

BY EMAIL

To: Ms Emily Catcheside Planning Department Oxfordshire County Council County Hall
New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND.

Dear Ms Catcheside

**STATEMENT OF OBJECTION – PLANNING APPLICATION [R3.0138/21].
HIF1 Road between A34 Milton Interchange & B4015 north of Clifton Hampden**

REVIEW OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT - APRIL 2023

On behalf of Oxford Friends of the Earth I am writing to state that we maintain our objection to this planning application. I am writing in respect to the Regulation 25 request dated 31 March 2023 and AECOM's response dated 26 April 2023.

1. Construction timetable

The latest Regulation 25 request (31/3/2023) concerns project delivery and confirmation of the 'validity' of the proposed construction programme and the implications of project delay and timeframe for conclusions on environmental effects.

AECOM's response fails to address these questions adequately. It invokes the Rochdale Envelope to avoid addressing key matters without a satisfactory explanation. They fail to provide a viable 'project management plan' for the development showing work within the scheme boundaries proposed. We note that the three constituent parts of the scheme - the Didcot area and the Science Bridge), the Didcot to Culham section, and the Clifton Hampden bypass - are to be constructed simultaneously by separate contractors with the plan that the road opens to traffic in 2026.

We note that it is proposed that the work can be delivered in a 30-month timeframe even though previously 36 months was proposed (later reduced to 35 months). We note the Major Infrastructure Capital Programme information presented at Cabinet on 24 Jan 2023 as the "**Latest Forecast**" for HIF1 representing project expenditure and timings. This showed construction expenditure for project delivery from 2023-24 to 2026-27, a project timeline of 36 months and expected completion by Dec-26 (open to traffic). Yet now the HIF1 scheme is now expected to complete six months earlier than previously forecast.

Fig 1. Extract Infrastructure Capital Prog. Jan-23	Latest Forecast						TOTAL
	Hist	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	
HIF Project	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s
Dualing A4130	2,918	750	4,300	10,800	13,900	832	33,500
Didcot Science Bridge	3,234	750	5,500	22,500	23,100	2,116	57,200
1. A4130 & Science Bridge	6,152	1,500	9,800	33,300	37,000	2,948	90,700
2. Didcot to Culham	6,373	1,400	10,500	60,000	73,500	8,227	160,000
3. Clifton Hampden Bypass	2,931	700	6,900	12,900	19,200	2,169	44,800
DGT OBC	637						637
	16,093	3,600	27,200	106,200	129,700	13,344	296,137
Annual %	5%	1%	9%	36%	44%	5%	100%

No explanation is provided as to how this improved delivery can be achieved.

The construction work for the £27M expenditure originally forecasted in 2023-24 will fall into a more compressed time period leaving 9 months after the funding deadline (31 Mar-26) to finalise the project. Work in this latter period will be at OCCs risk. The work on the project is compacted and increases the risk of delivery delay and failure.

In the absence of explanation it appears that the 30 months delivery time is driven by the government funding deadline.

The Rochdale Envelope (RE) and the Environmental Statement (ES)

AECOM invoke the Rochdale Envelope (RE) but do not state in the ES (as required) the nature of the uncertainties. The RE is meant to apply where some details of the **whole** project have not been confirmed. The Rochdale Envelope should not be used as an excuse (ref para 2.3 of the guidance) to avoid providing necessary information and timelines to make an assessment on a range of ES matters. It should not be used to mask an unexplained reduction in the project timeline.

The Reg 25 response should clarify which elements have been identified as uncertain. The caveat at para 5.4 states that the ES has been prepared on best available knowledge at the time of writing. This suggests possible deficiencies or imperfections and that the underlying information may not be a sound basis for decision making. The scale of this project demands a high degree of confidence the scheme can be delivered fully and on time to enable relevant assessments to be made.

A major project of this nature should contain a **risk analysis** with different scenarios across various probability ranges. The applicant should produce an overall summary Project plan (ideally with a risk analysis profile) showing the work planned for each part of the scheme. This planning application must not be brought to committee until this is provided.

The decision by the Secretary of State to hold a Public Enquiry in the Compulsory Purchase Orders and Side Road Orders for HIF1 introduces further uncertainty and

pending the outcome will impact OCCs ability to assemble the necessary land required to start the project. Given the scale of the scheme and these uncertainties we endorse the call that construction plans should be subject to a “cold eye review” by a reputable independent civil engineering company. This should be undertaken prior to planning permission.

The validity and timescale for this plan should be referred to AECOM to prove viability. An imposed funding-based completion deadline increases risk of financial problems for OCC and taxpayers.

Basis for refusal

We suggest that there are clear grounds for refusal.

1. AECOM fail as requested to demonstrate the validity of the construction programme. There needs to be a clear plan to show that HIF can realistically be delivered in full in the imposed timeframe.
2. Invoking the Rochdale Envelope without explanation is contrary to policy and guidance.
3. The AECOM schedule of 30 months contradicts the capital programme approved by Cabinet and Council in Jan-23. The conflict between the published Cabinet Papers and the Reg 25 response requires explanation.
4. The lack of information provided means the impact of the ES cannot be properly assessed.

2. Climate impacts and carbon emissions

The predicted CO2 emissions resulting from the construction and operation of the HIF1 scheme are contained in the Environmental Statement (ES) Vol 1 Chapter 15, September 2021, with subsequent Regulation 25 responses. We note that OCC Environment Team commissioned a review of these documents by SNC - Lavalin/Atkins, dated 15th February 2023.

A significant conclusion within the ES is that there will be a reduction in operational CO2 emissions if the HIF1 road is built due to reduction in traffic congestion and journey times. This statement is based on flawed assumptions.

A summary of the defects in this assessment was issued to the Planning Department on 19th January 2023 by Friends of the Earth as a response to R3.0138/21. This cites the detailed analysis contained in the report, dated January 2023, “THE HIF1 road proposal; is this plan compatible with Oxfordshire goals?”.

This remains the most accurate and comprehensive assessment of the flaws in the ES statement on CO2 emissions, briefly summarised as:

- The traffic modelling fails to account for induced demand caused by the HIF1 road. As new roads encourage more car dependent developments, this increased car use leads to increase in carbon emissions.
- The traffic modelling assumes that traffic increases on existing roads, without HIF1, will rise at the same rate, leading to congestion. This ignores the evidence base that driver behaviour, traffic management, public transport can and will modify predicted congestion – a key aspect of the LTCP.

The ES overestimates the level of congestion without the Scheme and overestimates the improvement in congestion with the Scheme. It therefore overestimates the potential carbon savings from reduced congestion. Using best available data, the operation of the HIF1 scheme would lead to increases in carbon emissions estimated at 359kt CO2 by 2050.

It is also clear that the cited benefit in traffic flow will not be realised. This is recognised in OCC's LTCP which states that "we have found that road schemes often generate new demand and quickly reach capacity again. It is therefore not a sustainable long-term solution for Oxfordshire's transport network."

The HIF1 is an unsuitable solution to enable housing growth in South Oxfordshire.

Basis for refusal

The ES is an unsafe assessment of the carbon emissions of this scheme. The carbon emission predicted to be produced by the HIF1 Scheme are incompatible with:

1. OCC's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 2022-2050 policy 27
2. National Planning Policy Framework chapter 14 paragraph 152 and Planning Policy Guidance paragraph 001,
3. The Climate Change Act 2008 amended 2019 and The Climate Action Plans of VoWHDC 2022-2024 and SODC 2022-2024.
4. VOWHDC local plan 2031 core policy 43 Natural resources and core policy 40 sustainable design and construction
5. SODC policies DES 7- Efficient use of resources and DES 8-Promoting sustainable design.

3. Noise and vibration

The errors in the noise assessment remain. We note the major deficiencies as detailed in the report (5th May 2022) from the Parishes Joint Committee remain unanswered.

The noise report in the Environmental Statement is an unsafe basis for granting planning approval to the HIF1 road scheme.

Basis for refusal

The HIF1 Scheme remains non-compliant with local plan policies of the Vale of White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council.

- SODC Local Plan 2035 Policy ENV12 (3) and Local Plan Policy
 - DES6 VoWH Development Policy 23 Impact of Development on Amenity
- These policies require that a development should not result in significant adverse impact on human health. No adequate noise assessment has been undertaken to convincingly demonstrate that all significant adverse cumulative noise impacts to adjacent communities along the length of the proposed HIF1 road have been identified.

The HIF1 scheme fails to meet the requirements of national planning policy and guidance.

1. The scheme does not meet the requirement of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at paragraph 185 that it should “*mitigate and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impacts resulting from noise and avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and the quality of life*’
2. The scheme, and its noise assessment, fails to meet the requirements of the DfT Transport Analysis Guidance (webTAG) 2014 due to its failure to consider alternatives to the road in the ES and to its alignment to ensure a balanced transport provision with least impact on existing communities.
3. The HIF1 scheme fails to meet the three aims of the Noise Policy Statement for England (NPSE) 2010 . These aims are the fundamental basis for noise assessments and require a scheme to “*Avoid significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life...*”; *Mitigate and minimise adverse impacts on health and quality of life; ,” contribute to the improvement of health and quality of life*”
4. The scheme fails to follow PPG 2019 requiring that “*Noise Action Plans Important Areas (NAPIA)..should be taken into account*”. The NAPIA at Appleford, as identified by DEFRA, has been ignored in the assessment of the adverse noise effect of the HIF1 road.

The noise assessment is flawed and misrepresents the noise impact of the operation of the road. It is based on traffic modelling that fails to recognise “induced” traffic, i.e., additional vehicles attracted by a fast new highway, and is based on the false premise that in the absence of the new HIF1 road the predicted traffic will use village roads and thereby

increase traffic noise in the villages. This ignores the HGV and traffic restraints already present on village roads and anticipated wider traffic reduction measures introduced by OCC and others to encourage alternative transport. The noise assessment under-estimates the noise impact of the proposed road and over-estimates the traffic noise in residential communities if the road is not built. No further noise monitoring at critical locations has been undertaken since the absence of representative ambient noise levels was pointed out in by NPC-JC in May 2022.

4. Landscape

We support the comments by the Principal Major Planning Officer (Vale of WH) that acoustic barriers are visually intrusive and that the area including the section Didcot to River Thames Crossing is rural in nature. The scheme will have major visual impacts that conflict with the character of the area and run counter to policy.

The new viaduct and bridge over the Thames will have a major visual impact on an important landscape.

The Science Bridge will have a major visual impact on the local landscape. There is nothing distinct or appealing about its design or appearance.

The **Elevated Road and Flyover Bridge at Appleford** will have major negative visual impact and is an unjustified imposition on the local community. It is visually intrusive and will bring additional noise and vibration with light spill from moving traffic polluting local dark skies. The road will overlook the village and is physically too close to resident dwellings. It will be damaging to human health and wellbeing (mentally and physically).

The **Double Roundabout** at Culham Science Centre is not appropriate to a country area and will change the whole character of the surrounding locality.

Basis for refusal

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that decisions should ensure “*a new development is appropriate to its location taking into account the likely effects including cumulative effects of pollution, on health, living conditions and the environment*”.

1. The visual impact of the bridges, viaduct and flyover will change the nature and character of localities along the route of the road from a rural country area to an urban district.
2. The proximity of the elevated road and flyover to Appleford village will be physically damaging to the health and well being of residents contrary to NPSE and NPPF policy.

3. The removal of trees and loss of hedgerow will change the character and visual outlook of the area permanently.

5. Arboriculture and biodiversity

The impacts on local biodiversity will be very significant. The HIF1 scheme requires an area of 155 hectares (383 acres). The biodiversity and environmental impact from tree loss is significant particularly in Clifton Hampden and to a lesser extent at Appleford. In total circa three miles of hedgerow will be lost.

- Eighty (80%) of the tree loss due to the HIF1 scheme will be in Clifton Hampden that will change the landscape and natural character of the village. In Appleford 33% of tree groups (incl. 2 partial woodlands) will be lost.
- The impact on biodiversity along with the visual impact of the tree, hedgerow and canopy loss will change the nature of the area for ever.
- There is no adequate explanation for how the loss of 383 acres and of so many trees and hedgerow can result in a biodiversity net gain as claimed.

Basis for refusal

The loss of 383 acres to the natural environment for road use coupled with significant removal of trees (160+), tree canopy (30%) and hedgerow (3 miles) with the consequent impact on biodiversity is significant. The lasting damage to the environment and climate will not be mitigated by small-scale tree planting and remediation.

6. Appleford bridge

We note and endorse the objections to the bridge from the Parishes Joint Committee.

In conclusion we would remind you that:

- The EIA Regulation Response (April 23) fails to provide sufficient clarification on the matters raised and for the reasons outlined above and other objections submitted previously the HIF1 application should not be approved.
- The traffic assessment - which ignores induced demand – is invalid on this basis and more work is needed on key locations.
- The carbon emissions from this scheme are understated. The plan runs counter to OCCs adopted LTCP policies and will fail to help achieve the reduction in car usage in the LTCP.
- AECOM have failed to prove the validity of the proposed Construction Programme as requested. There is no explanation to justify the 6-month reduction in the delivery schedule. The use of the Rochdale Envelope without explanation or

analysis is contrary to government policy and guidance.

- The HIF1 scheme remains non-compliant with national planning policies including NPPF & NPSE and various local policies (Vale & SODC).
- The loss of trees, tree canopy, hedgerow and land taken for road space will damage the biodiversity permanently. There is no clear basis for net gain as claimed.
- Despite the recent consultations there remain significant inadequacies and in this application. There are clear grounds on which this should be rejected.

With best wishes

Chris Church for Oxford Friends of the Earth