plan. The strategy is fine but perhaps a little vague. It promises 'a coordinated approach to new development through an urban design framework'. 'Protection for the distinctive character and heritage of Science Vale's ... villages and countryside.' 'A step change' in travel choices away from car travel'. All fine things – if they can be delivered.

Then there is Didcot Garden Town. At 9.10 there is this somewhat troubling phrase "the potential Garden Town will also explore opportunities to accelerate development and plan further development where it would contribute to the achievement of the Didcot Garden Town vision."

The plan is to deliver either "at least" or "about" 6,500 new homes in Didcot. These are two very different things... There is a table listing 6,348 of those. These contain

500 at Ladygrove East and 300 at Orchard Centre Phase 2b. This is troubling. Ladygrove has been in the plan since 2005 and shows no sign of being close. Orchard Centre seems to be up in the air as well. There must be considerable concerns about the viability of the plans for Didcot - as there always have been. The consequence is that developers will seek to exploit more profitable opportunities on green field sites in surrounding villages. Sound familiar?

*Q14 Do you agree that no further housing should be allocated to Didcot, given the amount of housing land that is already committed?*

This is the million-dollar question of course. If you agree you may then wish SODC to confirm that the existing plans are realistic. After all Ladygrove East has been in the plan since 2005. If SODC fails to deliver the schemes that they have identified, developers will leap on opportunities to go after places like East Hagbourne.

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## **CHAPTER 10: HENLEY, THAMES & WALLINGFORD**

Details of proposals for those places are contained in this chapter.

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## **CHAPTER 11: HOUSING IN OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES.**

East Hagbourne is included as one of the 58 small villages being part of South Oxfordshire's "140 rural communities". Indeed there's even a photo of East Hagbourne in this chapter! As mentioned above the proposal is for 5% growth, currently based on the 2011 census. There is little change from the existing strategy. However, this didn't stop the officers cooking up a deal with developers to consider East Hagbourne as part of Didcot. So it is unclear how this policy provides any genuine protection.

*Q21 Do you agree with the level of housing proposed for the rural area and its distribution between the Larger and Smaller Villages?*

So larger villages are what some people might consider to be small towns. They include places like Watlington, Nettlebed, Benson etc. The proposal is for these places to grow by around 10%. Smaller villages (e.g. East Hagbourne) around 5%. You may feel that makes sense. You may feel too that East Hagbourne's status as a small village needs specific affirmation in the plan. That is, the whole parish is a *small village* and therefore not suitable for overspill from Didcot.

*Q22 Should there be a "medium village" category and, if so, which villages should be included and what would be an appropriate percentage growth level for such a category?*

You may feel the current arrangement works fine. A new category at this stage would probably create huge bun fights from larger villages wanting to become medium and smaller villages not wanting to become medium. You may feel that this would require a process that would delay the whole plan. Which would not be a good outcome.

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## HOW TO COMMENT & BY WHEN

SODC is running an event in Didcot on Saturday 16 July 11-3pm at the Cornerstone where they will have people around to answer any questions. The consultation runs until Friday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

The link to the web pages about the plan is here:

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2032>

Feedback can be given online at the following link:

<https://consult.southandvale.gov.uk/portal/south/planning/pol/poj2016/poj2016>

**Any questions feel free to contact us at [Mindthegreengap.org](http://Mindthegreengap.org).**