



## THE WENDOVER SOCIETY

### Response to the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP)

#### 1 Background

The Wendover Society is a registered charity with over 400 members and has as its objectives to:

- a. stimulate public interest and educate the public in the beauty, history and character of the Parish of Wendover, Buckinghamshire and the care and maintenance thereof;
- b. encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features contributing to the pleasant and convenient living conditions of the inhabitants of Wendover;
- c. encourage high standards of architectural planning and building in keeping with the character of Wendover;

This submission is made by the Society Committee and follows us sending our initial thoughts to our members for their consideration.

Please note our comments relate entirely to the sections of the VALP that affect Wendover / Halton and the immediate surrounding area.

#### 2 Summary

- **The Society recognises the opportunities provided by the latest version of the plan to meet the housing demand whilst mitigating the effect on Wendover itself**
- **We applaud the withdrawal of plans to take areas out of the Green Belt**
- **We welcome recognition that there are no suitable large-scale development sites in Wendover**
- **We have a serious concern over lack of detail in plan, particularly about the infrastructure implications and the consequent effect of the 1000 new homes upon Wendover itself**
- **The Society looks to positively engage with AVDC / DIO / Bucks CC to progress the plan**

#### 3 Detailed comments

The Wendover Society in principle welcomes development that will:

Be sympathetic to the historic nature of the village and in keeping with its conservation area status.

Provide housing and local employment for younger people – helping to keep Wendover as a vibrant community catering for all age ranges

Be supported by the appropriate level of infrastructure

It is on the basis of the above that we have structured our comments as below.

To be clear, we do not oppose the proposed development at Halton in the VALP - but we do have serious concerns at the lack of detail there is to substantiate the proposals - particularly in the area of infrastructure. To that end we find our ability to fully agree the proposals that affect Wendover is constrained

Whilst recognising that responsibility for some of these details goes beyond the powers or control of AVDC we are concerned that the VALP has been proposed without us being able to know the Defence Infrastructure Organisation Masterplan for the Halton site or the supporting infrastructure to be put in place by Bucks CC.

With such a potentially major impact from these proposals on Wendover's historic and conservation area centre we therefore comment on the issues that are of concern and where we would welcome further dialogue and expansion / clarity of the plan.

#### **4 Green Belt**

We very much applaud the dropping of the draft proposals contained in an earlier version of the plan to remove the Green Belt status of areas around Wendover. We also fully support the comments about the attraction of the village lying amongst such a scenic environment and the ANOB area.

Together with the availability of the leisure facility of the National Trust Coombe Hill area, the Wendover Woods amenity (at Halton), the Weston Turville reservoir and the Ridgeway Path, we believe it is this that's makes Wendover such an attractive place for residents and visitors alike.

*(We welcomed the comments of a similar nature made by the Planning Inspector in relation to the application for a development adjacent to Halton Lane at Wendover. These considerations were important in the decision to reject the applicants appeal)*

#### **5 Housing**

The proposed 1000 homes seems to be only an initial figure.

**Page 117 "4.125 In terms of Wendover, approximately 1,000 homes will come forward during the Plan period at RAF Halton Camp after its closure in 2022. This is considered to be a realistic and somewhat conservative estimate, and the figure could increase as detailed master planning is developed."**

This comment is amplified by the following

**"4.133 Due to the size of the site, it is expected that there will be further development beyond this plan period, and this will be part of the Local Plan review. Work is underway on behalf of the DIO in order to establish the broad land uses that might come forward. This will inform the masterplan supplementary planning document**

**(SPD) for this site.”**

We are concerned that any agreement to the current proposals will create a precedent for further large scale development of an unquantified nature. Such an open-ended commitment is not acceptable.

We would request more clarity as what is seen to be the final figure – and request for a ‘cap’ on number of houses to be built.

We welcome the fact that the estimated 1,000 house capacity is expected to be met entirely by the conversion of the many barrack blocks on the site as well as potentially other suitable buildings together with demolishing buildings and building houses within their footprint where there are no heritage restrictions.

We note that the policy maps included in the VALP designate most of the RAF main site – including the playing fields bounded by Chestnut Avenue and Halton Lane- as scheduled for housing. This we find unacceptable (due to the loss of green space and sporting facilities) – and at variance with what we have been told by AVDC as to the location of the proposed housing.

Wendover is a high cost area for housing – we would look to see specific plans to provide lower cost ‘starter homes’ and rentals to meet pent up demand from young couples / families. Only by retaining those currently here and by attracting more will we keep the Wendover both balanced in terms of age profile and a vibrant community.

In addition, the development of housing that would be attractive to the older generation would help those in Wendover seeking to ‘downsize’.

In view of the above we would look to see more detail of make-up of housing type.

Given the size of the proposed development in relation to the current number of homes in Wendover we would like to see more emphasis on the development of a discrete community at Halton that minimises the degree of impact on Wendover and Halton villages. Whilst the plan does appear to cover this in terms of its spatial strategy it does not do so in terms of the infrastructure planned.

The following comments concentrate on the above issue

## **6 Retail**

The VALP in section 1.15 identifies that increased housing growth would generate an additional requirement of only 29 Sq.m. of retail space. This seems so little it is difficult to comprehend. (When Princess Mary Gate site was developed a convenience store was provided – however this development is only 400 houses in comparison to the initial 1000 at Halton.)

It is noted that in para 4.190 it states that 29 sq.m. is too small to make a specific provision for. Hence the 1000 new houses / a population of perhaps 2500 will have no retail supporting infrastructure, that seems perverse and unacceptable.

## **7 Medical**

We would very much agree with the view of the Clinical Commissioning Group as summarised in the Infrastructure Topic Paper

**“Particular concern re village infrastructure and the significant healthcare effects that could result from increases in local population / pressure on services “**

It should be borne in mind that the current doctors facilities are overloaded and means that patients have to wait for an appointment.

Dental facilities are limited to one private practice and one private cosmetic practice

Stoke Mandeville Hospital – even without the extra housing across the Vale and despite extensive rebuilding at the hospital facilities are already stretched. It is noted that the hospital missed waiting time targets in latest data released.

Accepting that these facilities are not under the control of AVDC it will be important to ensure that provision is increased as a result of the increased population that they will serve.

## **8 Schools**

We welcome the proposal for a new primary school to serve the new housing, this would then be additional to the existing Halton combined primary school which we understand is at capacity. It is not stated what the expected age range would be at the new primary school. *(Note - the existing Wendover primary schools are John Hampden Infant School (age 4 to 7) and the adjacent Wendover CE Junior School (age 7 to 11)).*

However, no provision is made for pre-school / nursery or secondary schooling. With the increase in households where both parents work after having children we believe that specific provision needs to be made at Halton for nursery / pre-school facilities to compliment the new primary school.

Recognising that school provision is driven by the number of homes to be built, we are concerned that any subsequent addition to the number of houses over and above the 1000 planned (see housing above) will be seen in its own right and not additive to the number planned in the VALP. So, if for instance a further 1000 houses were eventually planned that would not generate a requirement for a secondary school despite the total number ending up at 2000. Already the relatively recent development at Princes Mary Gate of 400 houses has had to be absorbed by Wendover schools adding to the pressures there (see John Colet comment below).

Noting that the number of houses proposed falls below the threshold that generates a requirement to provide a secondary school further consideration needs to be given to this subject. The obvious ‘local’ secondary school to the new housing is the John Colet at Wendover. The campus has however already been subject to expansion and more is already planned and approved – before any consideration of the 1000 extra homes.

Not only is this a school capacity issue but also a road traffic issue – already, now, without any extra school traffic there are road safety concerns on roads approaching the schools.

The currently planned and approved expansion of the schools will lead to an increase of vehicular traffic during schools opening and closure times - this will compound the already poor safety issues for pedestrians and only add to the existing considerable inconvenience suffered by the residents of nearby roads. As more and more pupils who live outside of catchment / walking

distance join the schools this problem will be exacerbated due to the increased rate of car drop-offs. In addition, even without the expansion, currently one of the school buses collecting pupils habitually parks over the entire pavement near the bottom of Wharf Road – there is just nowhere else for it to park!

Approximately 209 properties\* are already directly affected by school drop off traffic which is considerable despite the efforts to encourage 'walk to school'. As many residents have pointed out this is an issue not just of inconvenience but also more importantly of safety. In addition, since the previous expansion of the schools there has been an increase in student parking on the neighbouring roads due to the unwillingness of the John Colet school to provide parking on-site. (*\*Roads directly affected - Manor Crescent, Manor Road, Wharf Road, Swan Mews, Icknield Close, Grange Gardens and The Paddocks*)

The current situation is dangerous and also intolerable for nearby residents. This is before the planned expansion and the further impact of the proposed 1000 homes at Halton. Previously suggestions have been put forward about building a new school entrance for vehicles off the Tring road (B4009). There is an existing roundabout that would provide an ideal access point. This is needed now – and will be even more so when pupils go to the John Colet as a result of the Halton development.

## **9 Employment**

There are civilian employees who will lose their jobs when the RAF exit Halton camp. Together with new housing residents this will generate a demand for employment. (We have approached RAF Halton to ask about the current number of civilian employees but they have not replied. (Our estimates would put the number at 300)

Although this is a subject to be covered in the Halton Masterplan it is hoped that sufficient provision will be made on the RAF site for employment opportunities and it is not just a housing ghetto that is planned.

## **10 Transport**

The absence of retail, medical and secondary school facilities on the proposed development will only cause more traffic into Wendover as the nearest retail centre. It is obvious that the vast majority of the new residents will see Wendover as their 'local' centre - this is in addition to those new residents there who will be commuting to London using Wendover Station.

We are concerned that no mention is made of road or parking improvements in the village to handle the extra traffic either visiting Wendover or travelling through it to access the Amersham / Aylesbury roads or the station has been mentioned.

Commenting on some of the detail:

### **10.1 Traffic flows**

The VALP makes reference to transport modelling that has been carried out. However as presented it is rather confusing

The Transport Topic Paper appended to the VALP information states

**"3.21 Lastly there are overall reductions in travel time and congestion on the B4009 through Wendover in the DS+mitigation scenario."**

This is the only mention of Wendover in the document and there is no mention of what the DS+mitigation actions are to reduce the travel time?

The B4009 is the road from Halton into the centre of the village so with 1000 houses going in at Halton - and presumably at least 2000 cars using the roads - this comment is therefore vital in understanding what is planned for - or not.

There is a mention the main VALP plan on page 126 to junction improvements at Halton onto the B4009 / Upper Icknield Way - presumably to aid the inhabitants of the 1000 homes getting onto the B4009, but we do not see this as particularly relevant to traffic through Wendover itself?

The position is further confused by a comment in section 1.2 of the 'Reg19 draft - Infrastructure Delivery plan', here it says in relation to Wendover

**"A further transport model will be required to assess the impact of this site on the local network."**

The position is made further unclear by the Phase 3 countywide traffic modelling notes (p.27):

***"...the Countywide Model has limited network coverage in [the area of Halton and Wendover], and as a result the traffic to and from the [RAF Halton site] loads directly onto the B4009 as opposed to the local road network (which is not included in the modelled network). This methodology ensures that the wider strategic impact of the [RAF Halton site] is included in the modelled results, despite the limited network coverage in this area; however the limitation is that any local impacts in Halton will not be captured."***

In its technical note the Jacobs Report on Countywide Local Plan modelling (16 August 2017) suggests traffic will avoid the Wendover High Street congestion by using Hale Road and Church lane as a diversionary route. This seems a dangerous assumption to make, the roads are unlit at night and extremely narrow, a volume of traffic using it as a 'rat run' would result in an extremely hazardous situation and we feel such an assumption is totally unacceptable

It is not clear therefore how traffic flows have been assessed / planned to be mitigated and what level of statistical reliability can be ascribed to the data. We think the effect of the planned new housing and its traffic / parking effect should be completely reassessed.

## 10.2 Car parking

There seems to be no evidence of consideration of the number of incremental car movements that will be generated by new residents visiting and parking in Wendover when using it as their 'local' centre.

Whilst car parking on the new housing space itself will be covered by T5 (page 207) no mention is made of parking provision in Wendover village itself.

Car parking in Wendover is already a critical issue. It has become much worse over time due to:

- Incremental population of the village itself with new development
- The development of Princess Mary Gate housing (400 homes)
- Increased usage of Wendover station – and consequent increase in parking in residential roads due to exorbitant station car park charges (£7.50 per day/ £92.00 per month)
- Increased leisure visitors attracted by the location / coffee shops / restaurants etc.

The above increase in demand has not been met by any increase of scale in extra parking spaces, relatively few have been able to be provided due to the constraints of land in the village centre. Demand for parking of late has also meant that a hazardous situation has developed on the B4009 as it meets the Clock Tower with cars parked on the road by Bank Farm.

Parking in Wendover has been a running sore for residents over many years. The Society believes that the only realistic solution to our problems has to be the ‘double-decking’ of the central car park. This is an issue that has been talked about for years, with differing views within the village, but with the existing problems and the potential of so many more houses to come it is something that all involved need to ‘bite the bullet’ on.

### 10.3 Walking / Cycling

There are numerous mentions in the VALP of walking / cycling, but we would have to question if that is going to be the means of transport of choice for the new residents. E.g.

**4.131 “The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) has confirmed that RAF Halton is to close in 2022 and because it is in reasonable walking and cycling distance of Wendover’s services and facilities, it is appropriate that it be redeveloped for housing and other associated uses. “**

We would question the basis for this conclusion especially in the case of walking.

For instance, the development site is 48\* minutes round trip walk to and from Wendover and going back it is additionally uphill. Already the vast majority of residents at Princess Mary Gate which is nearer to the village centre use a car and the railway station is even further than the time quoted above. This timing is based on a fit and able-bodied person walking in fine weather, those who are infirm / with pushchair or children / walking in inclement weather / with shopping bags – or any permutation thereof would take even longer.

*(\* Elapsed time from Halton Camp main entrance on B4009 to the centre of Wendover High Street, add 12 minutes if to Wendover Train Station and back)*

Although walking and cycling may be desirable on health or other grounds we would challenge if this is a valid planning assumption to make. Coupled with the lack of retail space planned at the Halton housing areas we find this an unacceptable situation and would request a review of this subject.

### 10.4 Public Transport

Whilst mention is made of the public transport provision we wonder how viable an alternative that would be. Bus services to / from Wendover are not that frequent and even if the bus operators were to extend more routes to Halton would there be sufficient demand to justify a frequency of service that would be attractive to residents?

## **11 Water & Sewage**

All utility supplies have capacity issues, and in particular we recall that Water/Sewage was considered a real problem during the planning of the Princess Mary Gate Development. The removal of RAF Personnel on a one for one basis with new residents would use the same utility capacity, but any net increase in population will further strain capacity.

Bearing in mind the longer-term size of housing development on the RAF camp we hope this aspect has been fully evaluated

## **12 Conclusion**

The VALP, if agreed, presents both opportunity and challenges for Wendover. We welcome the benefits the latest version brings and would urge that the infrastructure issues are reassessed.

The Wendover Society stands ready to contribute in a positive vein to future discussion.

John Mayhead CBE  
Chairman – on behalf of The Wendover Society

November 2017.

Copied to

Cllr Steve Bowles  
Cllr Peter Strachan  
Cllr Richard Newcombe  
Wendover parish Council  
Halton Parish Council