

# 10. Managing delivery of the masterplan

Just as important as having the right vision for Didcot is ensuring that the vision can be made real and the Garden Town proposals can be delivered. In order to do that, the councils need to use their policy toolkits to ensure that all new development in Didcot reflects the garden town vision. An effective governing body must also be put in place to champion the vision, now and into the future. This chapter sets out the planning strategy and governance structure that will ensure the Didcot Garden Town vision endures.

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10.1

An overview of planning and  
governance



## 10.1.1 An overview of planning and governance

Didcot has long been earmarked as an appropriate location for growth. Some of the town's key development sites, such as Ladygrove East, have been allocated for development for over a decade. But development has been slow to come forward in Didcot, and where it has come forward in recent years, residents feel that it has not been good enough quality. Addressing these key issues of delivery and quality is critical if the vision for Didcot Garden Town is going to be lifted off these pages and made a reality.

Why is it taking so long for allocated sites to be built out, and why has Didcot been under-delivering despite its significant allocations? There are a number of factors that are contributing to the slow pace of delivery in Didcot, including:

- relatively low property values
- complex land ownership and acquisition issues
- an infrastructure funding gap

The delivery plan sets out a strategy to tackle these issues by improving Didcot's brand and identity, establishing a governance and delivery team capable of becoming more involved in delivering Didcot's future and securing future funding to realise the garden town vision. Making sure that the vision is embedded in the Councils' policies and championed by the councils' leaders is at the heart of getting Didcot Garden Town up and running – this chapter sets out how the councils will put these actions into motion.





## 10.2 Planning







## 10.2.1 Introduction to planning

It is important that the Didcot Garden Town proposals, including the masterplan, are embedded into planning policy. The garden town vision and principles should be set out in policy strongly enough to influence the determination of planning applications, including the refusal of consent where proposals do not contribute to, or impede, the realisation of the garden town vision. It is also critical that the proposals are set out in such a way that they send a strong and clear message to developers and landowners about the councils' positive plans for Didcot's future, the opportunity this presents and the change in quality that will be expected.

This section sets out the means by which the Didcot Garden Town proposals should be embedded in planning policy and identifies opportunities to start influencing development immediately, before the formal adoption of specific planning policy for the garden town.

## 10.2.2 The emerging local plans

Both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are in the process of developing new local plans. As agreed amongst the garden town team and the councils at the outset of the process, the garden town project has not slowed down the local plan process for either district. Rather than have the local plans wait for the garden town proposals to crystallise enough to be written into policy in detail, interim text has been developed for inclusion within the emerging local plans which sets out the up-to-date position of the garden town work. It has always been the intention for this document, the garden town delivery plan, to recommend how the proposals should be taken forward in planning policy terms. That is the purpose of this section of the report.

### Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan 2031

Vale of White Horse District Council adopted its Local Plan 2031 Part 1 in December 2016, which sets out the planning strategy for the district. This plan makes provision for 23,000 jobs and 20,560 homes and so fully meets the 'objectively assessed' housing need for the district. The council is now developing its Local Plan Part 2 which sets out more detailed policies to complement Part 1 and allocate additional land for housing (to meet the agreed proportion of Oxford City's unmet housing need to be addressed within the Vale and support economic growth and infrastructure delivery within the Science Vale area. The council published its preferred options (Regulation 18) version of the local plan part 2 for public consultation in March 2017.

The council intends to consult on the 'Publication' version (Regulation 19)

of the local plan part 2 in November 2017 and then to submit the plan to the Secretary of State for examination in February 2018. The council is targeting adoption of the local plan part 2 in late 2018.

### South Oxfordshire District Council emerging local plan

South Oxfordshire is also developing a new local plan. The council consulted on a preferred options (Regulation 18) version of its emerging local plan from June to August 2016. The garden town proposals were at an early stage when the preferred options draft was prepared, but the garden town team worked with officers to include a section explaining the purpose and broad aims of the garden town project within chapter 9: Didcot and Science Vale. The relevant extract from the emerging local plan preferred options draft (June 2016) is included at Appendix M. The council published an updated preferred options (Regulation 18) version for consultation in March 2017.

South Oxfordshire District Council is intending to consult on a full (Regulation 19) version of the emerging local plan in November 2017 and then to submit the plan to the Secretary of State for examination in February 2018. The council is targeting adoption of the emerging local plan in December 2018.

### The role of the Didcot Garden Town in the emerging local plans

It has always been recognised that the development of the garden town proposals should not slow down the local plan process for either council. Although the garden town principles were established relatively early in the Didcot Garden Town process, the

proposals set out within this report – which provide significantly more detail – have been evolving continually whilst the two councils have been drafting their respective local plan documents.

The garden town team has been working closely with the two councils to make sure that the local plan drafts each include up to date information about the emerging garden town proposals. A proportionate approach in the interim stage (whilst the garden town proposals were developing and before the councils have endorsed them) has been to include the high level garden town principles (set out at chapter 3.1.5 of this report) in the emerging local plans along with a commitment to provide more detailed policies about the garden town proposals once these become available.

The text included in the Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan Part 2 Preferred Options is included at Appendix N. In line with the recommendation (in chapter 10.3 of this report) that Didcot should have a single vision endorsed by both district councils, the same text (with relevant amendments) has been proposed for inclusion in the emerging preferred options version of South Oxfordshire District Council's local plan.

It is important that the garden town principles, which underpin the more detailed proposals, are included within the emerging local plans at the first opportunity so that they can establish a policy environment within which the more detailed Proposals can be developed through the emerging plans.

## 10.2.3 Embedding the garden town proposals in planning policy

Once endorsed by the councils, the garden town proposals, including the masterplan, should be embedded in local planning policy as soon as possible. There are three main policy vehicles through which the proposals could be formally adopted.

These are:

- the two separate local plans for the councils
- a standalone joint development plan document (DPD) for the Didcot Garden Town masterplan area (spanning the two councils) such as a 'Didcot Garden Town Masterplan Area Action Plan'
- a joint supplementary planning document (SPD) for the Didcot Garden Town masterplan area (spanning the two councils)

The principal considerations when assessing the merits of each option are:

- the weight the policies would have
- how quickly and easily the policies could be formally adopted
- the scope and unity of the policy document

The third consideration relates to the scope of the policy document and its degree of focus on the garden town.

A policy document that sets out the proposals for the whole of the Didcot Garden Town masterplan area in one place would send a strong message to developers and other interested parties. It would demonstrate that the two councils are united in their vision for the garden town and that Didcot has been planned, and its proposals will be considered, as a part of this single vision. The alternative, setting out the garden town policies across different policy documents (i.e. in the separate local plans of the two councils) would not send a unified message, and it would make it more difficult for interested parties to interpret the comprehensive plans for Didcot. A separate approach may also inhibit funding bids, which may need to cross boundaries or be based on the clarity of a unified agenda.

Garden town policies, both inserted directly into the councils' local plans or as part of a standalone DPD, would have great weight as they would form part of the councils' local development plans once adopted. Both a standalone DPD or SPD would create a single place for all policies relating to Didcot Garden Town, but an SPD would have less strength than a DPD because it would be 'supplementary' to the development plan.

The table below sets out a simplified assessment of the three policy vehicles against the identified considerations. The merits of these options are discussed in greater detail below.

### Within the local plans

As the two councils are in the process of developing new local plans it would be possible to include additional policies relating to the garden town within these. The policies would be subject to examination in public as part of the plans, as already planned. Both local plans are currently at a Regulation 18 stage (i.e. the first of two statutory stages of publication and public consultation), which means that they will be subject to Regulation 19 (i.e. the second of the two stages) consultation prior to their submission to the Planning Inspectorate for examination.

However, it is likely that the inclusion of substantially different or entirely new policies (such as detailed garden town policies) after the Regulation 18 stage of the plans would necessitate a further round of Regulation 18 consultation in order to satisfy the regulations and ensure that the public has been given sufficient opportunity to comment on the councils' policy proposals. An additional round of

Policy options	Strength	Ease	Focus
Within local plans	✓	✗	✗
Didcot DPD	✓	✗	✓
Didcot SPD	✗	✓	✓

Figure 10.1 - Comparison of policy options for Didcot Garden Town

consultation would slow down the local plan process; it could potentially add several months to the programme to adoption for each local plan.

Another drawback to introducing the garden town policies into the two local plans is that the opportunity to set out the proposals and policies for Didcot Garden Town within a single document would be missed. The policies would instead be spread between the two local plans.

### Didcot DPD

A standalone joint DPD for the garden town masterplan area was initially recommended by the two councils following the designation of Didcot as a garden town to replace the then-emerging Science Vale Area Action Plan. Creating a standalone DPD that sets out the garden town policies would carry just as much weight as inserting the policies within the local plans themselves, whilst having the particular benefit of consolidating the proposals within a single document.

The main constraint to developing a standalone DPD is time. It would take longer than inserting the policies into the separate local plans for each council because the draft document would need to be prepared, published for two separate stages of statutory public consultation (Regulation 18 and 19) and the final version would be subject to public examination by the Planning Inspectorate. Given that the two authorities are not going through a joint examination process for their local plans, a DPD would be subject to a separate examination process. It would, however, also mean that there would be a risk that the late insertion of more Didcot detail into the emerging local plans would slow them down.

Whilst a Didcot DPD would take longer to put in place than policies within the two local plans or an SPD, it is the best option for Didcot Garden Town. A DPD will afford the garden town principles the strength and clarity that they need in policy terms to genuinely influence, coordinate and direct future development. The time it takes to prepare and adopt the document will be justified by the weight that it will give to the garden town vision.

In order to ensure that a DPD remains a viable option for Didcot, a statement has been included within the draft emerging local plans for both councils which states that more detailed policy for the garden town will be brought forward through a DPD or SPD. Direct reference to the role and importance of a further policy document within the development plan lends additional strength to any future Garden Town DPD.

### SPD

Creating an SPD for the garden town masterplan area would be very similar to a DPD in form, but it would carry less weight in policy terms because it would not be subject to examination and would remain supplementary to the development plan.

An SPD would be quicker and easier to put into place than either a DPD or putting policies into the two local plans because it does not need to go through an examination process. As noted above, a statement has been included within the draft emerging local plans for both councils which states that more detailed policy for the garden town will be brought forward through a DPD or SPD. This direct reference to the role and importance of a further policy document within the development plan

lends additional credibility to any future garden town SPD.

### Recommendation

It is recommended that a standalone joint DPD is developed for Didcot Garden Town. This would embed the garden town proposals in the adopted development plan for both councils: the strongest level of planning policy. It would also set out the councils' shared vision and plans for Didcot in a single place, providing clarity for developers and landowners and a strong message that Didcot is a single place, with a single vision.

This garden town delivery plan goes a long way toward setting out the content of a garden town DPD. Building upon this work, a draft DPD could – and should – be prepared jointly by the two councils and brought forward as quickly as practical.

## 10.2.4 The status of this document in the meantime

Once approved by the district councils, officers and members should publish and treat this garden town delivery plan as a non-statutory planning document when considering applications within the garden town masterplan area or on sites which contribute towards the garden town housing target.

The garden town proposals will only be fully effective once formally adopted as planning policy. In the meantime, however, whilst the proposals will have no formal status in development plan policy terms, they can be a material consideration and will be a clear public statement by the councils of the level of ambition they have for Didcot and

the quality of its development. Given the national importance of garden towns designated by government, the document can carry weight in the determination of planning applications.

Once endorsed by the councils, this delivery plan will signal the councils' unified commitment to the delivery of the garden town vision set out in this document. It should be seen as a precursor to formal garden town policies and be treated as a non-statutory plan that sends a clear message about the councils' intentions for the development of Didcot as a garden town. It should give confidence to developers, landowners and

other stakeholders to bring forward development in the context of the garden town vision and principles. It will also provide a clear basis to support funding bids.

### Precedent: Birmingham's 'Big City Plan'

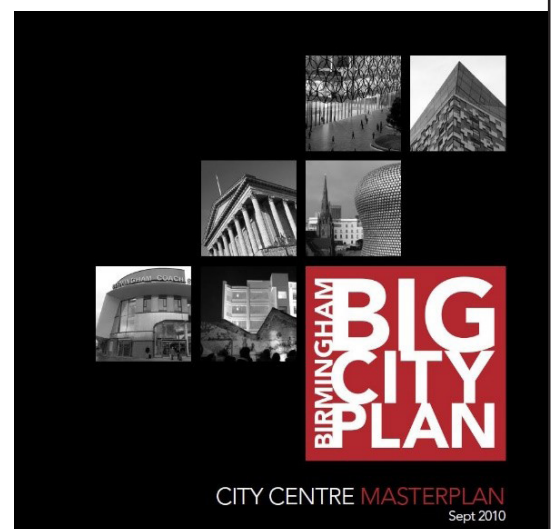
Birmingham City Council published *The Big City Plan: City Centre Masterplan* in 2010. The Big City Plan is a non-statutory planning and regeneration framework for Birmingham's city centre that is endorsed by the Council.

The Big City Plan was published whilst the council was in the process of developing a new local plan for Birmingham. It was developed to act as a formal statement of the council's intentions for the city and to help guide development in the interim period before the new local plan could be adopted.

According to Waheed Nazir, Birmingham City Council's Director of Planning and Regeneration, the principal benefit of the Big City Plan initiative has been in providing a platform to explain the council's vision to outside sources and to take advantage of the various funding and development opportunities that have arisen.

**"At the present time many local authorities are still reforming their development plans. This is invariably a long and complex process... If the current statutory framework is too constraining, then [local authorities] should explore alternative formats, just as we have done."**

- Waheed Nazir, Director of Planning and Regeneration, Birmingham City Council  
(Para 22, Delivering the growth agenda: The experiences of Birmingham City Council, 41st Joint Planning Law Conference Oxford, September 2013)



## 10.2.5 What should the garden town policies be?

The garden town vision, principles and masterplan should be set out in planning policy as described in chapter 3. The principles, which are included in the emerging local plans, should be supplemented with additional detail that clarifies how each principle will be interpreted for the purposes of directing development and considering planning applications. Before this text is worked up in detail through a DPD, a preliminary, high level version should be approved by the Councils in the interim to serve as non-statutory planning policy. A draft version of this interim policy is set out below.

### Didcot Garden Town principles for policy

#### Design

The garden town will be characterised by design that adds value to Didcot and endures over time; it will encourage pioneering architecture of buildings and careful urban design of the spaces in between, prioritising green spaces over roads and car parks. All new proposals should show the application of the council's adopted design guide SPD and demonstrate best practice design standards.

- High quality public spaces will be secured throughout the town
- Only developments that meet best practice urban design standards will be consented
- Wherever possible, new proposals should build upon local examples of high quality design or locally representative character, meaning:
  1. Design of new developments and public spaces will add value to Didcot and look to enhance the garden town, rather than merely according with the lowest common denominator
  2. Design should have regard to the local vernacular without being pastiche. It should signal Didcot's place at the heart of the innovation taking place in Science Vale

#### Local character

The garden town will establish a confident and unique identity, becoming a destination in itself that is distinctive from surrounding towns and villages whilst respecting and protecting their rural character and setting. Didcot's identity will champion science, natural beauty, and green living, in part delivered through strengthened physical connections and active public and private sector collaboration with the Science Vale.

- The garden town will be characterised by a series of neighbourhoods, each with a local identity borne of its location and function within the town
- The constituent neighbourhoods of the garden town will collectively and organically evolve to support Didcot's identity. This character may be enforced through supplementary neighbourhood design guides in future
- The three conservation areas that are central to Didcot – Didcot old area, Didcot Station Road and Didcot Northbourne – will continue to be protected through policy. However, new proposals within the setting of, or nearby to, these conservation areas which demonstrate exemplar design, reflect the garden town principles and better reveal the character of the conservation areas will be welcomed and encouraged.

- Links for walkers and cyclists between Didcot and its surrounding natural assets and strategic employment sites will be strengthened and enhanced. These include the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the River Thames and the science campuses.
- The rural character of the villages surrounding the garden town will be protected. Strategic landscape areas will be established to create a buffer between Didcot and these villages. When considering planning applications, attention will be paid to the appropriateness of the character of the development in relation to its location and design.

#### Density and tenure

The garden town will incorporate a variety of densities, housing types and tenures to meet the needs of a diverse community. This will include high density development in suitable locations in central Didcot and near sustainable transport hubs, higher density development will be balanced by good levels of public areas and accessible green space.

- Mixed tenure homes and housing typologies will include affordable housing at a level that is responsive to demand and to local employment needs
- Professionally managed homes for



private rent (also known as build to rent) have an important role to play in meeting the housing need arising from the science and innovation sector. Such schemes will be supported within the garden town as part of a diverse housing market

- Higher densities will be promoted where they allow for the critical mass of development needed to support services, facilities and public transport. High densities will be balanced with high quality public realm and accessible green space
- In areas which affect the setting of sensitive landscape designations, such as the AONB, new proposals will be carefully designed to respect and respond to their special setting. Lower density development may be appropriate in these areas.

## Transport and movement

The garden town will reduce reliance on motorised vehicles and will promote a step-change towards active and public transport through the creation of highly legible, attractive and accessible movement network and the appropriate location of housing, employment and leisure facilities. Cycling and pedestrian links between the garden town, its surrounding villages, and natural assets and the strategic employment sites will be enhanced.

- New and upgraded walking and cycling networks across the garden town will be prioritised to create greater connectivity between existing communities and with new communities.
- Connections between Didcot Garden Town and the Science Vale will be enhanced through improved public transport and active travel networks. Building

upon its reputation for research and innovation, a strategy for new and radical transport interventions may be brought forward – this would explore options such as light rail and driverless cars

- New homes will be located within easy commuting distance of employment areas, connected through cycle and pedestrian networks that promote active travel or, where required, public transport. In particular, housing will be promoted in strategic locations near to Science Vale to support its significant employment opportunities as far as possible
- Improvements to existing public transport and the provision of new public transport infrastructure will ensure that housing, leisure and commercial areas are conveniently and affordably accessible. Commercial developments will in turn reduce car parking provision in response to falling demand

## Landscape and green infrastructure

New development in the garden town will enhance the natural environment, increase biodiversity and support climate resilience through the use of traditional measures and new technology. Innovative habitat planting and food growing zones will characterise the garden town and, in turn, these measures will support quality of life and public health.

- A multi-layered and multifunctional landscape will be created across the garden town in line with a green infrastructure and landscape strategy, including:
  1. Urban zones that should incorporate allotments, vertical

gardens, green walls and green roofs where appropriate

2. Rural zones that should incorporate food growing zones, vegetable gardens and orchards
- Strategic landscape areas will be established to create a buffer to the villages which surround the garden town.
  - Improving and increasing Didcot's green spaces is a priority for the garden town, and all new developments will meet as a minimum, and exceed wherever possible, current policy requirements for the provision accessible green space
  - The reuse of land in the River Thames floodplain should be sympathetic to the area's low-lying, floodplain character type

## Social benefits and community engagement

The planning of the garden town will be community-focussed, creating accessible and vibrant neighbourhoods around a strong town centre offer of cultural, leisure, recreational and commercial amenities that support wellbeing, healthy lifestyle choices, social cohesion and vibrant communities. The garden town will embrace community participation throughout its evolution. It will promote community ownership of land and long-term stewardship of assets where desirable.

- Land value capture should benefit the community through strong and responsible governance by the local authorities and stakeholders
- There should be strong input from the community into the garden town vision, leadership and its continuing development

- New and existing neighbourhoods should be within walking distance of facilities that meet their day to day needs and there should be direct and safe links between these neighbourhoods and Didcot town centre which will serve a more strategic in meeting cultural, leisure, recreation and retail needs
- Didcot should develop a diverse and thriving economy that supports a range of businesses, from start-ups to local SMEs to large corporations. The science and technology sectors will be promoted through the activities of the Science Vale but professional and services sectors will also be encouraged to ensure that Didcot is a place to do business for all
- Strenuous efforts should be made to ensure that all groups within the community are fully represented and involved in the future governance arrangements for the garden town. In particular, young people should be encouraged to become involved in the various sub-groups operating under the garden town board, so that they can influence the growth of Didcot and create a town that young people want to live in as they get older

Both interim non-statutory policies and garden town policies to be adopted in future should apply to the whole of the garden town masterplan area in chapter 10.4.

Garden town policy, to be set out in a DPD, should carry forward the thrust of the interim policies set out above, providing further detail where necessary and embedding the masterplan into policy. The policies should also be clear about the councils' intended role in delivering the garden town vision by stating that:

The councils will take a positive approach to delivering the garden town Vision, including taking an active role in delivery where necessary. The councils will seek to unlock stalled sites within the garden town masterplan area by using the powers available to them where appropriate, including:

- Local development orders (LDO)
- Compulsory purchase powers.

## Local development orders

Local development orders (LDOs) are used to accelerate delivery through the simplification of planning. From the perspective of a local authority, LDOs signal a shift away from waiting for the market to realise development aspirations for a particular area, and towards initiating development activity by pro-actively granting consent for those aspirations.

The use of LDOs can make development less expensive, less risky and faster for developers as they remove the need to prepare a planning application, pay fees and wait for a decision from the local authority. By creating more planning certainty through consenting development outright, LDOs can make investment in a specific area more attractive to developers. LDOs should be made with a view to what is viable in the local market conditions so that the development they consent is likely to be deliverable and attractive to developers or landowners.

LDOs effectively grant planning consent for particular types of development in a designated area. Conditions, including compliance with a design code, can be imposed on development within the LDO and details to satisfy these conditions must be agreed with the local authority as and when development comes forward. Developer contributions can also be specified within an LDO. LDOs do not preclude planning applications being made for development that does not comply with the LDO parameters.

In order to prepare and adopt an LDO, councils must gather sufficient environmental information to assess the environmental effects of the development that would be consented by the LDO. Like traditional forms of planning consent, LDOs are subject to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) where they are considered likely to give rise to significant environmental effects. LDOs can be costly to prepare and timely to put in place. But they can also be seen as an upfront investment in realising planning policies and encouraging future development which will bring economic benefits to their area.

Most of the housing coming forward as part of the garden town already has planning permission or a resolution to grant. Planning risk does not appear to be the issue stalling most housing sites in and around Didcot – most are consented whilst others are allocated or about to be allocated through the emerging local plans. It is also important to note that an LDO for the Didcot Garden Town masterplan area would be likely to require EIA.

The marginal reduction in planning risk for those sites which do not yet have planning permission (i.e. Ladygrove East and Rich's Sidings) would not be likely to justify the cost of preparing an LDO for the masterplan area generally but an LDO could be a suitable way of advancing the development of key or stalled sites. As delivery of the masterplan progresses, the councils should continue to encourage the creative use of LDOs and to consider the use of LDOs generated by the councils where such sites are not coming forward relatively quickly in line with the garden town vision.

LDOs do not replace planning policy, but they could be used in conjunction with an effective garden town planning policy document to help enable the delivery of the masterplan by unlocking key sites. Because LDOs do not preclude planning applications

for development that exceeds their parameters, putting in place clear and effective garden town planning policy will remain critical to the delivery of the garden town vision. The garden town planning policy will ensure that the quality of new proposals coming

forward throughout the garden town – on key sites and on smaller sites in between – contributes towards the garden town vision.

## 10.2.6 Handling existing planning consents

Most of the homes that comprise the 15,050 homes set out in the garden town bid are already well progressed – over 10,000 have a resolution to grant or full planning consent. Figure 10.2 below sets out the proposed housing numbers and status of each site contributing to the garden town's housing delivery target. These housing sites are allocated within South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' emerging local plans and the scale of this consented development is substantial. The delivery of these planning consents, which include two substantial urban extensions to Didcot, will influence the function and feel of the town.

	Site	Bid doc	Updated position	Status
South Oxfordshire	1. North East Didcot	2,100	2,030	Resolution to grant for 1,880 and remaining allocation
	2. Ladygrove East	700	642	Allocation for 642
	3. Rich's Sidings	300	400	Allocation for 300
	4. Gateway South	300	400	Resolution to grant for 300
	5. Great Western Park	3,500	3,300	Consented
	6. Culham No. 1		500*	Proposed allocation
	7. Vauxhall Barracks	400	300*	Allocation for 300
	8. Hadden Hill		74	Consented
Both	9. Didcot A	400	400	Resolution to grant
Vale of White Horse	10. Valley Park	4,300	4,254	Resolution to grant
	11. North West Valley Park	800	800	Allocation
	12. Harwell Campus	1400	1000	Proposed allocation
	13. Harwell Village		100	Proposed allocation
	14. Milton Heights	450	458	Application pending
	15. West of Harwell	200	207	Consented
	16. East of Sutton Courtenay	200	200	Application pending
	Total	15,050	15,065	

\* Potential opportunity to increase the number of homes at these sites to be explored further through the South Oxfordshire District Council's emerging local plan.

Figure 10.2 - Housing sites contributing the Didcot Garden Town's housing target

One of the greatest challenges for the garden town will be to realise the Didcot Garden Town vision within the context of these large consented sites. Now that planning consent has been granted (subject to section 106 agreements on some sites), the councils' ability to influence these proposals is significantly reduced.

Nevertheless, there are still opportunities to retrofit consented schemes to incorporate elements of the garden town vision and principles. Methods for influencing proposals with planning consent fall into two categories:

1. using remaining planning controls, such as planning conditions and reserved matters applications, to influence the schemes and embed the garden town principles as far as possible within consented parameters
2. incentivising developers to voluntarily adapt their proposals to reflect the garden town principles and help deliver the garden town vision

The councils should pro-actively pursue both approaches to shape consented schemes into proposals which actively contribute towards the realisation of the garden town vision as far as possible.

For the large outline consents of North East Didcot and Valley Park, there will be significant potential within the conditions imposed on the planning consents to influence the final scheme that is delivered on site. For example, conditions are expected to require the development and agreement of detailed design codes for these large sites and subsequent reserved matters

applications will need to conform to those design codes. Although it will not be possible to impose changes to high level elements of the proposals (such as layout and density) without willing cooperation from the developer, details to be agreed by condition offer an opportunity to ensure the proposals accord with the Didcot Garden Town principles as far as possible.

When considering reserved matters applications and details pursuant to conditions on sites within the garden town masterplan area, or on sites which have been identified as contributing towards the garden town's housing target (listed in Figure 10.2), the councils should ensure that the proposals and details are compliant with the garden town principles and serve to deliver the garden town vision as far as possible.

The extent to which schemes could be changed by incentivising developers or landowners to propose amendments themselves is substantial. It will be important to seriously consider ways in which consented schemes could be changed to better align with the garden town vision that would also improve the scheme's value. Such 'win-win' opportunities may be rare, but their potential for positive change is so great that they should be actively sought out through discussions with developers and landowners. For example, increasing development densities on sites in sustainable locations could potentially achieve garden town principles whilst also increasing development values. This, and any other similar opportunities, should be discussed with developers of consented sites at the earliest opportunity.

The garden town team has engaged with developers of Valley Park and North East Didcot to discuss opportunities to amend the proposals at these sites to better align them with the garden town principles. The council has also become aware of an opportunity to review the residential element of the proposals at Didcot A power station and align them with the garden town vision and principles.

## Planning Freedoms

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 has introduced a new tool for local authorities called 'planning freedoms'. Provision for planning freedoms is made in Section 154 of the Act, which came into effect on 13 July 2016. Local authorities can apply to the Secretary of State for planning freedoms in areas where there is a need for a significant increase in housing. Planning freedoms would allow the local authority to disapply or modify planning provisions in order to contribute to such an increase.

The Locally-led Garden Villages, Towns and Cities prospectus published by DCLG in March 2016 makes reference to the potential application of planning freedoms for garden towns. It states:

40. We are interested in working with local authorities which have a good track record of housing delivery who are prepared to commit to delivery of housing over and above their objectively assessed housing need through the creation of new garden villages.

41. In exchange for guaranteed housing delivery, we will work with you to identify and deliver planning freedoms to support housing growth including, for example, ensuring that there is greater ability to resist speculative residential planning applications, and to continue protecting the Green Belt.

The recently announced Garden Towns of Aylesbury, Taunton, and Harlow and Gilston have each requested planning freedoms within their Expression of Interest, citing the need for policy protection against speculative housing proposals.

In order for a local authority to request planning freedoms they must be able to demonstrate that they have adequately consulted on the proposed changes by publishing an explanation of what the proposed planning freedoms scheme is expected to involve. No local authority so far has published details of any proposed planning freedoms scheme.

It is yet to be seen what type of planning freedoms will be sought by local authorities or how these proposals will be received by the Secretary of State. But government has clearly signalled an opportunity to use planning freedoms in the context of garden towns – they could potentially be applied to resist speculative housing development if this were seen to enable local authorities to focus on delivering the housing growth committed to as part of the garden town.

The potential use of planning freedoms should be considered in the context of Didcot Garden Town. Such freedoms could be a helpful tool to enable the councils to resist speculative housing proposals around Didcot which would harm the garden town's natural setting in order to focus efforts instead on delivering the garden town vision. The councils should work with government to investigate how such freedoms could be used to reinforce the delivery of the vision for the garden town.









## 10.3

# Suggested approach to governance







## 10.3.1 Suggested approach to governance

Convincing, decisive and credible governance is critical to the delivery of the garden town proposals. To achieve this, the garden town should be championed by a single governance body whose primary aim is to deliver the garden town vision. This body should be established without delay, building upon the momentum of Didcot's garden town status and looking ahead to address the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities and that will come with Didcot's significant planned growth.

In the past, Didcot has suffered from a lack of a coherent and focused approach to how it should grow as a place, leading to piecemeal development across the town and

an increasing strain on its social and physical infrastructure. Work has been done previously to identify how Didcot should evolve, including a masterplan prepared by Savills in 2013, but these proposals have not been realised. The establishment of a single governance body whose primary aim is to deliver the garden town vision will be a major step to ensuring that the garden town proposals are achieved.

It will also be important to demonstrate to government that there is a strong and credible governance mechanism in place that is capable and focused on delivering the garden town vision. This will be vital to securing ongoing government support for the delivery of the garden town proposals.

A number of governance models have been considered for Didcot Garden Town, including an urban regeneration company, urban development corporation and a variety of 'do-it-yourself' options. A detailed note which considers the merits of each option is included in Appendix O of this delivery plan; its conclusion is that a bespoke governance mechanism is the most appropriate option for Didcot Garden Town. This chapter describes the needs, composition, functions and strengths of the recommended bespoke governance structure.



Stakeholder engagement event © Councillor John Cotton

## 10.3.2 A single unitary council for Oxfordshire

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have reached a consensus that, in the context of reduced government funding and the urgent need for capital investment, a step-change is needed in the way council services are run. To address this the council leaders have agreed to work together with Oxfordshire County Council on a joint bid to government to create a unitary authority for Oxfordshire. The three councils recently submitted a robust proposal to government for the creation of a new unitary authority. This proposal aims to deliver a “Better Oxfordshire” and the three councils are hopeful that

government will decide to support this as a way of delivering more efficient and effective local government across Oxfordshire.

The creation of a new unitary authority would address some of the governance issues that Didcot currently faces, such as cross-boundary coordination between the two district councils. However, given the early stage of these proposals, it is important to establish a mechanism to address these governance issues in the short term to ensure that the garden town initiative is rolled out as soon as possible. The governance structure set

out in this section has been developed with the specific aim of enabling the effective delivery of the garden town vision. The proposal has been developed in the current context of the district councils, and it is not reliant upon any changes to existing district boundaries. Nevertheless, it provides a robust governance framework to deliver the garden town vision now and in the future. If a new unitary authority is established going forward, the garden town governance body could be updated within the proposed structure to reflect the, joined-up nature of a new unitary authority.



**A UNITARY PROPOSAL FOR A  
BETTER  
OXFORDSHIRE**

## 10.3.3 Powers

A new governance structure for the Garden town should focus on the creation of a single body whose primary aim is to deliver the garden town vision. The governance body will need to have appropriate powers in order to be effective, including powers for:

- plan making
- development management (determining planning applications)
- Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)
- access to and control over funding

Each of these powers is discussed further below.

### Plan making powers and development management

Consolidating plan-making and development management powers serves one fundamental purpose which is to ensure that all planning matters in Didcot are determined with special regard to the needs of the garden town as a whole. Consolidated plan making powers should be used to create a single planning policy document setting out the garden town vision, principles and masterplan. The detail of this document is discussed further in chapter 10.2 Planning. The joint determination of planning applications by committee should be carried out by a joint planning committee. The creation of a joint planning committee would require approval from the Secretary of State.

### Compulsory Purchase Order(CPO)

CPO powers can be an important tool in bringing forward development and enabling local authorities to take an active role in realising their vision for an area. These powers are not used lightly and there are strict rules that govern

when and how they can be applied. But as a last resort, CPO can be effective in unlocking stalled sites and bringing about the regeneration of an area in line with the council's plans. A bespoke governance structure would not have its own CPO powers but it would be able to draw upon the powers available to the two local authorities.

### Funding

The powers to leverage funding and decide how it is allocated are essential to the delivery of the garden town vision. Control of funding will ensure that developer contributions and other sources of funding are used in a co-ordinated manner that has regard to the priorities of the garden town. A convincing funding strategy will inspire confidence from government – and other investors – that Didcot is capable of effectively stewarding investment.

### A trade-off?

When establishing a new governance body, there is a trade-off between how quick and easy it is to set up and how powerful it is. For example, setting up a body that reassigns the powers of elected officials, like an urban development corporation does, would alter the democratic structure of councils and therefore require approval by the Secretary of State – not a quick or easy process, but the result is powerful and has government support. Other structures that can be set up within the Council's existing powers should be easier to put in place quickly, but do not necessarily have government support.

For Didcot Garden Town, it will be important to strike the right balance between putting a new governance mechanism in place quickly enough to

capture the momentum of the work being done now, and ensuring that it is sufficiently powerful to be meaningful. A bespoke mechanism can strike the most effective balance, as set out in the supporting detailed note on governance at Appendix O.

## 10.3.4 Didcot Garden Town governance structure

### The recommended structure

The recommended governance structure for Didcot Garden Town is a bespoke governance model that is tailored to Didcot's unique needs and context. The district councils already have all of the powers that are needed to make a success of Didcot Garden Town's projected growth, with the exception of creating a joint planning committee – this would require the approval of the Secretary of State.

The proposed bespoke governance model has been developed on the basis that the district councils could, together, better use the powers available to them in a coordinated and focused approach to planning Didcot's growth. Unlike other governance models considered, a bespoke governance structure can be powerful, relatively easy to set up and it can function within the councils' existing democratic structure. It can also be sufficiently credible to demonstrate convincingly to government and other potential investors the councils' intent to work with stakeholders and the community to proactively pursue the delivery of the garden town vision.

The proposed governance structure is set out at Figure 10.3. It is led by a Didcot Garden Town Board, which is supported by a number of groups which each perform specific functions. The proposed governance structure identifies co-ordinated roles for politicians, local businesses, sector-specific stakeholders and community groups – all of which have a stake in shaping the garden town vision and delivering its proposals.

The latest proposals for governance arrangements, following consultation, can be found at Appendix S.

### Didcot Garden Town Board

The Didcot Garden Town Board has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the values, vision and strategy of the plan are sustained throughout the governance structure. The Board will have significant autonomy under delegated power; the board will make recommendations directly to cabinet for any decisions that cannot be taken under its delegated powers. The board will review all recommendations relating to the delivery plan, primarily tabled by the Strategy Board and Delivery Group, and will relay its decisions to the Delivery Group and Joint Planning Committee. The chair of the board should be a well-respected independent individual. The 'Business Leader' will either be elected by the local businesses working group or nominated by the OxLEP.

### Joint Cabinet Briefings

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' cabinets will agree a scheme of delegation setting out decisions that can be made directly by the Didcot Garden Town Board and those that must be referred to cabinets. Joint cabinet briefings present an opportunity for the two cabinets to help inform and shape proposals from the Strategy Group and Delivery Group in relation to matters that cannot be delegated; this provides a 'sense-checking' mechanism before proposals are considered by the Didcot Garden Town Board. Following joint cabinet briefings, the Strategy Group and/ or Delivery Group will have the opportunity to amend proposals before submitting them to the Didcot Garden Town Board for consideration. These briefings should be held as needed when the Strategy Group or Delivery Group are preparing to

present proposals to the board which would require non-delegated powers (i.e. cabinet approval). It is very important that this process is carried out efficiently such that it speeds up decision-making for Didcot Garden Town. Should this mechanism be found to slow down decision-making or be overly cumbersome, its role should be reviewed.

### Strategy Group

The Strategy Group will advise on visionary and strategic matters in relation to the garden town and represent sectors (see Working Groups). It serves as an arena for discussion amongst stakeholders, and will help the groups to identify priorities and inform proposals relating to the garden town. Proposals from the Strategy Group will first be put to members via joint cabinet briefings; feedback from briefings will inform finalised proposals presented to the Didcot Garden Town Board. One councillor from each of the district councils will sit on the Strategy Group, who will be nominated by the cabinets and will chair meetings alternately. Although the Strategy Group Chair will sit on the Didcot Garden Town Board to represent the Strategy Group's interest, they will absent themselves from discussions regarding the performance of the Strategy Group.

### Delivery Group

The Delivery Group will source funding, apply for bids, recommend funding allocations to the Didcot Garden Town Board and distribute funding (with approval of the board and sign-off from cabinet when required). Like the Strategy Group, the Delivery Group will present draft proposals at joint cabinet briefings before finalising proposals for



consideration by the board. The group will be led by a council officer (i.e. Head of Development, Regeneration and Housing) whose role is to coordinate delivery of the garden town proposals in line with decisions made by the Didcot Garden Town Board and cabinets where appropriate. The group will be chaired by an elected member nominated by cabinet and, although this person will also sit on the board as the Delivery Group representative, they will absent themselves from discussions regarding the performance of the Delivery Group.

## Working Groups

Working Groups are sector specific groups formed of voluntary participants who represent the interests of their organisations in relation to the garden town. A representative of each Working Group sits on the Strategy Group and relays the Working Group's perspective. The Working Groups will be autonomous. The extent of their input into the garden town will therefore be dependent on their voluntary involvement. The role and purpose of each working group will become clearer as they meet. Therefore, they will be allowed sufficient flexibility to organise and re-organise themselves, subject to their needs. Those listed in the Governance diagram are initial options and may be re-worked or expanded as required. For example, they may create sub-groups if helpful, and members may choose to sit in multiple Working Groups if appropriate.

## Community Representatives Group

The Community Representatives Group will be comprised of residents' groups or representatives and the town and parish councils whose jurisdiction fully or partially covers the garden town

masterplan area. The group will function similarly to the Working Groups, acting as a forum for discussion on community and local business matters. Local businesses may be members of both the Community Representatives Group and any of the Working Groups relevant to their business interests, or may choose to sit in only one of these groups. The group will have a seat on the Strategy Group to shape and inform garden town strategies and proposals. The group will also have four seats on the board: one for Didcot Town Council, one for an elected representative from the remaining parishes, one elected representative directly from the community; and one for an elected representative of the local businesses. This group will keep channels of discussion between the board and the community open and ensure that the community is always at the heart of shaping the garden town.

## Didcot Garden Town Planning Unit

A joint planning unit for Didcot Garden Town is needed to support the joined up approach to planning proposed in chapter 10.2 of this report. This will draw on existing planning resources from the district councils' planning teams. The Garden Town Planning Unit will perform day-to-day functions of planning teams for Didcot Garden Town and lend strategic oversight. It will make recommendations to the Delivery Group regarding the spatial implications and deliverability of strategies and interventions and to the Strategy Group on strategic issues. It will have the ability to prepare planning policy documents and process planning applications across the Didcot Garden Town.

## Joint Planning Committee

The Joint Planning Committee will determine all planning applications within the garden town masterplan area boundary that would be determined by planning committee (as per the district councils' existing schemes of delegation). Committee members will be kept informed of the garden town proposals by the Garden Town Planning Unit. Decisions should be made with the needs of Didcot Garden Town in mind. The Joint Planning Committee will be comprised of an equal number of members from both district councils. The committee will be chaired alternately by councillors from the two district councils. Setting up the Joint Planning Committee for the garden town masterplan area would require approval from the Secretary of State.

## Volunteering

Resident and community involvement in the various sub-groups within the governance structure will be on a voluntary basis. However, the Garden Town Board will actively consider how additional volunteering can be encouraged to help implement various aspects of the delivery plan. This could be an important mechanism for encouraging community involvement in the garden town.

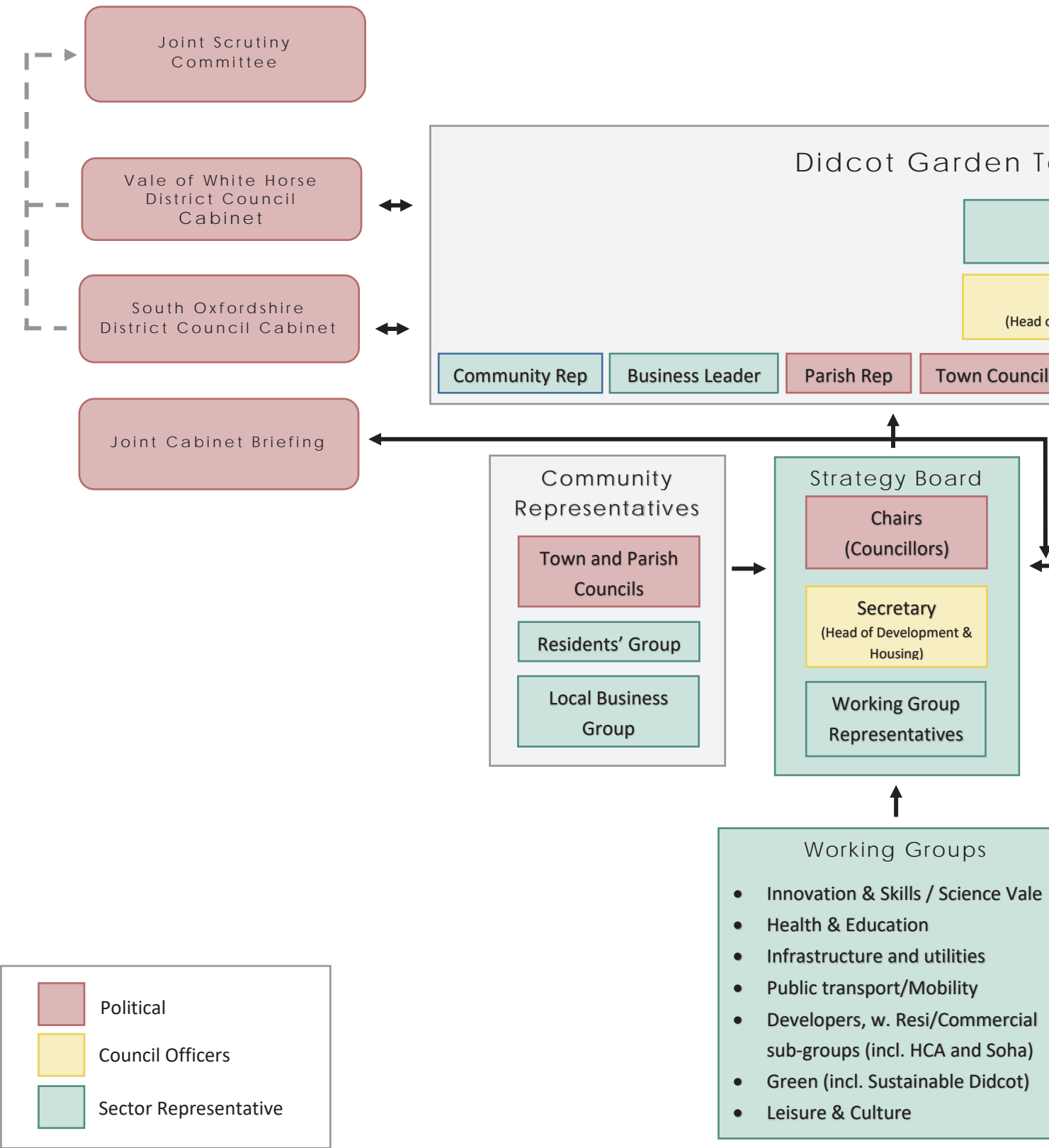
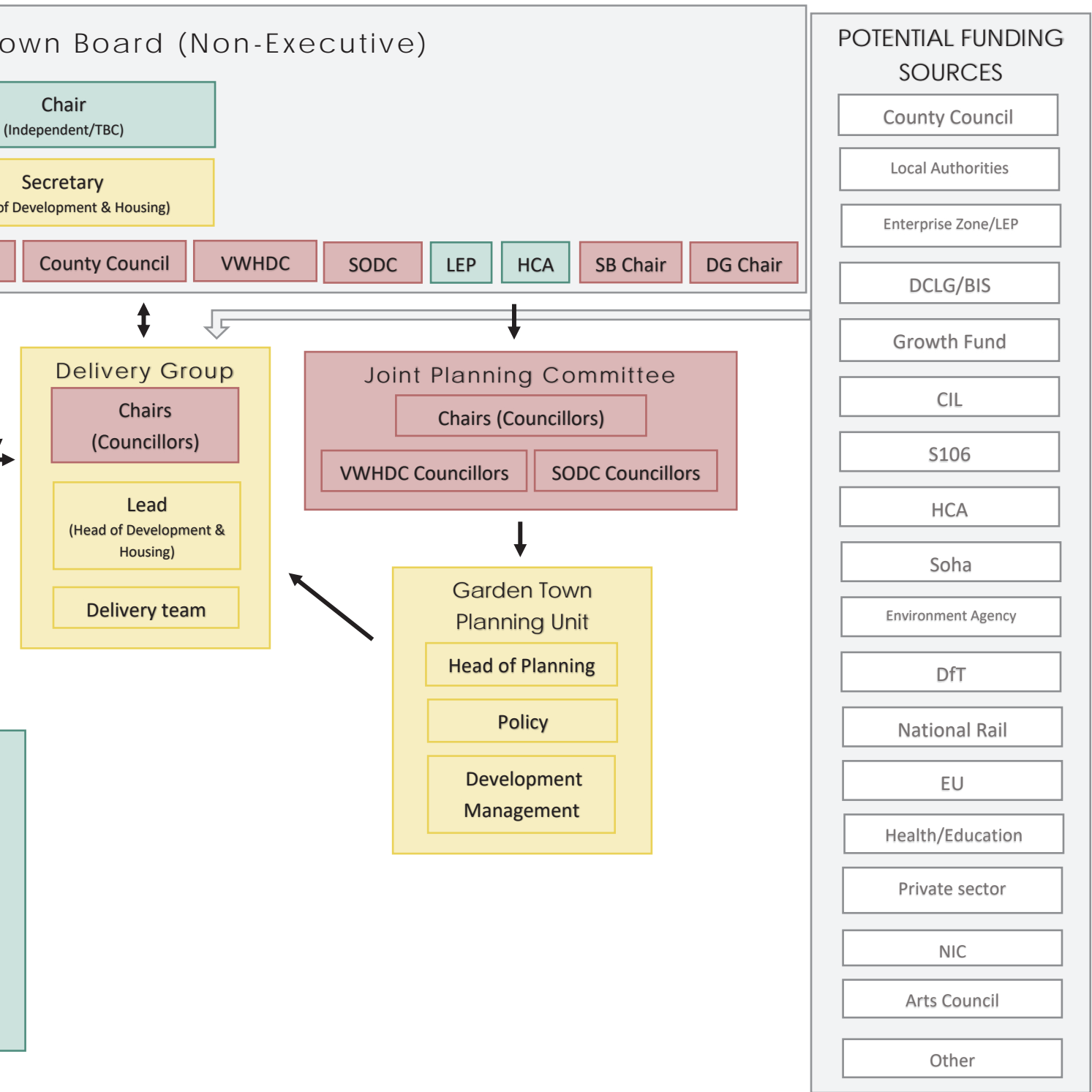


Figure 10.3 - Proposed governance structure





## Community engagement strategy

The councils have engaged with experts on community engagement in order to consider the detailed ways in which the community can be actively involved in delivering the Didcot Garden Town vision in the short and long term. This work is complementary to the proposed governance structure, and provides some further detail of how the Community Representatives Group might function. The report commissioned by the councils is appended to this delivery plan at Appendix P. The main features of this proposal are:

### **1) Creating an accessible, updatable garden town outline for continuing local engagement**

This seeks to establish a 'live' strategy that sets out the long-term means of engaging the community and its role in the delivery of Didcot Garden Town, and can be continually updated.

### **2) Appointing a dedicated voluntary sector coordinator and establishing a programme of engagement with the voluntary sector and parish councils/ residents groups**

This proposal would help to facilitate the Community Representatives Group by coordinating the role, presence and importance of the community and voluntary sector in Didcot Garden Town. This coordinator could sit within the Delivery Group and work to ensure that the community is formally engaged in the plans for the garden town on an ongoing basis.

### **3) Developing a set of projects suitable for voluntary sector delivery which would contribute to delivery of major goals such as the cycle link**

This feeds in to the 'quick wins' aspect of Didcot Garden Town proposals and offers a role for the community to lead in the delivery of these projects, thereby taking stewardship of the garden town and helping to encourage involvement from the outset.

### **4) Investing in growing the voluntary sector (i.e. through space in the Didcot Garden Town hub or by helping to take on new roles)**

This would give the community and voluntary sector a physical and central presence in the garden town, thereby establishing the importance of these groups and providing an obvious location and tangible means by which the community can get involved – as opposed to merely responding to surveys or consultation documents.

### **5) The Didcot Garden Town Board to adopt an objective for the voluntary sector and broad principles for membership balancing openness, commitment and compromise**

The underlying aim behind this is to ensure that the Didcot Garden Town Board is explicit about the important role the community and voluntary sector should play in the garden town, and to make a formalised commitment to hearing and taking into account their views.

## A garden town delivery company

### A proposal by Garden City Developments

A further option that could be incorporated into the recommended structure is a garden town delivery company.

In response to the garden town consultant team's recommended governance structure, the district councils commissioned Garden City Developments to explore options for a more interventionist delivery vehicle that would become directly involved in delivering the garden town masterplan and provide long-term stewardship over public assets. The full paper is appended to this document at Appendix Q. The document endorses the governance structure proposed in this delivery plan document and suggests an opportunity to take this further by establishing a 'Garden City Development Corporation' intended to foster confidence in the delivery of the garden town development. A 'Community Trust' would also be created that would have stewardship responsibilities over community facilities.

This proposal to establish a council-owned company that delivers infrastructure upfront and generates returns from a share of development profits attracts a significant amount of risk. Given that most of the available major sites in Didcot already have planning consent, this vehicle may not be required in the short term but may be an appropriate option to consider as part of a longer-term garden town delivery strategy. Such a company could be developed within the proposed bespoke governance structure once established and if further significant development opportunities come forward. This opportunity should be considered further by the Delivery Group and Didcot Garden Town Board when established.

## 10.3.5 How has this recommendation incorporated local views?

During community engagement, the council received a number of comments relating to governance. This structure has been recommended following consideration of this feedback. In summary, feedback regarding governance has included the following:

- the need for transparency
- calls for stronger planning leadership that is 'responsive and diligent', 'joined-up, visionary, skilled and brave', and seeks to protect Didcot's rural setting
- calls for a locally-led plan that is 'compatible with the ethos of a garden town'
- calls for better cross-boundary coordination, for example: the opinion that the two district councils should be one or that a development corporation should be established for the town, and, conversely, that the garden town boundary should not result in a change to parish boundaries
- ensuring that the garden town boundaries do not impinge on the setting of the surrounding villages
- using the garden town designation as an opportunity to determine planning applications within the garden town by a single body
- concerns about the need to manage and influence the impacts of the pace of change in Didcot, which is perceived by some as too fast and poorly managed. There has been an expression of the need for the governance mechanism to help mitigate strains on infrastructure resulting from this, and concern that the garden town designation should not just be a 'green light for developers' or cause urban sprawl
- concerns over the need for local representation and for a strategy that is informed by in depth local knowledge

- desires to encourage investment in Didcot

The bespoke governance recommendation has also been discussed with the Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board (comprising councillors from both councils including the leader of each, the chief executive of both councils and the head of development, regeneration and housing of both councils). The following feedback was given:

- the need to ensure the democratic accountability of the governance structure
- the need to include political representation within each body of the governance structure
- concerns that a joint planning committee could allow members from one authority disproportionate influence in decisions which primarily affect the other

These comments have informed, and the majority echo, the issues which the new garden town governance structure seeks to address. The governance recommendations have incorporated these views where appropriate. The proposals ultimately seek to ensure that local views are continuously heard and reflected by an evolving garden town strategy. In particular, the governance proposals respond to the above feedback with:

- a bespoke garden town governance structure that has an overview of Didcot's growth and is charged with managing change in line with the garden town vision
- a Didcot Garden Town Board that is supported by locally-interested stakeholder groups and is accountable to the district councils' cabinets. This recommendation is

intended to resolve cross-boundary coordination issues and is founded on the belief that accountability can be achieved through the guiding presence of councillors within the Didcot Garden Town Board itself and the requirement to gain the councils' cabinet approval where necessary. The supporting bodies should grow and organise themselves organically to reflect their aspirations for Didcot. This will allow local aspirations to drive the momentum of the garden town whilst ensuring that the strategies taken forward are deliverable

- a dedicated Delivery Group that actively seeks out and coordinates investment. This is vital to ensuring that the benefits of the garden town are felt by all and that the garden town proposals are prioritised and delivered accordingly
- a Community Representative Group that provides a formal and flexible mechanism through which local people can be involved in the garden town now and in the future. The council is eager to receive views about the arrangements for this group during consultation on this delivery plan
- a Garden Town Planning Unit and Joint Planning Committee to overcome cross-boundary coordination issues and establish a single body focused on all planning matters relating to the garden town.

The recommended governance structure allows experts, professionals and local people to have their views heard within a structure that maintains political accountability at its highest tier.

## 10.3.6 Summary and conclusion

The success of the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan relies on the political will to take a more strategic view of managing Didcot's growth. Leveraging the powers and funding available to manage this change and deliver the infrastructure to support planned growth will be fundamental to the garden town's successful delivery. It will be essential to demonstrate that a coordinated, accountable and effective governance structure is in place to deliver the garden town proposals in order to gain government support and attract further funding for the garden town going forward. This is a significant opportunity – one which the garden town is eager to capitalise upon.

In essence, the recommended governance structure enables the consolidation of planning and funding powers already within the councils' possession into one body, as far as possible. This is necessary to support their strategic and coordinated use to deliver the garden town vision and delivery plan, identified in this chapter as:

- being rooted in existing Didcot

Garden Town governance arrangements. It has identified the core themes underlying this existing arrangement – leadership, strategy, planning and delivery, stakeholder involvement and community – and seeks to incorporate and enhance these elements through attributing clear roles to dedicated groups within a coordinated and accountable structure that will work now and in the future

- strengthening joint working and delivery through the establishment of the Garden Town Planning Unit and Joint Planning Committee in order to focus decision making within Didcot Garden Town boundary to align with the priorities of the garden town itself
- maintaining the democratic nature of the councils: recommendations are strongly influenced by elected members and ultimate decision-making powers rest with the (existing) cabinets
- being flexible, leaving open the option to reorganise the Working Groups and Community Representatives Group in response to the needs of each, and to reorganise the Delivery

Group into a company if helpful in future

- responding to stakeholder and public engagement in an ongoing manner
- providing a sustainable mechanism for the long-term stewardship of the garden town by establishing ongoing, accountable strategic oversight of delivery of the garden town vision.

The swift adoption of this bespoke governance structure will carry forward the momentum of the work being done now and provide Didcot with the toolkit it needs to overcome its current challenges, capitalise upon the opportunities that come with its garden town status, and will provide a major step towards ensuring the Didcot Garden Town's long-term success.

## 10.3.7 Governance structure development

Following approval by the district councils to proceed with the proposed governance structure the recommended next steps for putting this in place are set out below. It is most important that the existing Didcot Garden Town Advisory and the district councils are proactive in formally establishing and implementing the Didcot Garden Town governance structure.

### 1. Detailed stage: seek legal advice, draft terms, agree amendments

- Seek legal advice on the steps required to establish each element of the governance structure and the measures necessary to form a joint planning committee
- Draft a constitution\* for the governance structure
- Draft terms of reference\*\* to which each constituent body of the governance structure must agree
- Prepare and publish community engagement strategy for consultation
- Optional: identify a 'brand' name in order to give the governance structure a single identity and clear purpose in advance of engagement with government and public launch. For example, Didcot Garden Town Partnership

### 2. Internal approval: agreement by cabinets

- Cabinets of each district council to formally approve the implementation of the garden town governance structure, including agreeing the constitution, schemes of delegation and terms of references for its constituent bodies

### 3. Engage with government

- Engage with government to make them aware of the intended governance structure and body and formally request Secretary of State approval to establish a Joint Planning Committee

### 4. Formation: Public announcement, invitation to form Working Groups and the Community Representatives Groups, selection of board members and employees

- Councils invite applications from/ make offers to organisations or individuals to take up positions in the garden town governance body, including for the selection of the chair of the Didcot Garden Town Board

- Advertise establishment of Working Groups to public, encouraging interested parties to come together as a working group and to formally notify the councils of their interest
- Publish community engagement strategy, making clear the ways in which the community can become involved in the partnership and the development of Didcot Garden Town

### 5. Launch: Formal establishment and implementation of garden town governance structure

- Dissolution of temporary garden town governance bodies.
- Public announcement at launch event
- First meetings held by all constituent bodies. All bodies and their members must agree to the terms of reference required by the cabinets
- Working Groups and Community Representatives Groups each to write their own group charters\*\*\*

\*The constitution will include terms of reference for each constituent body and a scheme of delegation that will allow the transferral of powers to the Didcot Garden Town Board or its relevant constituent bodies and officers. The scheme of delegation should allow the separate planning committees to continue to make planning decisions until such a time as a Joint Planning Committee is approved by the Secretary of State.

\*\* Terms of reference will set out the role, responsibilities and membership of each constituent body of the garden town governance structure, and will be embedded in the constitution (and therefore cannot be amended by the bodies without approval by the cabinets). For the Working Groups and Community Representatives Groups, the 'role' section should be high-level, such that these groups may still determine the extent to which they feed into the garden town.

\*\*\* Charters will set out how these groups intend to function on a day-to-day basis; including regularity of meetings, time commitments expected of members, desired deliverables and outcomes.





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## 10.4

# Garden town areas

## 10.4.1 Garden town areas

When Didcot was announced as a garden town, one of the first questions to arise was: what exactly is the garden town? Not only has it been important to define what garden town status means for Didcot, but it has been critical to determine exactly where the garden town would start and end. Local people and businesses need to know whether they are in or out of the garden town, and what that might mean for them.

In response to these questions it is important to understand that the garden town project does not involve changing administrative boundaries – the garden town makes no attempt to alter Didcot town boundary, parish boundaries or district council boundaries. However, the consultant team proposed two boundaries relating to the garden town project: one for the garden town masterplan boundary and one for a wider area of influence that may be affected by some of the proposals included in the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan (e.g. those relating to green infrastructure or urban/rural coalescence). These boundaries were the subject of public consultation in November–December 2016, and have since been updated to reflect the comments received. This section sets out the purpose of each garden town boundary and explains why they have been drawn as they are (please see Figure 10.4).

What is the garden town masterplan area?

The Didcot Garden Town masterplan area is the extent of Didcot that is covered by the garden town masterplan, it is shown at Figure 10.4. This area has been considered in detail to identify both appropriate development opportunities and

in order to plan investment and improvements in transport, landscape, green infrastructure, public spaces and social services. The masterplan's primary focus is the garden town masterplan area, but proposals that relate to connectivity – such as transport and green infrastructure – in some cases extend beyond the garden town boundary in order to join Didcot up with surrounding networks.

The Didcot Garden Town masterplan area is intended to cover the current and future extent of Didcot: the area where you might reasonably describe yourself as being 'in Didcot' if you lived or worked there. Didcot has already transcended its historic boundary in some areas to incorporate new homes and employment uses and its planned growth will extend Didcot's boundary further into neighbouring parishes. For example, parts of Great Western Park and the planned development at Valley Park are within the parish of Harwell, and the majority of the proposals for North East Didcot are within the parish of Long Wittenham.

Most of the people that live and work in these new developments will use Didcot's town centre for their day to day needs. It is therefore important that these new developments are included within the Didcot Garden Town masterplan boundary, to ensure a comprehensive approach to planning Didcot now and in the future.

Chapter 10.2 describes how garden town vision, principles and masterplan will be set out in planning policy. Garden town policy should apply to the whole of the garden town masterplan boundary.

### Didcot Garden Town area of influence

As part of developing proposals for Didcot Garden Town, it has been important to look beyond Didcot's immediate boundary to consider sites and areas that are strongly linked to the garden town. This wider area around Didcot, called the area of influence and shown at Figure 10.4, is important in setting the scene for the garden town. It has provided context for the garden town masterplan and some proposals (such as those which relate to connectivity) extend beyond the garden town masterplan area into the area of influence itself.

A number of factors have been taken into account when defining the area of influence. All housing sites identified in the garden town expression of interest as contributing towards the garden town housing target have been included within the area of influence. Given the strong ties between Didcot and the Science Vale, the area of influence includes the three major science campuses: Harwell, Milton Park and Culham. As well-known and valued landscape features near to Didcot, Wittenham Clumps and the River Thames are important features contributing to Didcot's natural setting, these are included within the area of influence. Finally, Didcot acts as a primary service centre for a number of surrounding villages; this relationship influences Didcot's economy and transport network, and so these villages are included within the area of influence.

By considering Didcot within this wider area of influence the garden town proposals are outward-looking and responsive to Didcot's wider context. This approach has also prompted

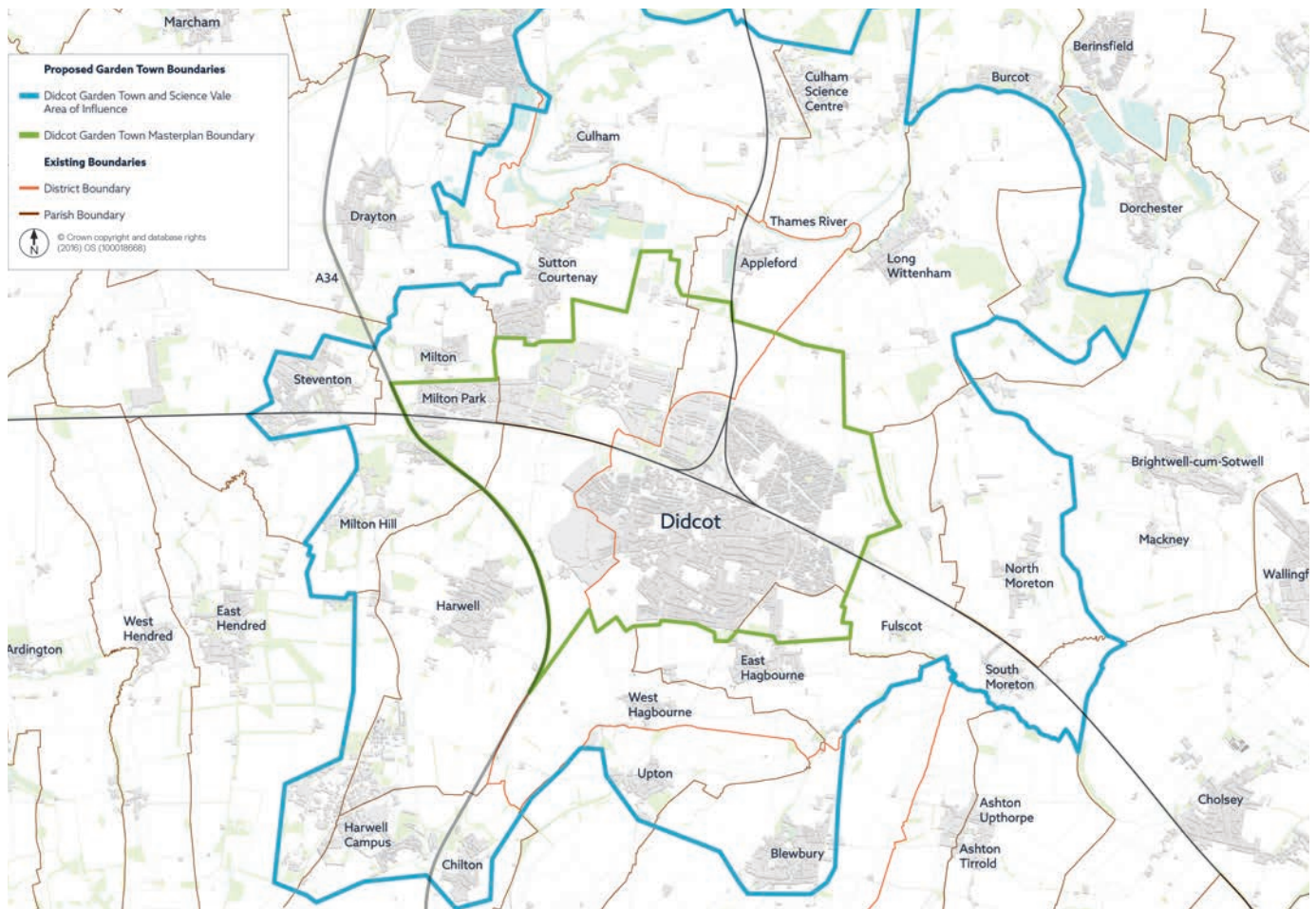


Figure 10.4 - Map of garden town areas

engagement and consultation with the people who live and work not only within Didcot, but in the surrounding area. The area of influence boundary has itself been the subject of public engagement, and has been amended to reflect comments received.<sup>1</sup>

Garden town policy (discussed in chapter 10.2) will not apply to the area of influence as a whole, but it will apply to individual housing sites that contribute to the garden town target of 15,050 homes – some of these lie outside the garden town masterplan area but within the area of influence because they are separate to the built up area of Didcot.

### Garden town masterplan area description

The garden town masterplan area boundary includes allocated housing and employment sites in the built up area of Didcot (i.e. Ladygrove East, North East Didcot, Didcot A power station, Valley Park, North West Valley

Park, Milton Park and Enterprise Zones (EZs)) and sites which are considered important for green infrastructure or similar interventions.

The detailed explanation of the boundary, starting at the southernmost point at the intersection of the A34 and A417 and moving clockwise is as follows:

- The A34 forms a natural boundary and follows the Valley Park, North West Valley Park and A34 service area allocations in the Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan Part 1. North of Milton Interchange, the boundary cuts east to trace the northern edge of Milton Park, including the EZ sites here whilst excluding Milton Village to the north
- From Milton Park, the boundary turns north to include the northernmost EZ at Milton Park and the power station site. It then continues north to capture the full extent of the gravel pit and landfill sites before joining the B4016 to the

south and heading east

- The boundary follows the B4016 east and then turns south along the edge of the North East Didcot site. It then joins South Moreton parish boundary, which coincides with the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty boundary, and travels south
- The boundary cuts west across the Parish of East Hagbourne, including the green gap which separates the Didcot from East Hagbourne village. Part of this land was the subject of a recent planning appeal which was dismissed, reinforcing the strategic role that this open space plays in preventing the coalescence of Didcot and its surrounding villages. This area has been included within the boundary so that it can be carefully planned as part of the garden town vision
- To the west of East Hagbourne, the boundary re-joins the East Hagbourne parish boundary and follows this west, joining the West Hagbourne parish boundary which reconnects with the A34

<sup>1</sup> Comments were received suggesting that North Moreton and South Moreton should be included within that area of influence as Didcot acts as their nearest service centre. The boundary has been amended to include these villages.

It is important to remember that the garden town boundary does not indicate the area of Didcot to be developed. The masterplan also includes areas to be retained as open space and indicates where new green infrastructure should be introduced.

### Didcot Garden Town area of influence description

This area includes Harwell Campus, Milton Park, Culham Science Centre and all housing sites which are earmarked to contribute towards the 15,050 new homes to be delivered as part of the garden town but which are separate from the built up area of Didcot. The boundary follows parish boundaries where possible because these are long established and widely understood, but it has been necessary to deviate from these in order to capture specific sites or villages which are considered to influence, or be influenced by, the garden town.

The detailed explanation of the boundary, starting at the south and working clockwise, is as follows:

- To the south of Didcot, the boundary cuts across the parish boundaries of Blewbury, Upton and Chilton in order to include these villages, for which Didcot acts as the service centre
- From Chilton, the boundary runs west and then north around Harwell Campus, and then directly north from the campus to meet the A417 where it rejoins Milton parish boundary running west and then north
- The boundary again deviates from Milton parish to include the village of Steventon for which Didcot acts as the service centre. To the north of Steventon, the boundary cuts back east to again trace the

parish boundaries of Milton, Sutton Courtenay and Culham. Incidentally, the boundary also follows the River Thames at the north which forms a natural geographical boundary

- The boundary follows the Clifton Hampden parish boundary north and east of Culham Science Park, but then cuts south through the parish to rejoin the River Thames to the south. This deviation has been introduced to keep the boundary relevant to the garden town and to exclude the village of Berinsfield to the east which is served primarily by Abingdon
- The boundary continues to follow the River Thames east and then south and loops around the Wittenham Clumps which are considered a key landscape feature relevant to the garden town. It then rejoins the parish boundary of Little Wittenham and runs south along the boundaries of North Moreton and South Moreton to include the villages of the same names, before turning west along the boundary of South Moreton. It then joins the boundary of East Hagbourne and travels south west before deviating to include Blewbury (as described above)





Great Western Park playground opening © South Oxfordshire District Council



