

# Great Western Park, Didcot

## Key details

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Name</b>                                | Great Western Park  |
| <b>Location</b>                            | Didcot, Oxfordshire   |
| <b>Number of dwellings</b>                 | 3,300   |
| <b>Date first homes sold</b>               | 2011  |
| <b>Homes delivered to date</b>             | Around half   |
| <b>Percentage of affordable homes</b>      | 30% of which 8% to be social rented housing (others shared ownership), managed by Sovereign and SOHA Housing Associations |
| <b>Average house price</b>                 | £336,000  |
| <b>Road vehicle trips forecast</b>         | 2550 (AM peak); 2610 (PM peak) (according to scenario assuming construction of a total of 3200 dwellings)                 |
| <b>Parking provision</b>                   | Average of 1.5 off-street spaces per dwelling, plus some on-street parking  |
| <b>Walking distance to railway station</b> | 25 minutes  |
| <b>Size of site</b>                        | 180 hectares  |
| <b>Housing density</b>                     | Parcel density mostly 30-50 dph; (18 dph gross density across whole site)   |
| <b>Planning guidance</b>                   | PPG3  |



## Background and context of development

Didcot lies within a patch of southern Oxfordshire which has become known as the Science Vale. This includes the settlements of Didcot, Wantage and Grove, and major science, technology and innovation related employment sites at Milton Park, Harwell Campus and Culham Science Centre, plus the Didcot Growth Accelerator Enterprise Zone created in spring 2016. In 2011, the Science Vale area had a population of 117,000, with 54,000 jobs. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment has identified that 725-825 new homes are required per year in South Oxfordshire and 1,028 per year in Vale of White Horse District. Consequently the Local Plans of these two districts allocate around 20,000 new homes for the Science Vale area in the period 2011-2031.

In December 2015 it was announced that Didcot will become a Garden Town. This will enable the delivery of 15,000 new homes in the town and 20,000 new science-sector jobs across Didcot and the Science Vale by 2031. A public consultation on the Garden Town plans completed its consultation period on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017. These plans include the expansion of the Orchard Centre to provide more shopping facilities in the centre of Didcot, a comprehensive network of cycle routes around the town and the improvement or possible relocation of Didcot Parkway station. Didcot will become a much larger town with a wider range of facilities and services and better links to key employment sites.

Currently 4% of employees who reside and work in the Science Vale area commute by bus, while 62% of internal commuters travel by car. In comparison 7% of residents who work outside the area commute by bus. Journeys to work by bicycle are higher than the national average at 4.1% according to the 2011 census. The Science Vale area strategy aims to increase the proportion of journeys to work made by bicycle by 50% by 2021.



Great Western Park is located to the west of Didcot, on the edge of the existing urban area. It benefits from proximity to the town and to local employment centres. The development is based around a north-south spine road, with access points onto the A4130 in the north and the B4493 Wantage Road in the centre of the development.

## Public Realm

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Urban trees</b>   | Trees have been planted in some areas                              |
| <b>Grass verges</b>  | Yes (on some streets)  |
| <b>Front gardens</b> | Not generally provided, but many houses have narrow private strips |
| <b>Back gardens</b>  | Yes  |

## Public transport, walking and cycling accessibility



Within Great Western Park, cycle and pedestrian accessibility is good, but the links beyond the development could be improved. The 2007 revised Travel Plan specifies that there will be an on-carriageway cycle route in both directions along the main spine road through the development 'except where this is not appropriate (e.g. at the main Wantage Road site access junction).' Traffic speeds will be restricted to 20mph except in the section between the northern neighbourhood centre and the A4130 access point to the north of the development, which will instead have 3m wide off-carriageway pedestrian/cycle lanes on both sides of the road. Cycle parking will be promoted at destinations such as schools, shops and community facilities, and all residential dwellings will be provided with cycle storage facilities where practicable. As the photo above shows, cycle parking has already been installed in some places.

| Destination            | Company       | Route numbers | Weekday daytime frequency | Weekday evening frequency | Saturday frequency | Sunday frequency | Travel time | Location of bus/train stop | Last return time |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| Didcot town centre     | Thames travel | 98            | Every 15 mins             | Every 30 mins             | Every 15 mins      | Every 30 mins    | 12 mins     | 3 within development       | 23:58            |
| Didcot railway station | Thames travel | 98            | Every 15 mins             | Every 30 mins             | Every 15 mins      | Every 30 mins    | 9 mins      | 3 within development       | 23:55            |

Bus services have been improved since our visit in January 2017. They now run every 15 minutes to the town centre and railway station, and every 30 minutes to the Harwell Campus employment site. They continue until midnight, and there is even an additional night bus service from Oxford that runs



until after 03:00am on Friday and Saturday nights. In September 2018, a new bus service between Great Western Park and the Milton Park employment site was introduced, running every 30 minutes on weekdays.

The original section 106 agreement instructs the developers to construct pedestrian links to adjoining sites at Cow Lane, Vauxhall Barracks and Stephen Freeman School. The agreement specified that the Stephen Freeman Footpath/Cycleway link is required prior to the occupation of the first dwelling, while a request may be made by the council for a bus link to be constructed at this site, at any point before the occupation of the 400<sup>th</sup> dwelling. This bus link was not built, because any buses using it would not have been able to serve the northern part of Great Western Park, which would have made it more difficult to provide a simple high frequency bus network serving the entire site.

While some paved pedestrian/cycle links with neighbouring residential areas have been put in place, at the time of our visit other locations remained in need of improvements to the unofficial paths that had emerged (see photos below; these paths may have been improved since our visit). There is no easy pedestrian or cycle access to the major nearby employment site of Milton Park. This may be rectified when a planned new road bridge is built over the mainline railway line.



## Local Facilities

A commercial centre for Great Western Park is being built just to the north of the Wantage Road, based around an 11,000 sq ft (1022 sq m) Asda supermarket and 10 smaller retail units. A local shop and community centre are already open in the northern part of the development, and another smaller centre is due to be provided in the southern district.

The newly created circular Boundary Park is comprised entirely of playing fields, plus a Pavilion which is now the home of Didcot Cricket Club, Didcot Rugby Club and Harwell & Hendred Youth Football Club. Another small park and children's play areas exist, while a more typical park, with planting, benches and landscaping, is set to be created adjoining Boundary Park. Dog walkers from Didcot used to frequent the area when it was open fields; they still come here although they are not allowed inside Boundary Park.



| Type of facility       | Plans and current state of progress within development  | Built yet within site? | Closest example outside the development | Estimated time to reach nearest example outside development |         |         |                  |
|------------------------|---|------------------------|---|---|---------|---------|------------------|
|                        |   |                        |   | Walking   | Cycling | Driving | Public transport |
| Convenience store      | Best-one opened in Northern neighbourhood autumn 2015   | Yes                    |   |   |         |         |                  |
| Café / restaurant      | Costa Coffee (near Asda)  | Yes                    |   |   |         |         |                  |
| Drinking establishment | There will be a public house close to the Asda. The Pavilion in Boundary Park contains a bar and opened in September 2016 | Yes                    |   |   |         |         |                  |
| High street            | There will be 10 retail   | No                     |   |   |         |         |                  |
|                        |   |                        | Didcot town                             | 30 mins   | 8 mins  | 6 mins  | 13 mins          |

| shops                     | units close to the Asda  | centre |                                     |              |         |         |                              | (incl 7 mins walk) |
|---------------------------|--|--------|-------------------------------------|--------------|---------|---------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Supermarket               | 11,000 sq ft Asda store recently opened  | Yes    |                                     |              |         |         |                              |                    |
| Nursery                   | A new nursery will open in the commercial centre.  | Yes    |                                     |              |         |         |                              |                    |
| Primary school            | There will be 2, the first opened in Sept 2016, with a nursery attached  | Yes    |                                     |              |         |         |                              |                    |
| Secondary school          | University Technical College and Aureus School   | Yes    |                                     |              |         |         |                              |                    |
| Park                      | There is a small local park next to the playing fields of Boundary Park. A larger new park is due to be created. | Yes    |                                     |              |         |         |                              |                    |
| Playground                | Two play areas already built, two more planned.  | Yes    |                                     |              |         |         |                              |                    |
| Playing fields            | Within Boundary Park are rugby, football and cricket pitches.  | Yes    |                                     |              |         |         |                              |                    |
| Tennis courts             | Planned in neighbourhood park  | No     | Edmonds Park, Didcot                | 24 mins      | 6 mins  | 5 mins  | No direct link               |                    |
| Leisure centre            | The Pavilion in Boundary Park is not a full leisure centre   | No     | Didcot Leisure Centre               | 34 mins      | 10mins  | 8 mins  | 23 mins incl. 17 min walk    |                    |
| Swimming pool             | There are no plans to build a swimming pool  | No     | Didcot Wave                         | 26 mins      | 8 mins  | 6 mins  | 22 mins incl. 17 min walk    |                    |
| Wildlife area             | Community orchard and allotments planned in southern neighbourhood.  | No     | Mowbray Fields local nature reserve | 36 mins      | 10 mins | 9 mins  | No direct link               |                    |
| Community Centre          | Already open in Northern Neighbourhood. Another planned in the district centre                                   | Yes    |                                     |              |         |         |                              |                    |
| Daytime / evening classes | In community centre  | Yes    |                                     |              |         |         |                              |                    |
| Medical facilities        | Health centre and dental practice planned in commercial centre; pharmacy now open.                               | No     | Woodlands Medical Centre            | 15 mins      | 4 mins  | 3 mins  | 10 mins (incl. 8 mins walk)  |                    |
| Post office               | No plans known   | No     | Georgetown post office              | 15 mins      | 4 mins  | 3 mins  | 11 mins (incl. 10 mins walk) |                    |
| Library                   | S106 agreement includes contribution towards improvement of library facilities in Didcot or on site              | No     | Didcot Library                      | 24 mins      | 6 mins  | 5mins   | 12 mins (incl. 8 mins walk)  |                    |
| Co-working space          | No plans known   | No     | Abingdon                            | 1 hr 58 mins | 30 mins | 19 mins | 57 mins (on two buses        |                    |





## Developer contributions

There have been some substantial transport related developer contributions, including contributions to bus services, contributions to transportation infrastructure in and around Didcot, and monitoring of air quality and traffic generation. In addition to these payments, the S106 agreement also called on the developers to complete highway improvements at the nearby Milton Interchange on the A34.

*Contributions already paid to Oxfordshire County Council, as of July 2017 (for planning applications P02/V1594/O and P02/W0848/O):*

| Contribution        | Purpose   | Amount         |
|---------------------|---|----------------|
| Highways monitoring | Monitoring the impact of the development and generation of traffic on the local highway network | £68,478.75     |
| Transportation      | Provision of transportation infrastructure in and around Didcot                                 | £4,608,049.51  |
| Public transport    | Provision of bus services serving the site  | £3,760,862.07  |
| Primary education   | Provision of primary education  | £14,000,374.45 |
| Support Service     | Services for people in need of care and/or assistance   | £535,744.36    |
| Secondary education | Provision of secondary education  | £4,436,943.22  |

*Contributions already paid to Oxfordshire County Council, as of July 2017 (for planning application P/10/W1959):*

| Contribution | Purpose  | Amount        |
|--------------|--|---------------|
| Transport    | Off-site transport and/or highway measures including but without limitation improvements to public rights of way and traffic calming, and a pedestrian crossing in Park Road, Didcot | £1,123,650.49 |
| General      | Various potential uses (not transport related)   | £2,457,423.31 |

*Contributions to Oxfordshire County Council still to be triggered, as of July 2017 (for planning applications P02/V1594/O and P02/W0848/O):*

| Contribution     | Purpose   | Amount      |
|------------------|---|-------------|
| Public transport | Provision of bus services serving the site            | £920,000.00 |
| Support Service  | Services for people in need of care and/or assistance | £200,000.00 |

As of April 2017, South Oxfordshire District Council had received over £5.6 million in S106 contributions, including £102,618.64 for air quality monitoring. The District Council was also expecting a further £5.6 million in contributions not yet triggered.

## Summary

As a Garden Town, Didcot has ambitious plans for expansion. Great Western Park is well sited for access to the town and the rapidly growing Science Vale area. It is possible to walk or cycle into the town centre, and bus services are frequent, while the estate is also close to the A34 trunk road. Within the site the roads are generally quite friendly to those on foot or bicycle, but foot and cycle links connecting the site to neighbouring suburbs and nearby employment sites such as Milton Park need improving. In terms of local facilities, it is promising that the commercial centre under construction will contain 10 smaller retail units, though it remains to be seen to what extent the single large supermarket will dominate this area.