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Organisation: Although I am a District Councillor, I am submitting this response as a resident of West Oxfordshire. And of Earth.

"There has been a tendency to put climate change on the back burner. If we are not able to reverse the present trend, we will be doomed." UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, October 26th 2022

General points:

- This government's repeated assertion that we are "leading the way" on climate change is proved untrue by the reckless, ill-advised and destructive effect of the Planning Inspectors' Main Modifications to the AAP. A genuine attempt by a local authority to prove that housing growth and emissions reduction are not incompatible has been ruined. They have introduced additions, deletions and changes of language throughout that have greatly weakened the original text. They have lowered standards and introduced loopholes that will allow developers to make excuses for not meeting them. The AAP as modified does not do nearly enough to address the climate and ecology crises and is therefore NOT LEGALLY COMPLIANT and UNSOUND.
- I have not said whether I regard each individual Main Modification as legally compliant, because I am not a lawyer. I note, however, that the Town & Country Planning Association has said that "the decision to gut the net zero policy is plainly wrong and both irrational and unreasonable in terms of public law principles." Therefore, for this reason also, I deem the entirety of the amendments to be NOT LEGALLY COMPLIANT.
- Local authorities have a duty to keep their residents safe, and this includes doing what they can to prevent runaway climate-change and biodiversity loss. The Area Action Plan was written towards this end, and would also have inspired other councils to draw up similar plans. The harm done by the Inspectors therefore has exponential effects.

Main modifications

MM2 – is UNSOUND.

-It does not fulfil the stated objectives of the AAP to deliver a net zero development, and undermines the vision of the garden village as "an exemplar net zero carbon, energy positive development which meets the challenges of climate change head on."

- The new wording is unclear and therefore does not comply with the NPPF's requirement that a plan should "contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous."

- It is not compliant with the national requirement for 80% carbon reduction by 2035 and net zero by 2050.
- 100% should be restored, and the words “wherever possible” should be removed.

MM3 – is UNSOUND, because there is little point adopting a natural-capital based approach, if it can not be demonstrated.

In the same way, “will be required to demonstrate resilience” is sound, whereas its replacement, “will be resilient” is a subjective description which cannot be tested.

MM4 is UNSOUND and, to use less technical language, it is reckless, destructive and quite frankly insulting to those who had put such hard work into the plan. All those words deleted should be restored.

- Measurable targets have been replaced with vague words. The words that have been added to replace them are vague – what is “a high level” of energy efficiency? Developers would be able to decide for themselves.
- Again, the plan as rewritten does not meet the requirement of the NPPF to “contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous”
- It has removed the net zero objective, although the TCPA has concluded that “the plan’s net zero objective is clearly in line with government policy, supported by the Sixth carbon budget, which is itself enshrined in law and entirely consistent with the climate duty in the 2004 Planning Act and the powerful enabling law in the Energy Act.”

MM5 is UNSOUND – “So far as is practicable” should be deleted

MM8 is UNSOUND – “through a planning condition or legal agreement” should be restored

MM10 is UNSOUND – the words “with the outline planning application for the garden settlement” should be restored

MM12 is UNSOUND – previous version should be restored. Much too vague – and private gardens should not be included, because there is nothing to stop their owners paving them over.

MM13 is UNSOUND – Previous version should be restored

MM14 is UNSOUND – the food strategy should not be put off until some future date but should, as envisaged, accompany the outline planning application. This is urgent.

MM15 is UNSOUND – (Biodiversity net gain)

The habitat in the Corpus Christi fields has been degraded recently. So a future measure of BNG will be from a much lower baseline than was the case just 2 or 3 years ago. A 25% increase in BNG will now be far less valuable than it would have been – unless the land is given time to regenerate naturally before the measurement is taken.

MM22 – It should be clear that this policy applies to all development on the garden village site, not just major development. As currently written, it is UNSOUND

M24 – UNSOUND – In so many ways, the original section, now deleted, was better. An A40 crossing for cyclists must be possible – take out the feasibility loophole. Also, the spine road should not minimise severance, it should avoid severance altogether.

MM35 – UNSOUND - the reference to exemplary design has been deleted, and yet this is supposed to be an exemplary development.

MMs 40,41,44, 45, 46 – the language for these policies has been seriously weakened, despite strong community support – UNSOUND

MM54 – UNSOUND – The new paragraph is completely absurd. Seriously, it's worthy of satire, and undermines the entire project. What on earth would these "triggers and particular circumstances" be? As currently written, this is a charter for developers to call for viability assessments and then further lower the standards of what was supposed to be an exemplary development, which was only given the go-ahead because of its high standards.