

Charvil Parish Council Response to the Local Plan Update

General Approach

Charvil Parish Council supports the general approach of the Borough in trying to concentrate development in larger “garden villages”, as this offers the best opportunity to build sustainable communities, provide adequate infrastructure and encourage active travel and public transport.

Of the three large sites considered, the Council is broadly supportive of the choice of Hall Farm/Loddon Valley, although there are concerns that if the flood mitigation plans are not as effective as hoped, locations downriver like Charvil could suffer the consequences. One measure that could be considered, is to improve water use efficiency, as this would help to reduce the likelihood of flooding downstream and would help mitigate the effects of climate change.

We would not be supportive of the Twyford/Ruscombe proposal, as this is not only in the greenbelt, but no adequate plan has been suggested to mitigate the effect of extra traffic on both Twyford Village Centre or travelling through Charvil and Sonning to Reading.

We are not so supportive of the apparent abandonment of the ranking of villages in terms of their sustainability – so previously, Sonning and Charvil were both regarded as “limited development locations” due to poor infrastructure, but this no longer seems a concern despite the only change since the last plan has been the opening of a single form entry primary school designed to meet the existing population, not a growing village.

While we understand the fact that there is more pressure on smaller villages due to the loss of the Grazeley scheme, many of the stated aims of building sustainable, high-quality environments do not seem to have filtered down to the smaller developments proposed.

This is of great concern to the villages to the north of the Borough, who are due to accommodate around 400 dwellings in the Local plan, and at least another 100 from “windfall” development, with little or no improvements to any of the infrastructure, numbers of school places and doctors that could improve their sustainability.

Charvil sites

Sites to the east of Park View Drive North (CV001)

The Parish Council welcomes the slight reduction of housing numbers on this site, and the affirmation that any development will not take place in the flood zone 3 parts of the site, but nevertheless, considerable concerns remain about this location.

Much of Charvil is low-lying, and its eastern boundaries particularly so. Technically, this site is in flood zone 1, but any development here, unless very carefully managed, is likely to have a negative impact on nearby homes that are already vulnerable – namely, the dwelling at Newland Farm and the easternmost homes on Charvil Meadow Road and Thornbers Way. Given that the Environment Agency have taken the trouble to source a temporary flood barrier for these areas to be used in times of need, is clear evidence that this part of the A4 corridor is particularly vulnerable to flooding and explains why so many residents are exercised by this proposal.

While much has been made of the possibilities to improve the diversity of the river area in the Hall Farm proposal, no such undertaking is mentioned in Charvil, which is unfortunate.

Concerns also remain as to how the site will be accessed and how it will connect to the rest of the village. It lies to the east of what has always been considered the boundary for the built environment, and will appear incongruous visually, but of greater concern is how the development will impact on the traffic levels and air quality on the A4. Sustainability is a great buzzword but building a development with little scope for active travel to Twyford, let alone Reading or Henley, is only likely to lead to most journeys being by car – and could well reduce the current level of walking and cycling by adding in another hazardous crossing on the National Cycle Route 4, used by many pupils of the Piggott school.

The Parish Council has never supported the inclusion of this site in the Local Plan, and if it must remain, then the issues raised by us and residents need to be addressed to avoid it being nothing more than another anonymous development tacked onto a village, of which there are many depressing examples all over the country.

Site West of Park Lane (CV002)

This site was probably in receipt of most of the objections received by the Borough from the first Consultation period, and we again welcome the reduction in numbers of dwellings allocated.

There remain concerns, however – mainly around the effects on local traffic and air quality, particularly close to a school. Consequently, we welcome the mention of encouraging active travel around this site and into the Country Park but feel this needs to be extended to a cycle track to Twyford Station and with a link to the National cycle route 4, as these could potentially cut car journeys substantially.

One issue that has come to light with the current development of 25 dwellings on this site is the displacement of the wildlife that had made this area its home since it was taken out of agricultural use. This is most obvious with large mammals like deer, but there are many others that would be less visible. Because of this, we would like there to be a “green corridor” east to west, so that animals can move freely from the Country Park west to the areas of ancient woodland, the golf course, Paddick’s Patch, Ashenbury Park etc.

Issues relating to both sites

The Neighbourhood Plan survey is only in the early part of being analysed, but one point that was clear from many respondents was the need for smaller, more affordable homes – both for the young to be able to afford to stay in the area, and for the old to downsize to without leaving the village where they may have lived for many years. Both developments imply they will be adding to the high percentage of large family homes as these are the most profitable, but the need seems to be for more modest dwellings. We would welcome some movement in this direction.

A second issue is that neither site is particularly close to public transport links, and the local bus service is inadequate. In the recent bus consultation, it was pointed out that our bus service is not fit for purpose, so again, any development in either Sonning or Charvil (and to a lesser extent, Twyford) will put pressure on the roads unless direct action is taken to make public transport more attractive.

Other local issues

The Parish Council raised objections to the proposal at Bridge Farm on traffic and impact on the flood plain. The combined effect of all the developments on the A4, with new junctions etc, will change traffic flows completely, with the need for reduced speeds, crossings etc., and even if the Borough were minded to improve the road to reduce the impact, the fact remains little can be done to mitigate the effects of Reading on traffic flows. We support the idea of a third bridge over the Thames, that might help reduce congestion in the area, but also, there need to be radical changes to the cycle/pedestrian/public transport network to reduce the reliance of the northern parishes on the car.

The other main concern of the Bridge Farm development again relates to the possible effect on the flood plain and possible knock-on effects on Charvil. Any flood mitigation plan on the part of the developer needs to consider whether the flood plain can withstand developments both to the east and west, without impacting on existing properties. Assuming both Bridge Farm and the land to the east of Park View Drive North are developed, there is a need for both plans to be considered together to ensure the safety of low-lying homes nearby.

Additions to the Local Green Spaces

Charvil are supportive of the local green spaces included in the Borough, and would like to take this belated opportunity to suggest sites that could be included in Charvil

Charvil Country Park and East Park Farm Playing Fields

While one is for formal sport and the other is for other physical recreation, it is important to view these two together as they tend to be used by many Charvil residents for enjoyment and exercise.

Being so close to both The Hawthorns and East Park Farm, many residents walk their dogs, enjoy the peace and quiet, and the wildlife that exists so close to their homes.

Charvil Meadows

Charvil Meadows are widely used by residents living on the Old Bath Road and provides access to less formal public open space than East Park Farm, and larger open spaces than around the Country Park.

Its biodiversity is slowly increasing, with the help of traditional meadow practices, and is much loved by many residents.

Park at The Hawthorns

While this is somewhat smaller, it is important to the residents of The Hawthorns as a safe place to take children to play and is also the only public green space that is free of dogs, which makes it popular for parents of younger children. It is also home to the new Community Orchard.

St Patrick's Recreation Ground

This is the only area of public open space in the north of the village, as it is leased by the Parish Council from Reading University.

It is consequently well used by many families and dog walkers.

Land to the east and north of Park View Drive North

Although privately owned, this area that has not been included in the Local Plan for development, is important to many residents due to the lack of public open space in the area (St Patrick's is not very big and does not serve the needs of the community on its own). It is an area of open farmland, with two ancient monuments on it, which could be made more of if access was formalised. It is well used for recreation, with many well-defined paths running round and across it. Part of it has been recognised in the LPU as a valued landscape.