

Inspector's question 1

As I understand policy S2, more than 50% of housing development is to be directed towards Aylesbury itself. This is a less pronounced focus than in the previous Local Plan (65%) but still represents a proportionate shift away from rural settlements towards the town (which housed 41% of the District's population at the last census). Of the designated larger villages, only 3 out of 12 have any housing allocation. Of the designated medium villages, only 6 out of 19 have any housing allocation. Although policy does not preclude growth in settlements without allocations, supporting text appears to do so (see my question 2(xi) below), which implies a continuation of little or no growth in villages for the next twenty years or so.

Given that (i) household sizes continue to fall so that a no-growth housing provision is likely to lead to a reduced population in these villages and (ii) there is an ageing population which historically demonstrates reduced household expenditure, to what extent is this settlement policy consistent with the strategic aim stated in paragraph 4.183 that communities continue to thrive and do not stagnate or go into decline and the aspiration of the part of policy D6 that "local and village centres will be encouraged to grow and loss of essential facilities and businesses such as local shops, pubs and post offices will not be supported." Has the viability and deliverability of this policy been tested?

Paragraph 11.16 defines shops, post offices and public houses as community facilities, so the same question applies to policy I3; "The council will resist proposals for the change of use of community buildings and facilities..." though I appreciate that this latter policy is qualified by the phrase "for which there is a demonstrable need" and also by considerations of viability and marketing. Despite the qualifications in the latter policy, I have doubts about the soundness of both these policies in the light of the known evidence of demographic change and household expenditure characteristics and would appreciate the Council's views on this point. It may be that, upon reflection, these two policies (the last part of D6 and the first part of I3) may be felt to be unrealistic.

AVDC Response

The issues raised in Question 1 are as follows:

50% of the housing development proposed in the plan is directed towards Aylesbury. Only 3 of the 12 larger villages and 6 of the 19 medium villages have housing allocations.

The supporting text to D2 implies no or little growth in villages for the next 20 years or so.

As household sizes continue to fall a no growth provision is likely to lead to a reduced population and as the ageing population has reduced household expenditure the policy approach to limited or no growth in the villages is not consistent with the strategic aim of the plan that communities should continue to thrive.

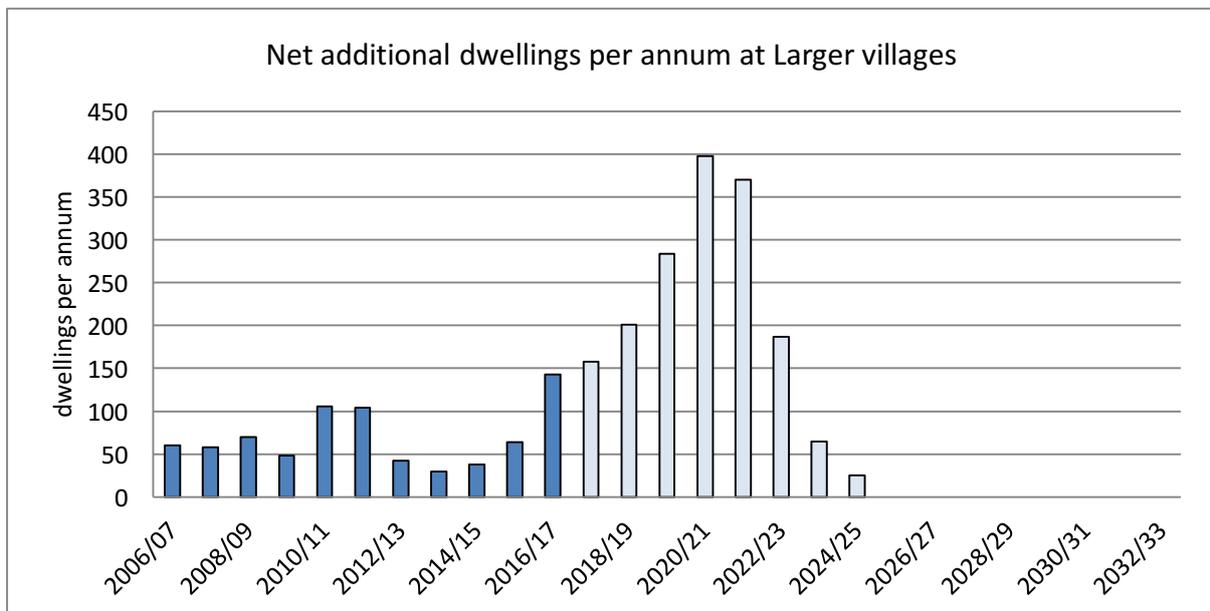
Whether the deliverability and viability of policy D6 has been tested.

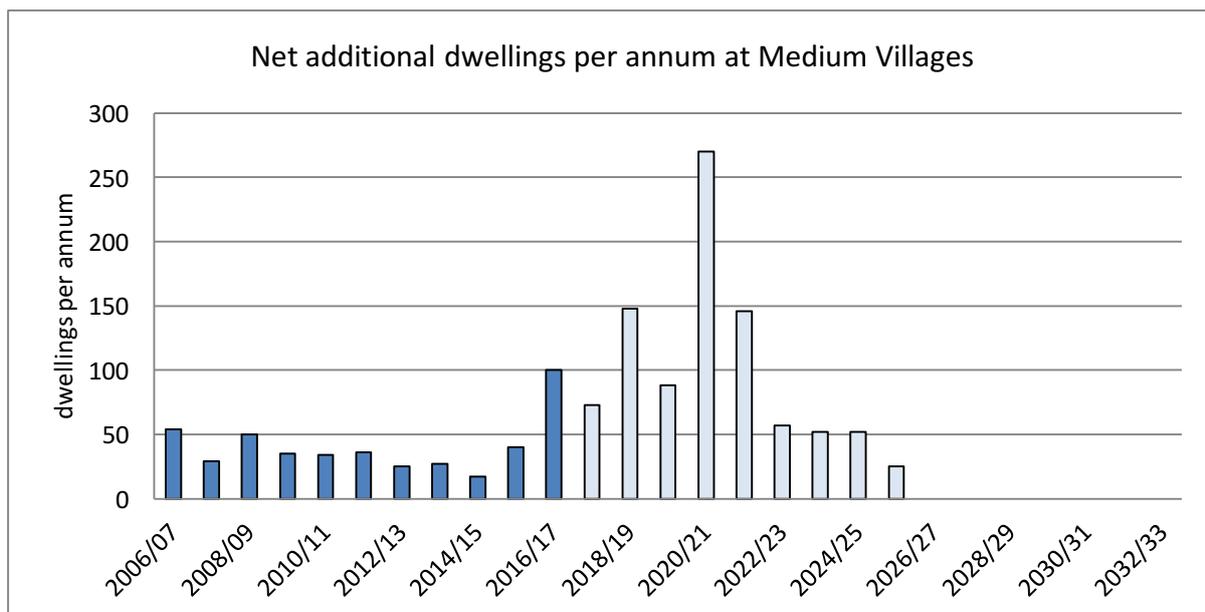
In light of the above whether the parts of policies D6 and I3 which seek to protect the loss of community facilities in villages are sound or realistic.

In considering the growth that will occur in the larger and medium sized villages it is not appropriate to confine consideration to whether or not those villages have allocations in the Local Plan. It is necessary to consider all sources of growth which include completions and commitments; neighbourhood plans and windfalls as well as allocations. These sources of supply are considered below.

Commitments and Completions

As can be seen from the below trajectories for the larger and medium villages (also based on information in the VALP Housing Land Supply Soundness document CD/HOU/010) there is forecast to be a significant increase in housing completions in these settlements in the future years compared to past delivery. It is likely that this will be supplemented by extra allocations in neighbourhood plans and will then be added to by the early review of the local plan. Development to support facilities will therefore be significant in the immediate future.





It can therefore be seen from the above graphs that over the next five years there will be growth in these villages. Indeed the commitments and allocations when combined will deliver a level of growth of 1,963 dwellings in the larger villages and 1,095 in the medium villages. These locations therefore will grow in size and not remain the same

Moreover the statement that “household sizes continue to fall” is not consistent with the latest demographic data. As shown in figure 17 on page 44 of the Buckinghamshire Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment Update 2016 the average household size in the South East was static between 2001 and 2011 and in Aylesbury Vale the adjusted estimate shows only a very minor reduction between 2001 and 2011.

That there is historically reduced household expenditure due to an ageing population is also debatable. Many village residents in Aylesbury Vale can be described as wealthy retired and the increase in house prices in villages has been driven by the arrival of wealthy incomers. There is therefore the expectation that an increasing population which maintains its ability to support local services will be able to support existing services.

Neighbourhood Plans

Whilst the proportion of villages with allocations in VALP is as described above these figures do not take into account the fact that many of the villages have housing allocations in their emerging or approved Neighbourhood Plans (NPs). The table below shows the allocations in both the neighbourhood plans and in the VALP and the projected commitments. The situation in the villages is described in more detail in the table below

Settlement	'Made' neighbourhood plan and number of dwellings allocated	Existing commitments and completions at 31 st March 2017 (including	VALP Allocation	Reason if no VALP allocation

		NP allocations)		
Larger villages				
Aston Clinton	No, but in advanced preparation	627		High number of commitments
Edlesborough	Yes (60 dwellings allocated)	116		NP
Ivinghoe	No	18		No further capacity identified
Long Crendon	Yes (23 dwellings allocated)	77		NP
Pitstone	Yes (70 dwellings allocated)	199		NP
Steeple Claydon	Yes (118 dwellings allocated)	98		NP
Stoke Mandeville	No	128		Proximity of Aylesbury growth
Stone (including Hartwell)	No	26	10	
Waddesdon (inc Fleet Marston)	Yes (75 dwellings allocated)	91		NP
Whitchurch	No	41	22	
Wing	Yes (100 dwellings allocated)	125		NP
Wingrave	Yes (100 dwellings allocated)	109		NP
Medium villages				
Bierton (including Broughton)	No	23		Proximity of Aylesbury growth
Brill	No	6		No capacity identified
Cheddington	Yes (100 dwellings allocated)	107		NP
Cuddington	No	4	21	
Gawcott (*part of the parish is in the Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan area)	No	8		No capacity identified
Great Horwood	Yes (45 dwellings allocated)	74		NP
Grendon Underwood	No	42		No capacity identified
Ickford	No	3	20	
Maids Moreton	No	1	170	
Marsh Gibbon	Yes (no allocations)	38	9	
Marsworth	No	15		No capacity identified
Newton Longville	No	31	17	
North Marston	No	8		No capacity identified
Padbury	No	48		No capacity identified
Quainton	Yes (no allocations)	22	37	
Stewkley	No	101		No capacity identified
Stoke Hammond	No	149		High number of commitments
Tingewick	No	105		No capacity identified
Weston Turville	No	36		Proximity of Aylesbury growth

All larger villages will have had some development over the plan period. For the larger villages nine of them have VALP or NP allocations (Steeple Claydon and Waddesdon NPs have been made since the plan was formulated), whilst Aston Clinton and Stoke Mandeville have high commitments. This only leaves Ivinghoe without significant provision and no suitable sites were found to be available. It will still have grown by 18 dwellings in the plan period. Overall the larger village provision averages 164 new homes per village.

All medium villages will have had some development over the plan period. For the 18 (not 19) medium villages the inclusion of NP allocations means that eight villages have allocations and four of the villages have commitments of over 100 homes. This means that 66% of the medium villages have allocations or significant commitments and overall the new homes per village average is 61 homes per village.

These tables demonstrate that the Government objective of achieving growth through community engagement has worked reasonably well in Aylesbury. This success continues with 18 more Neighbourhood Plans in the pipeline in the larger and medium villages.

In the case of the smaller villages they have been found to be relatively unsuitable for significant growth on the basis of the assessment that underlies the Settlement Hierarchy, but developments of five houses or less can take place in those villages.

Windfalls

The plan also contains a windfall allowance which is based on contributions from small sites of five houses or less and the majority of this small scale development is found in the rural areas. Further there are **18 more villages with NP** area designations mostly concentrated in the larger and medium village categories many of which are actively preparing their plans.

It is therefore not correct to describe this as a “no-growth housing provision” in the villages and, given that there are 12 made NPs, the level of growth has been found to be sustainable for those villages through their respective Examinations.

It is a longstanding matter for debate what level of growth is required to protect services in villages, but given that the total growth for the villages and the windfall provision amount to 4,516 new homes describing this level of growth as “little or no growth in villages” is not fairly describing the growth happening via commitments allocations, neighbourhood plans and windfalls.

Sustainability Appraisal

There is also the fact that the distribution of development to the villages as part of the overall VALP strategy was considered by the Sustainability Appraisal. That considered in detail the options, or set out where there were no options for growth in villages. The approach it took is mainly set out in chapter 6 of the report, with tables showing the position for each village at table 6.4 and 6.5 and the detail behind these is contained within the technical annex to the SA. The conclusion of the SA was that the overall distribution of growth was sustainable and was preferable against alternative options.

There is also the fact that the distribution of development within Aylesbury Vale is largely determined by the distribution of a large amount of commitments. As set out in Table 1 within VALP there are 8,588 homes committed in Aylesbury out of a total of 14,871 homes overall

which amounts to 58% of commitments. The allocations to Aylesbury within VALP are then influenced by the Garden Town designation which commits the district to significant development in the town. The significant transport benefits for Aylesbury from the proposed allocations also have a bearing on the level of development allocated to the town. However it can be seen that there are also a material level of commitments in the larger and medium sized villages.

Beyond the matters considered above it is important to note that the final bullet point under paragraph 28 of the NPPF refers to local plans “promoting the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages”. It can therefore be seen that policies D6 and I3 which seek to resist the loss of community facilities are wholly in accord with the NPPF. It is also considered that these policies are realistic and achievable. As far as the council is aware there is no requirement to test the viability and deliverability of a policy but it is considered that the policy is appropriate in the circumstances.

It is therefore considered that the policies as set out are appropriate to the sustainability of the villages, their level of expected growth in VALP/NPs and the circumstances in Aylesbury Vale, as well as reflecting national planning policy.

The County Council has also provided a response to this question as follows:

AVDC is best placed to discuss the soundness of the policy wording for S2 and I3, however we have set out below why BCC agree with the VALP spatial strategy and growth proposals.

BCC discussions with AVDC with regards to the VALP spatial strategy have been focussed on options which consolidate growth at strategic settlements and larger villages, rather than having dispersed housing development across the district. BCC agree with the spatial strategy approach proposed in the VALP as we would have concerns about the impacts associated with dispersed growth, including increasing the need to travel and the costs associated with additional infrastructure investment, such as the provision of public transport, walking and cycling routes, access to additional school places, shopping and leisure amenities, health care and social services.

The spatial strategy proposed provides greater opportunity to generate development with sufficient critical mass to enable the best possible outcomes for delivering the infrastructure that will be required to make development work properly.