

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 - SECTION 77 AND
THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (INQUIRIES PROCEDURE)
(ENGLAND) RULES 2020**

Application by Oxfordshire County Council

Proposal: Dicot Garden Town HIF1 Scheme

**Site Address: Land between A34 Milton Interchange,
and B4015 north of Clifton Hampden, Oxfordshire**

**Full Statement of Case of
South Oxfordshire District Council**

**Planning Inspectorate reference: APP/U3100/V/23/3326625
South Oxfordshire District Council reference: P23/S2955/CM**

November 2023

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Appendix 1: Consultation responses from South Oxfordshire District Council

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This is the Statement of Case on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council which has Rule 6 status for the forthcoming local inquiry in respect of the called in planning application for a project known as “the HIF1 scheme”, comprising the following:

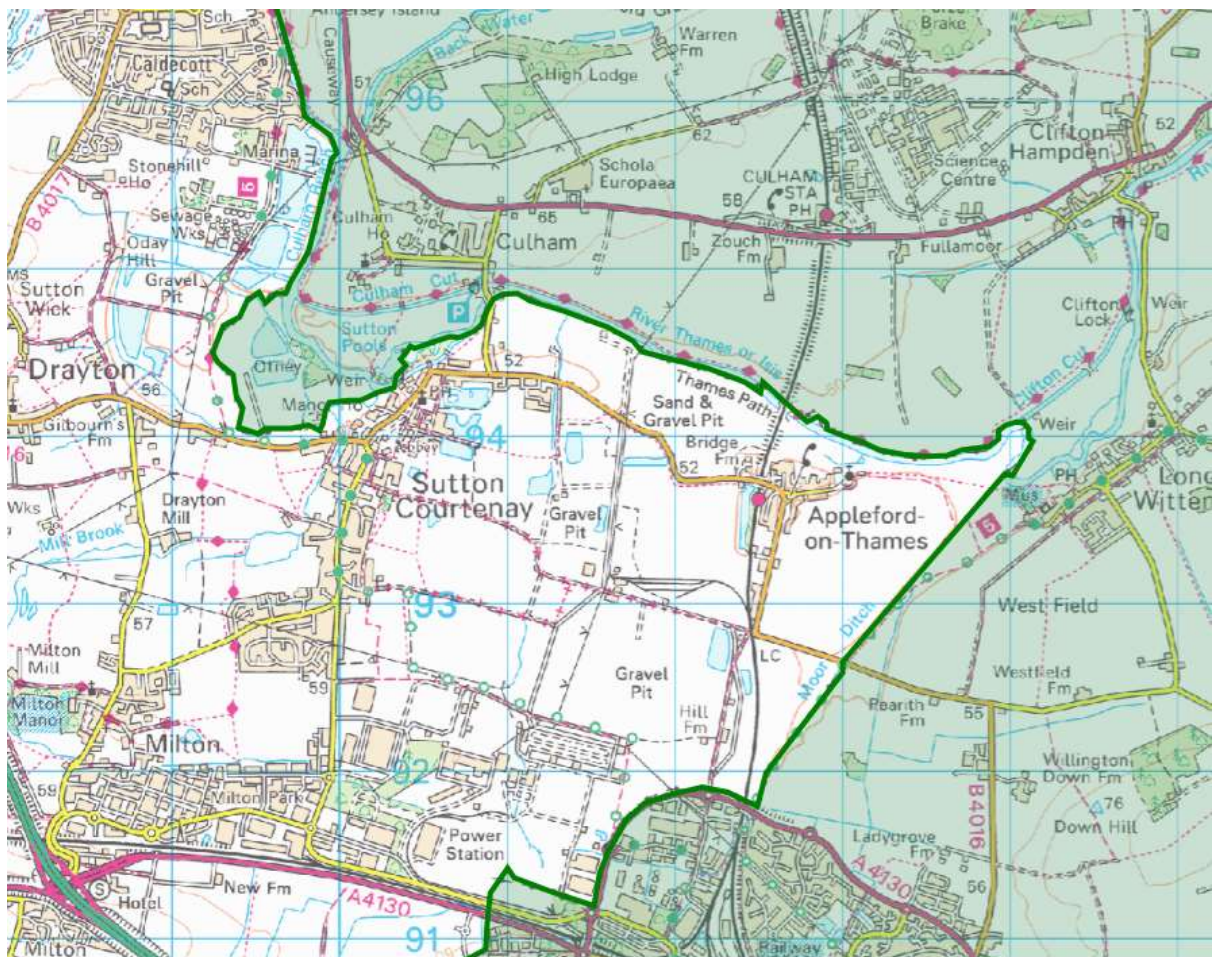
- The dualling of the A4130 carriageway (A4130 Widening) from the Milton Gate Junction eastwards, including the construction of three roundabouts;
- A road bridge over the Great Western Mainline (Didcot Science Bridge) and realignment of the A4130 north east of the proposed road bridge including the relocation of a lagoon;
- Construction of a new road between Didcot and Culham (Didcot to Culham River Crossing) including the construction of three roundabouts, a road bridge over the Appleford railway sidings and road bridge over the River Thames;
- Construction of a new road between the B4015 and A415 (Clifton Hampden bypass), including the provision of one roundabout and associated junctions; and
- Controlled crossings, footways and cycleways, landscaping, lighting, noise barriers and sustainable drainage.

1.2 The elements described in bullet points 3-5 fall wholly or partly within the administrative boundaries of South Oxfordshire District Council.

1.3 In summary, South Oxfordshire District Council strongly supports the principle of the HIF1 scheme. HIF1 is critical to the delivery of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (‘SOLP’) spatial strategy for planned housing and employment growth and, subject to conditions, the proposed development accords with the Development Plan when read as a whole and is strongly supported by national policy.

2.0 SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 The application site traverses land within both South Oxfordshire District Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council. Those parts of the proposal north of the river Thames are within South Oxfordshire District Council, as are small sections of the site around the edge of Didcot on the A4130. The plan below indicates the extent of South Oxfordshire in the vicinity of the site, shaded green. The areas not shaded fall within the Vale of White Horse.



South Oxfordshire District Council shaded in green (Vale of White Horse unshaded)

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 South Oxfordshire District Council was consulted on the application proposals, including two sets of amendments. This council's three responses to the consultations are attached at **Appendix 1** of this statement. In each response the council expressed its support in principle for the proposals.
- 3.2 The responses provided by the South Oxfordshire District Council also include opinions expressed by internal technical consultees, with the last set of comments included in the letter dated 20 June 2023.
- 3.3 On 29 August 2023, elected members of the council attended a special meeting to facilitate discussion about the potential implications of the Oxfordshire County Council planning application process, and its consequences for the HIF1 scheme. The report that was prepared for this meeting, and the minutes of the meeting, and a letter from the Leader of the council to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are attached at **Appendix 2** of this statement and will be referred to in the council's Proof of Evidence.

4.0 THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 4.1 The statutory Development Plan consists of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035, which was adopted on 10 December 2020, and any relevant Neighbourhood Plan for the area. In this case the Culham Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2041, which was made 12 June 2023, also forms part of the Development Plan.

South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035

- 4.2 The council will demonstrate that the SOLP safeguards land within South Oxfordshire for the HIF1 scheme, and that the scheme is required to deliver planned housing and employment growth set out in the SOLP. The council will

also argue that, subject to the imposition of conditions, the proposed development will comply with the Development Plan as a whole.

- 4.3 The delivery of HIF1 and the housing and employment allocations that are reliant on this infrastructure are an integral component of the SOLP. The policies which go to the principle of development and are of most relevance to the consideration of the proposal are:

STRAT1: The Overall Strategy

This sets out how growth is to be delivered, identifying the focus of major housing and economic growth as Science Vale (including Didcot Garden Town and Culham), which is an area planned to play an enhanced role in delivering homes and jobs “with improved transport connectivity”. STRAT1 also identifies strategic allocations of housing in several locations. The allocations at Culham and Berinsfield are of particular relevance.

STRAT2: South Oxfordshire Housing and Employment Requirements

Outlines a total housing requirement of 23,550 homes over the plan period and a minimum employment land requirement of 39.1 hectares, to be delivered in accordance with the spatial strategy.

STRAT3: Didcot Garden Town

The importance of HIF1 is explicitly referred to in criteria viii to “require infrastructure to unlock development in Didcot Town Centre, Didcot and the wider area”. Part 3 of the policy states “Significant infrastructure improvements are committed to under Policy TRANS1b Supporting Strategic Transport Investment. Infrastructure will need to be in place to enable sites allocated in the Local Plan in and around Didcot to be delivered.” This explains the importance of the HIF1 infrastructure for delivering Didcot Garden Town and that HIF1 is needed to unlock development and deliver the allocations.

STRAT4: Strategic Development

This policy specifies that new development will be provided within strategic allocations to deliver the scale and distribution of development set out in the spatial strategy.

STRAT8: Culham Science Centre

Supports the redevelopment and intensification of the Science Centre subject to amenity and environmental considerations. In combination with the adjacent strategic allocation, will deliver at least 7.3 hectares of employment land.

STRAT9: Land Adjacent to Culham Science Centre

In addition to at least 7.3 hectares of employment land (in combination with STRAT8), this site will deliver approximately 3,500 new homes, with approximately 2,100 homes within the plan period. Three pitches will also be provided for Gypsies and Travellers. The proposals will be expected to deliver all necessary infrastructure, and this includes “new junctions onto the A415 and significant contributions towards the Clifton Hampden Bypass, the Didcot to Culham River Crossing, and upgrading the A4074/B4015 junction at Golden Balls.” The HIF1 project is also specifically referred to in paragraphs 3.71-72 of the supporting text to STRAT8 and STRAT9.

STRAT10i: Land at Berinsfield Garden Village

Allocates around 1,700 new homes within the plan period and at least 5 hectares of additional employment land. Proposals will be expected to deliver all necessary infrastructure including contributions towards “upgrading the A4074/B4015 junction at Golden Balls, the Clifton Hampden bypass, and the Thames River crossing between Culham and Didcot Garden Town.”

H2: New Homes in Didcot

Outlines that provision will be made for around 6,339 new homes and adds that some are on sites that have planning consent (including outline permission or with a resolution to grant permission).

EMP1: The Amount and Distribution of New Employment Land

Sets out that between 2011 and 2035 a minimum requirement of 39.1 hectares of employment land will be provided. The locations identified for employment land include sites reliant on HIF1, including Didcot, Culham and Berinsfield.

TRANS1b: Supporting Strategic Transport Investment

Amongst other things, this policy states that the council will work with Oxfordshire County Council to “support the development and delivery of a new Thames River crossing between Culham and Didcot Garden Town, the A4130 widening and road safety improvements from the A34 Milton Interchange to Didcot, a Science Bridge over the A4130 and railway into the former Didcot A power station site and the Clifton Hampden Bypass.”

TRANS3: Safeguarding of Land for Sustainable Transport Schemes

This policy safeguards all of the land necessary to support HIF1 and seeks to resist development that would prejudice the construction or effective operation of the scheme.

Culham Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2041

4.4 The relevant Culham Neighbourhood Plan Policies are:

- CUL5: Design Code for Culham
- CUL6: Local Heritage Assets
- CUL7: Nature Recovery and Climate Change

- CUL8: Sustainable Travel
- CUL10: Light Pollution

Emerging Development Plan documents

Burcot and Clifton Hampden Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2035

- 4.5 The publicity period on the Burcot and Clifton Hampden Neighbourhood Plan concluded on 11 April 2023. The draft plan documents and comments received during the publicity period have been submitted for independent examination.

The relevant policies are:

- BCH6: Local Heritage Assets
- BCH7: Footpaths and Cycle Paths
- BCH9: Green Infrastructure
- BCH10: Local Landscape Character

- 4.6 The council will refer to the emerging Neighbourhood Plan policies where relevant.

Other Documents

Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan

- 4.7 The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan was first published in 2017, with the list of proposed projects updated in 2022. Whilst the Delivery Plan is not a statutory planning document or part of the Development Plan, it is a material consideration. Its visions include strengthening the economic base of Didcot, providing supporting infrastructure including transport infrastructure particularly for sustainable modes of travel, and delivering a wide choice of homes. The Delivery Plan also includes a masterplan which seeks to bring about positive change for Didcot.

- 4.8 The first four projects on the updated projects list are the different elements of the HIF1 scheme, indicating the importance of HIF1 to realising the potential of Didcot Garden Town.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' Joint Design Guide

- 4.9 The Design Guide is a Supplementary Planning Document adopted in June 2022 and is a material consideration when determining planning applications. The Design Guide is intended to assist landowners, developers, applicants, agents, designers, and planners through all stages of the design and planning process to achieve high quality and sustainable development.
- 4.10 In its proof of evidence, the council will highlight the need to mitigate the impacts of the development through the imposition of conditions, to ensure that the development goes as far as possible to meeting the aspirations of the Delivery Plan and the principles of the Design Guide.

5.0 THE CASE FOR THE COUNCIL

- 5.1 The council's case will address the four subject matters listed in paragraph 7 of the Planning Inspectorate's letter dated 25 July 2023 which are repeated below:
- a) *"The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for delivering a sufficient supply of homes as set out in the NPPF (Chapter 5); and*
 - b) *The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for building a strong, competitive economy as set out in the NPPF (Chapter 6); and*
 - c) *The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with the development plan for the area; and*
 - d) *any other matters the Inspector considers relevant."*

- 5.2 The council will refer to S38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which provides that if regard is to be had to the Development Plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.3 The council will refer to the Development Plan, and the case for the council in respect of the issues arising from the four matters above listed in paragraph 7 of the Planning Inspectorate's letter dated 25 July 2023.
- 5.4 In summary, below is the council's case in respect of the four matters listed in paragraph 7 of the Planning Inspectorate's letter dated 25 July 2023.
- a) The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for delivering a sufficient supply of homes as set out in the NPPF (Chapter 5)***
- 5.5 The NPPF in chapter 5 sets out the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes and doing this using planning policies to identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites. At paragraph 73 the NPPF explains that "The supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns, provided they are well located and designed, and supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities (including a genuine choice of transport modes)." It goes on to instruct strategic policy-making authorities to "consider the opportunities presented by existing or planned investment in infrastructure, the area's economic potential and the scope for net environmental gains".
- 5.6 The proposals are entirely consistent with the Government's objective to significantly boost the supply of homes, as set out in Chapter 5 of the NPPF. The Local Plan was prepared to align the NPPF's principle of growth being focused on locations that can be made sustainable as set out in paragraph 105 of the NPPF

“Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions, and improve air quality and public health.”

- 5.7 In accordance with paragraph 106 of the NPPF, the Local Plan was prepared with the close engagement of Oxfordshire County Council as Local Highways Authority to ensure that their strategies and investments for supporting HIF1 aligned with the aims of the Local Plan. The growth strategy in the Local Plan will only be successfully achieved if the HIF1 schemes are implemented.
- 5.8 Given that the Local Plan was prepared with knowledge of the County Council securing funding for HIF1, all growth scenarios in the shared evidence base to support the Local Plan (the Evaluation of Traffic Impacts ETI) were developed with the presumption that the HIF1 scheme would be provided. The scenario testing undertaken within the ETI tested growth locations all presumed that the baseline traffic levels were as if the HIF1 scheme was in place.
- 5.9 The housing developments in the Local Plan that are directly contingent on HIF1 being delivered to mitigate their impacts are:
- Around Didcot – at least 15,050 homes
 - At the strategic allocation adjacent to Culham Science Centre – approximately 3,500 homes as indicated in policy STRAT9.
 - At the strategic allocation at Berinsfield Garden Village – around 1,700 homes as indicated in policy STRAT10i.
- 5.10 The planned homes and the HIF1 scheme that would accompany them is an integrated, sound and tested package, which is plan-led and funded. The council will demonstrate that without the HIF1 scheme being in place, the Local Plan housing supply would be at risk both directly (on the sites that are dependent on HIF1 for mitigation) and indirectly because of the baseline presumption that was used to test overall growth scenarios in the ETI to support the Local Plan.

- 5.11 Delays in HIF1, or failure to deliver it at all, have implications for the Council's ability to demonstrate a rolling five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. This would have the knock-on effect of undermining plan-led development as the tilted balance would be engaged, making it harder to resist speculative developments. Uncertainty over HIF1 also undermines the planned trajectory for delivery across the plan period.
- 5.12 The trajectory for many of the site in and around Didcot is to deliver housing over the next five years. The strategic site allocation at Culham is expected to start delivering new homes from 2029 and the Berinsfield allocation from 2031. The sites that are reliant on HIF1 are therefore sites that have been identified as specific and deliverable for years one to five of the plan period, and specific deliverable sites for years 6 to 15 of the plan. The council will demonstrate that the HIF1 schemes are necessary to maintain a sufficient supply of sites over different time periods, as required in paragraph 68 of the NPPF.

b) The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for building a strong, competitive economy as set out in the NPPF (Chapter 6)

- 5.13 Paragraph 81 of NPPF chapter 6 is relevant and sets out that “Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future. This is particularly important where Britain can be a global leader in driving innovation, and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential.”
- 5.14 As required by paragraph 82 of the NPPF, the Local Plan sets out a clear economic vision and strategy and has identified strategic sites for local and inward

investment to match this strategy. The council will demonstrate that some of the key sites listed in the Local Plan as sources of employment supply are reliant on the mitigation that the HIF1 scheme will provide.

- 5.15 The Local Plan provides support for the intensification of Culham Science Centre (STRAT8) and provides for at least 7.3 hectares of additional employment land in combination with the adjoining allocation on Land adjacent to Culham Science Centre (STRAT9). Culham Science Centre is the leading UK center for fusion research and technology and is of international importance. The full potential that these sites will make to building a strong competitive economy will not be fully realised without HIF1.
- 5.16 The other employment sites that are reliant on HIF1 include at least 5 hectares of additional employment land through the allocation at Berinsfield (STRAT10i), and 2.92 hectares at Southmead Industrial Estate in Didcot (EMP1). There may also be additional employment opportunities generated through the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan.
- 5.17 The policies in the Local Plan explicitly refer to the HIF1 scheme as infrastructure necessary to unlock development in Didcot and the surrounding area and highlight the importance of HIF1 for delivering Didcot Garden Town. The council will draw on the relevant policies to demonstrate that proposals are necessary to ensure economic development can be achieved in proximity to planned housing growth sites without resulting in severe congestion on the highway network, consistent with Government policies for building a strong and competitive economy.

c) The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with the development plan for the area

- 5.18 The council is strongly of the view that the principle of the HIF1 scheme is entirely consistent with the housing, employment and transport policies in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan. At the examination into the Local Plan, the need for HIF1 to support the planned growth and the policies which rely on it, were found sound

on the assumption that the infrastructure would be coming forward. The policies in the Local Plan provide explicit support for HIF1 and safeguard the land necessary to deliver it. The proposed development is critical to the delivery of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan spatial strategy, housing and employment supply and large strategic allocations.

5.19 The resolution following the meeting of 28 August 2023 included the following list of matters that Members of South Oxfordshire District Council wished to be expressed at the inquiry. These bring in other policy considerations that go beyond the principle of the development:

- i. The importance of infrastructure funded by HIF1 to the delivery of housing and economic sites allocated in the adopted Local Plan 2035.

As outlined in the relevant sections above, the council will demonstrate that HIF1 is an integral component to the delivery of planned housing and employment sites.

- ii. South Oxfordshire's target of becoming a net zero district by 2030.

The council supports the walking and cycling components of the development and particularly the segregated provision through the entire length of the development. This will promote sustainable modes of transport over reliance on the private car to reduce carbon impacts of the allocated housing and employment sites. The council welcomes the applicant's commitment to incorporate bus priority measures into the scheme and secure a carbon management plan through conditions.

Relevant SOLP policies include DES7 (Efficient Use of Resources), DES8 (Promoting Sustainable Design) and TRANS2 (Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility).

- iii. The need for high quality design throughout, as set out in the Design Guide and the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan.

The council would welcome any measures that the applicant could incorporate through planning conditions to improve the Science Bridge. Although located with the Vale of White Horse District Council, this feature is key to the Didcot Garden Town arrival experience.

Relevant SOLP policies include DES1 (Delivering High Quality Development) and DES2 (Enhancing Local Character).

- iv. Minimising harmful impacts of any scheme on our natural and historic landscape, including the River Thames, and maximising biodiversity.

The council welcomes the applicant's commitment to upgrade up to 50 new trees to semi-mature specimens and the provision of a £50,000 fund for the local community to apply for additional landscaping. These measures will help manage and mitigate the harmful effects of the development.

Relevant SOLP policies include ENV1 (Landscape and Countryside), ENV2 and ENV3 (Biodiversity), ENV4 (Watercourses) ENV6, ENV7, ENV8, ENV9 and ENV10 (Heritage).

- v. Respecting the views of affected communities including both Didcot and the surrounding villages.

The council is grateful that the local inquiry process will provide the opportunity for affected communities to express their views.

- 5.20 The council considers that overall, the benefits of the HIF1 scheme would outweigh the harm and that the proposal complies with the development plan as a whole.

d) any other matters the Inspector considers relevant

5.21 The council will seek to address any other matters the Inspector considers relevant as and when these are identified.

6.0 DOCUMENTS

6.1 The council considers the following should be included within the Core Documents:

- South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 policies STRAT1, STRAT2, STRAT3, STRAT4, STRAT6, STRAT8, STRAT9, STRAT10i, H1, H2, EMP1, TRANS1b, TRANS2, TRANS3, TRANS4, TRANS5, INF4, ENV1, ENV2, ENV3, ENV4, ENV5, ENV6, ENV7, ENV8, ENV9, ENV10, ENV11, ENV12, EP1, DES1, DES2, DES6, DES7, and DES8
- Culham Neighbourhood Development Plan 2020-2041 policies CUL5, CUL6, CUL7, CUL8, and CUL10
- Emerging Burcot and Clifton Hampden Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2035 policies BCH6, BCH7, BCH9 and BCH10
- South Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan Evaluation of Transport Impacts: Stage 2 – Development Scenarios and Mitigation testing
- South Oxfordshire Local Plan Examination Matter 10 Note – Didcot Garden Town Explanation of Traffic Modelling Figures (August 2022)
- Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan
- South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' Joint Design Guide

Appendix 1

Consultation responses from South Oxfordshire District Council

Planning

HEAD OF SERVICE: **Adrian Duffield**



Listening Learning Leading

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Abbey House, Abbey Close
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23 December 2022

Ref: P22/S4168/CM

Dear Emily

Re: R3.0138/21 Notice of Submission of Further Information

Proposal:

- The dualling of the A4130 carriageway (A4130 Widening) from the Milton Gate Junction eastwards, including the construction of three roundabouts;
- A road bridge over the Great Western Mainline (Didcot Science Bridge) and realignment of the A4130 north east of the proposed road bridge including the relocation of a lagoon;
- Construction of a new road between Didcot and Culham (Didcot to Culham River Crossing) including the construction of three roundabouts, a road bridge over the Appleford railway sidings and road bridge over the River Thames;
- Construction of a new road between the B4015 and A415 (Clifton Hampden bypass), including the provision of one roundabout and associated junctions;
- Controlled crossings, footways and cycleways, landscaping, lighting, noise barriers and sustainable drainage systems.

Location: A linear site comprising a corridor between the A34 Milton Interchange and the B4015 north of Clifton Hampden including part of the A4130 east of the A34 Milton Interchange, land between Didcot and the former Didcot A Power Station and the Great Western Mainline, land to the north of Didcot where it crosses a private railway sidings and the River Thames to the west of Appleford-on-Thames before joining the A415 west of Culham Station, land to the south of Culham Science Centre through to a connection with the B4015 north of Clifton Hampden.

Thank you for re-consulting South Oxfordshire District Council on the above application.

South Oxfordshire District Council continue to support the principle of the proposals as the infrastructure will assist in delivering the housing and employment growth identified in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035. Without this proposed infrastructure planned new growth is unlikely to be delivered.

Previous comments provided by this council in its response dated 21 January 2022 remain applicable and this council's further observations on the proposals are set out in the table below:

Planning Officer

Bridges

In response to this council's comment that the Science Bridge should be a landmark feature as envisaged in the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan (the DGTDP), paragraph 3.3 of the Aecom EIA Regulation 25 response states *"Given the recent plans for large monolithic data centres and warehousing immediately north of the Science bridge the appropriateness of a 'spectacular bridge' structure may now be inappropriate"*.

Perceived *"large monolithic"* structures do not then justify a monolithic bridge design. On the contrary, this authority considers that a 'spectacular bridge' design is all the more appropriate and important to enhance the approach to Didcot.

The design of the River Thames Crossing between Didcot and Culham is not revised. Appendix G (Oversized bridge examples) of the Reg 25 response, provide little confidence that the bridges will be attractive features or sensitive to its rural setting.

The NPPF places great weight on good design. Paragraph 126 of the NPPF expects *"The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities"*.

The bridge designs by reason of their concrete materials, massing, unbroken grassed banks, lack of vertical landscaping on the approaches to the Science Bridge and on the banks of the bridge will result in them being an unspectacular and visually intrusive feature comprising poor design contrary to paragraphs 126, 130 and 131 of the NPPF, and the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan.

Tree and Hedge Planting

The DGTDP envisages Didcot as a *"super green town prioritising green infrastructure including tree lined streets"*. This aligns with the principles of policies ENV5 and DES1 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan and paragraph 131 of the NPPF. The widened A4130 is a key gateway to Didcot. To aspire to the DGTDP vision, the A4130 needs to be judiciously tree and hedge lined.

Trees and hedges should visually separate the road from the cycle and pedestrian paths alongside the road.

The planting comprising shrub planting and occasional trees is weak and will not achieve the aims above or the expectation in paragraph 131 of the NPPF that streets should be tree lined.

A comparison of the landscaping and street lighting plans shows that street lighting conflicts with the proposed locations of trees and even more so if OCC insists on 10m gaps between lighting columns and trees. Consequently, landscaping will be further weakened.

Landscape Officer

Summary

The extent of planting mitigation proposed remains inadequate, as noted in previous comments. Paragraph 9.6 of the Aecom EIA Regulation 25 response document states that, for the scheme overall, initially there will be over 50,000m² more tree cover lost than planted. No figures are given for hedgerows, the loss and replacement of these should also be quantified. There has been very little increase in planting compared to the previous proposals.

The proposal is therefore contrary to policy ENV1 of South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035, which states development will only be permitted where it protects and where possible enhances features that contribute to the nature and quality of the landscape, including trees, tree groups, woodlands, hedgerows and field boundaries. The opportunity to plant more woodland in line with the government's aim to plant more trees is lost.

Overall, the proposed mitigation is limited, and hasn't been designed to link into the existing landscape pattern to help to integrate the road into the landscape. Embankments in many places need to grade out more softly to better fit the topography, rather than using standard 1 in 3 gradients. The use of false cutting should be considered in preference to acoustic barriers, also where this would help assimilate the road where it cuts across the grain of the landscape.

There appears to have been no consideration of alternative options at the Culham Science Centre (CSC) site entrance; this remains a significant concern. Current proposals result in an unacceptable loss of mature trees which are important in mitigating the impact of development within the CSC site, and also, due to the complicated road arrangement, limit opportunities to mitigate this; refer to previous comments. Important groups of trees are also lost along Thame Lane. All these trees currently help provide softening of the Science Centre especially in views from the south; their loss will result in additional adverse impact to that of the road, due to opening up of views of the CSC site.

The landscape plans do not include sufficient information to enable a proper understanding of the scheme, such as embankments and cuttings, and vegetation removed.

Detailed comments

Landscape preliminary masterplan 13

The planting shown does not reflect the existing landscape pattern. North of the bridge planting is limited to occasional trees and small blocks of scrub, this does not reflect the local landscape pattern of hedges and linear tree belts - a new hedgerow

along the western side of the new road up to the A415, forming the new field boundary, would fit better with landscape pattern and provide better screening.

At the bridge embankments, extend the woodland block on east side to the hedge and wrap around the balancing pond to the east and north within the red line. Extend woodland west of the road to the north and south to screen views of the road north of the river and of the bridge from the Thames path to the west, woodland has been removed here from the previous proposals.

How will the sedum blanket survive in periods of drought, presumably this is just laid on concrete?

A dark green acoustic barrier on the bridge will be viewed against the sky and will stand out making it more intrusive.

Has any change been made to the colour and thickness of bridge supports? No new photomontages appear to have been submitted.

Landscape preliminary masterplan 14

Limited changes from previous scheme, more individual trees added. Extend hedgerow on western side southwards, see comments above. Add woodland blocks at roundabout, not just individual trees and bulbs. Link short sections of retained existing hedge with new hedges. Tie in with local landscape pattern of hedges and woodland blocks. Do not emphasise the shape of balancing ponds/ roundabout, use blocks of woodland/ tree groups to disguise them and blend into landscape.

Landscape preliminary masterplan 15

No change from previous plans. There should be tree and shrub planting and marginal planting associated with the balancing pond, is it necessary to surround ponds completely with a gravel track? Add some blocks of trees as above. Add tree planting to enhance existing the hedge on south side of Abingdon Road.

Landscape preliminary masterplan 16

Little change from previous proposals, some areas of scrub added at eastern side, this would be better as woodland. Unacceptable loss of mature trees which play a significant role in screening the CSC site. Proposals around the roundabout lack any significant planting, refer to previous comments. Has any consideration been given to an alternative location to access the CSC site which would allow retention of the mature tree belt? The roundabout should not be located on embankment, this will only increase the impact. Existing ground level should be indicated on the extended cross sections

Landscape preliminary masterplan 17

Limited change from previous proposals, some additional woodland edge planting around existing properties – could the use of false cutting not have been employed here rather than acoustic fencing, at least to the north of properties? Acoustic fencing should be the last resort when there is no room for more visually acceptable methods. Continue woodland planting along the side of the slip road on the east side of the existing property to provide screening.

Loss of belt of mature trees along Thame Lane which help screen the CSC site remains a concern, could the road not be pulled south-east to avoid this? There

appears to be room to do this. Woodland planting should be included on the south-east side of the road. There should be significant planting of tree belts along this section of road, not just individual trees, both to contain the new road, tie in with the existing landscape framework of tree belts, and to compensate for loss of existing vegetation.

Landscape preliminary masterplan 18

Very little change from previous proposals. The road cuts across the grain of the landscape to the west of Clifton Hampden, emphasised by the linear belts of planting. False cutting could be used to conceal the road within the landscape and avoid the need for an acoustic barrier, as previous comments. No planting is shown on the south side of the road, south of Thame Lane; this is required to mitigate the impact on views from the public footpath. Where the tree line is severed by the road replant trees to continue the line – can more trees not be retained here, why are so many removed on the northern side of the new road?

Landscape preliminary masterplan 19

Very little change from previous proposals. As above, false cutting would be a better solution than an acoustic barrier. Include a new hedgerow and tree line along the west side of Oxford Road to strengthen the existing landscape framework and provide containment. Replace any hedge lost at the end of the scheme on the north side of Oxford Road to continue existing hedge and repair link to the hedge which runs along the field boundary to the north. Add trees to replace existing mature trees lost at this point. It is important to show existing vegetation, including hedges, on the plans so that linkages like this are not missed. Vegetation lost should also be shown.

Lighting

Is it necessary to light the road between the CSC roundabout and joining the B4015? The Abingdon Road is only lit at the CSC entrance.

Acoustic barrier

A green barrier will be prominent in views where seen against the sky, such as on bridges.

Balancing ponds

Why are all balancing ponds completely surrounded by a gravel track? This increases the artificial appearance. There should be marginal planting and tree and shrub planting associated with the balancing ponds to improve appearance and wildlife value.

Use of embankments

The road should not be located on embankment simply to achieve a balance of cut and fill, but should be kept as low as possible in the landscape to limit the adverse impact. It may be possible to accommodate any surplus fill through the creation of false cuttings where appropriate. Embankments should be graded out to tie in with the local topography, not kept at a standard 1 in 3 engineered slope.

Presentation of information

Embankment and cutting slopes should be shown on the landscape plans, also tree loss as previous comments.

Recommendations

Recommendations remain as previous comments. The mitigation planting associated with this scheme needs additional work and the scheme should provide the opportunity to create new woodland in line with the governments aims and be designed to fit in with the existing landscape pattern. Softer gradients are required for the embankments and the use of false cutting should be considered.

The issues raised in the comments above should be addressed including further clarity with regard to the extent of vegetation loss, and areas of embankment and cutting. The design of the road south and west of CSC should be revisited to see if this is the most appropriate design for this area.

Forestry Officer

Several of the issues raised in response to the initial submission have been addressed, as outlined at paragraphs 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4 of Aecom's Reg 25 response.

However, the following points remain unresolved and inappropriate:

- Whilst the drainage has been amended in the vicinity of tree T24, which is a veteran tree, there still appears to be construction works proposed within the root protection area/buffer of this tree which remains contrary to BS 5837:2012, Forestry Commission and Natural England standing advice and section 180 of the NPPF.
- The preliminary landscape masterplans submitted, still do not show the level of detail required to be able to scrutinise the mitigation planting in detail, to determine whether or not the proposed planting will mitigate the proposed tree loss. Considering the extensive tree removal proposed for this application, very considerable amounts of tree planting will be required. This is essential to ensure that the scheme delivers a net increase in canopy cover to address environmental issues such as climate change and carbon sequestration, as well as the landscape and amenity benefits required to be achieved for this project. Many of the landscape masterplans submitted appear to show very limited levels of tree planting along the route of the proposed road.

Conclusion:

When assessed against both local plan and national policies the impact of the proposal is contrary to:

- Policies ENV1, ENV8, DES1 and DES2 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035;
- Paragraphs 131 and 180 of the NPPF; and,
- BS 5837, 2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction.

Countryside Officer

With reference to previous ecological comments provided by the district, the only matter that has been potentially addressed is the biodiversity metric assessment. Other matters raised are not explicitly addressed in this latest submission / amendment.

The updated BNG assessment document (Appendix R) has concluded that development can likely achieve a net gain for biodiversity. This conclusion is based upon the assumption that high value (distinctiveness) habitats will be retained and enhanced as a result of development. OCC should be satisfied that the habitat

creation and enhancement proposals contained within the Outline Landscape and Biodiversity Management Plan are sufficient (and practically deliverable) to meet the relevant condition criteria of the 3.1 metric for each habitat.

Conservation Officer

Environmental Statement:

Although the documents have been updated in part to consider impacts to Fullamoor Farmhouse, references to supporting figures are not supported by updated Chapters of the Environmental Statement – in particular Chapter 10.

Acoustic Barriers:

There are no detailed updates to proposed mitigation now that the Farmhouse has been included within the assessment. Likewise, the more detailed acoustic assessments do not appear to have been provided with this latest update to the documents. The proposed acoustic noise barrier to the west of the Clifton Hampden and the edge of the village conservation area is an unfortunate solution and it does not appear to be supported by justification or alternatives that would have less potential visual impact.

Lighting and Landscaping:

The revised Lighting and Landscaping plans do not provide adequate assurances of appropriate mitigation in the setting of listed buildings and the conservation areas. The existing entrance to CSC is characterised by the mature tree-scape and hedge-scape and the proposed new planting around the new much larger junction does not appear on the plans to offer adequate replacement. Given the raised levels of the road at the new entrance to the CSC, which will in turn raise the height of street lighting here, the replacement planting needs to be a genuine mechanism for enhancing the appearance of the area. Can this detail also be provided in section?

Construction Impacts:

It is noted that representations have been made concerning the impact during construction on the listed Fullamoor Farmhouse. Given the level of vibration impact required to damage a listed building (see *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges* and IHBC publication *Context May 2015*) the works will be sufficiently distanced from the listed building not to impact likely shallow foundations. The impact of noise during construction would not result in harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset. This is likely a valid amenity issue for the occupants but the temporary nature of this would result in the reinstatement of the existing roadside character of the farmhouse, albeit with traffic actually further removed from the main house.

Conclusion and recommendations

There is still insufficient detail to understand the impacts of proposed lighting on the significance of heritage assets or the potential success of mitigation proposed. The plans do not indicate that a suitable landscaping scheme can be employed here to offer mitigation nor has consideration of options that remove the need for embankment and raised road levels been provided.

The proposed works are considered likely to cause harm to the Listed Building of Fullamoor Farmhouse as a result of development within its setting that would erode its overall significance. The impact of acoustic barriers on the wider setting of Clifton Hampden Conservation Area is also a material planning consideration and could be improved with further design consideration.

It may be possible to address concerns and mitigate some identified impacts, but the detail required has not been provided and as such the proposals remain contrary to paragraphs 199 and 200 of the NPPF and policies ENV6, ENV7 and ENV8 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

Environmental Protection Officer (noise and vibration)

Aecom's response indicates that there is little further that can be done to mitigate the noise impacts of the proposed development. This suggests that there will remain a number of properties which will experience a significant adverse impact from this development but will not benefit from the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975.

The decision process will have to balance this negative impact against any benefits that the development is expected to bring.

I hope the above comments will assist in your determination of the application and if you require any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Bowerman
Principal Major Applications Officer

Planning

HEAD OF SERVICE: **Adrian Duffield**



Listening Learning Leading

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135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park
ABINGDON OX14 4SB

4 February 2022

Ref: P21/S4797/CM

Dear Emily

Re: Planning application R3.0138/21

Proposal:

- The dualling of the A4130 carriageway (A4130 Widening) from the Milton Gate Junction eastwards, including the construction of three roundabouts;
- A road bridge over the Great Western Mainline (Didcot Science Bridge) and realignment of the A4130 north east of the proposed road bridge including the relocation of a lagoon;
- Construction of a new road between Didcot and Culham (Didcot to Culham River Crossing) including the construction of three roundabouts, a road bridge over the Appleford railway sidings and road bridge over the River Thames;
- Construction of a new road between the B4015 and A415 (Clifton Hampden bypass), including the provision of one roundabout and associated junctions;
- Controlled crossings, footways and cycleways, landscaping, lighting, noise barriers and sustainable drainage systems.

Location: A linear site comprising a corridor between the A34 Milton Interchange and the B4015 north of Clifton Hampden including part of the A4130 east of the A34 Milton Interchange, land between Didcot and the former Didcot A Power Station and the Great Western Mainline, land to the north of Didcot where it crosses a private railway sidings and the River Thames to the west of Appleford-on-Thames before joining the A415 west of Culham Station, land to the south of Culham Science Centre through to a connection with the B4015 north of Clifton Hampden.

Thank you for consulting South Oxfordshire District Council on the above application.

This planning application includes highways infrastructure and measures to support active travel that will benefit existing residents in South Oxfordshire and enable the delivery of the new homes across the District that are allocated in our Development Plan.

The proposals will provide vital infrastructure that is essential for the delivery of around 3,500 new homes on land adjacent to Culham Science Centre and 1,700 new homes on land at Berinsfield Garden Village. The scheme will also provide infrastructure for more than 6,000 homes that have / will be delivered in Didcot between 2011 and 2035.

The highways infrastructure is essential to enable jobs growth at key employment sites in the area. This project provides important support to the economic and social prosperity of Science Vale UK, including two Enterprise Zones. It is home to one of the largest science-based research and knowledge clusters in Western Europe, based around Harwell (space sector), Culham Science Centre (nuclear fusion), and Milton Park (life sciences). These sites are subject to significant public and private investment and generate thousands of jobs.

Consent for this planning application is required to deliver infrastructure necessary to provide homes for the growing highly skilled workforce required by the world leading businesses and their supply chains. The employment land allocations linked to this infrastructure in South Oxfordshire include Culham Science Centre, Didcot and Berinsfield.

This proposal will therefore deliver key transport infrastructure, relieve congestion and improve connectivity in our District, and unlock the new homes and jobs required for Oxfordshire to grow as a thriving economy. In addition to supporting new housing and employment growth, it will also help alleviate current congestion issues in and around Didcot Garden Town.

These schemes will provide essential support for the development coming forward in our Local Plan and are important for the delivery of key housing and employment sites. Without this proposed infrastructure planned new growth is unlikely to be delivered. The principle of this development is therefore supported by our current Local Plan policies.

The comments in the table below set out this council's further observations on the planning merits of the proposals for your consideration.

Whilst consultation has been undertaken with this council's technical specialist officers, only high-level comments have been possible. The County Council should therefore use its own internal specialist advisors to provide advice to ensure that proposals meet all relevant policy or legislative requirements.

Planning Officer
<p>Overview:</p> <p>The proposed infrastructure schemes are a key component of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan (SOLP) 2035 and as stated in policy STRAT3, infrastructure will need to be in place to enable sites allocated in the Local Plan in and around Didcot to be delivered. To enable the delivery of these key transport infrastructure schemes,</p>

policy TRANS3 safeguards land to ensure that any proposals for development do not prejudice the delivery of the road schemes.

Policy TRANS1b of the SOLP 2035 outlines measures that the council will take to support strategic transport investment and this includes working with Oxfordshire County Council to support the development and delivery of the proposed road schemes. Together, these policies demonstrate the importance of the proposed road schemes to achieve the vision and objectives of the Local Plan.

It is also important that the details of the scheme are appropriate to meet the aspirations of the Local Plan to deliver high quality, innovative and well-designed developments that respect the scale and character of our towns and villages and enhance the special character of our historic settlements and the surrounding countryside.

Comments on details of the scheme:

The proposals should demonstrate how they positively contribute to the achievement of the Didcot Garden Town Masterplan Principles. The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan (the DGTDP) is a material consideration, and we have the following feedback in relation to the design of the proposals:

For the A4130, defined by the DGTDP as The Gateway Spine, it envisages improvements *“to deliver a spectacular arrival experience into Didcot from the east, the west or the station - enhancing first impressions of the town. Movement along the east-west corridor will be enhanced with three key projects: infrastructure improvements to carriageways, cycle and footpaths, a SuDS scheme along its length and a public art programme to enhance neglected bridges and underpasses”*.

The DGTDP explains that improving the arrival experience into Didcot as well as accommodating multi modal infrastructure to enhance this key corridor must be a key aim of the HIF1 proposals. Improvements could allow a separate lane for public transport vehicles and potentially for autonomous vehicles. It is disappointing that this vision and aim is not met with the proposal favouring private vehicle movements over sustainable modes of travel.

The DGTDP envisages Didcot as a *“super green town prioritising green infrastructure including tree lined streets”*. The widened A4130 is a key gateway to Didcot. To aspire to the DGTDP vision the A4130 needs to be tree and hedge lined with opportunities taken to plant trees in the central reservation. The proposals lack ambition in this respect.

Tree and hedge planting will help screen the road in views from new housing on sites allocated for housing on the southern side of the A4130 and act as a noise buffer. Trees and hedges should visually separate the road from the cycle and pedestrian paths alongside the road.

Street lighting is excessive with much of it proposed in spaces shown on the landscaping plans for hedge and tree planting. It is therefore questionable as to whether adequate tree planting could be secured. Judicious landscaping is crucial in providing some mitigation for the carbon footprint of the proposals, in reducing their landscape and visual impacts and some compensation for biodiversity impacts.

To prevent increased visual intrusion in the rural area, street lighting should not extend north of Didcot beyond Hartwright House (OX14 4PJ).

The Science Bridge should be a landmark feature as envisaged in the DGTDP. The proposed design is mediocre, uninspiring and will not meet the aims of the DGTDP. The design of the River Thames Crossing between Didcot and Culham is also disappointing. The concrete supporting columns, mass of the concrete retaining walls and acoustic barrier on the bridge will be incongruous and intrusive features in the landscape particularly in views from the Thames path.

The proposals contain limited information on how SUDS will be designed including to benefit biodiversity or how public art can be incorporated into the scheme. Further information is required in relation to these matters.

The proposed 3m high acoustic barriers beside the road leading from Didcot to the River Thames Crossing are likely to be visually intrusive. Please note the discrepancy between plans with the cross-section plan sheet 5 of 6 showing a 3m high noise barrier whereas the River Crossing Structures GA and Proposed Elevations plan sheet 1 of 3 showing a 1.5m high barrier.

All maintenance areas and tracks should be of an absolute minimum width necessary for maintenance vehicle access and should be surfaced in grasscrete or similar to allow vegetation to grow through and limit their visual impact.

The cycle and pedestrian ways beside the roads are welcomed and provide sustainable links between Didcot and villages to the north as well as linking the town and residential areas with employment sites at its northern and western edges.

Landscape Officer

Comments:

Scheme Design

There are inconsistencies between the information submitted in the planning application and additional information or clarification is required. These inconsistencies predominantly relate to the amount of vegetation loss and the associated proposed mitigation. Changes could be required to ensure the scheme provides appropriate mitigation, however, it is unlikely that these changes would impact on the conclusions of the LVIA.

Tree and vegetation removal, replacement and mitigation

Overall, the proposed mitigation to the road is limited, with limited planting and where hedgerows have been used, they tend to follow the road accentuating its alignment. A more imaginative approach sympathetic to the existing landscape pattern could help to integrate the road into the landscape.

The use of off-site planting should be explored where the impact of the road is difficult to mitigate, such as the viaduct section, photomontage VP16. The use of hedges with trees, larger areas of tree planting alongside off-site roads and footpaths would help limit visibility.

At present there are inconsistencies in the information which would have an impact on the Landscape and Visual Assessment work as well as the associated Landscape Masterplans. The Tree Protection Sheets are indicating less tree and

hedge retention than illustrated on the Preliminary Landscape Masterplans. One example is Tree Protection Sheet 3 which shows the removal of the vegetation from the southern side of the existing road, however the Preliminary Landscape Masterplan Sheet 1 shows the southern vegetation retained within the roads central reservation. The road section plans show level changes which indicate potential difficulties in retaining the existing hedgerows on the A4130, west of the Science Bridge location. It would help to have the proposed retained areas of vegetation plotted on these sections.

It would help to have the tree and vegetation removal information marked on the Landscape Masterplan to fully understand the vegetation being lost and whether this is being replaced. For example, there are many areas of the side where the roadside vegetation/ hedgerows have been lost but are not proposed to be replaced. For example, the Northern side of the A4130 Northern Perimeter Road. Preliminary Landscape Masterplan Sheets 6 and 7, again show different information to the Tree Protection Sheets with the extent of tree removal greater than that shown on the landscape plans with the removed hedgerow and tree planting not proposed to be replaced. Replacement vegetation is required both to soften the edge of the roads and help reduce its landscape and visual impact but also to replace the lost vegetation linkages.

Culham Science Centre

I am concerned about the impact of the design of the link road and Culham Science Centre entrance. I note that there did not appear to be alternative options listed in the EIA documentation. The proposals result in the loss of a considerable number of trees which currently frame the entrance to the Culham Science Centre. These trees, especially in summer screen and help mitigate the scale of development within the Science Centre. The proposed road layout would remove these trees and other clumps of trees such as those along Thame Lane and also from where Abingdon Road, links into the Clifton Hampden village, all these trees help provide the softening of Culham Science Centre, especially in views from the south.

The layout of the Culham Science Centre entrance creates a complicated road layout with a triple line of roads with the new link road, the road to the station and then the road south of the nursery building. This limits the available space to implement any meaningful replacement planting especially once lighting, drainage etc. has been considered. The proposed planting is predominately species rich planting and bulbs with no tree belts or woodland blocks, additional planting is required in this area. Could this area be completely redesign to move the Clifton Hampden bypass connection to the east of the sewage works, with the Culham Science Centre and the Station being accessed via Thame Lane?

Planting

Detailed planting plans are not provided (these should be conditioned to follow) but I note the information provided on the Preliminary Landscape Masterplan Sheets does not fully tally with the information provided in the Landscape Biodiversity Plan.

With regards to the Road Verge mix, at present a Lawn Mix is proposed, I suggest that a seed mix bespoke to Highway verges should be specified, the species would be better suited to the different management and growing regimes such as grass cutting frequency and salt rather than a lawn mix.

More variety of shrub species are required for the woodland edge mix, such as hazel, holly, crab apple, guelder rose which are listed in the woodland mix. I also wouldn't plant blackberries, to limit competition at the establishment phase, this species is likely to self-seed at a later date.

Hedgerow planting should also contain hedgerow trees, there should be an indication of what species will be used for hedgerow trees.

There are some areas of larger tree planting blocks, it may be more appropriate to rabbit fence areas of planting rather than only using tree guards. Are there any proposals to protect planting from deer?

Bridges and Acoustic Fences

The design of the bridges does not necessary minimise their visual impacts, the viaduct supports are visually bulky, and there is limited space to soften the northern side of the Science Vale bridge.

The use of light concrete on the bridges and bridge abutments may make them more prominent when viewed against the landscape backdrop. Could darker materials be used to minimise the visual impact of the bridges?

The abutments of the Thames crossing bridge are located away from the river to provide a more open aspect to the Thames Path, and this is an appropriate approach. However, the abutments are of a large scale and will be prominent in views from the Thames Path National Trail. Can the extent of exposed concrete on the abutments be softened by breaking up their mass?

The appearance of the proposed acoustic fence is very hard, with limited softening proposed. Can a softer approach to the acoustic fencing be used? There is space in the vicinity of Clifton Hampden village, to use earth embankments softened with planting rather than the proposed fencing which is easily subject to vandalism. In other areas a living wall acoustic fence for example GreenSoundBlok or similar could be an appropriate approach.

Conclusion

There is currently inconsistent information submitted as part of the application with regards to the extent of level changes, tree and vegetation removal and how this is represented on and mitigated for within the scheme and the Landscape Masterplans.

I also have concerns to whether the design of the link road and entrance to Culham Science Centre minimises the impact of the scheme on the existing trees and vegetation located to the south and east of the Science Centre, this vegetation has considerable benefits in reducing the landscape and visual impact of the Culham Science Centre.

Overall, the proposed mitigation to the road is limited, and in many places hasn't been designed to link into the existing landscape pattern to help to integrate the road into the landscape. Embankments in many places need to grade out more softly and to better fit the topography rather than using a standard 1 in 3 gradient.

Recommendations

The mitigation planting associated with this scheme needs additional work and the scheme should provide the opportunity to create new woodland in line with the governments aims and be designed to fit in with the existing landscape pattern. Softer gradients are required for the embankments.

The issues raised in the comments above should be addressed including further clarity with regards to the extent of the loss of vegetation and if this extent has been fully incorporated into the Landscape Masterplans and LVIA. Also, the design of the link road south and west of Culham Science Centre should be revisited to see if this is the most appropriate design for this area.

Forestry Officer

Comments:

The submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment report has identified a very significant amount of tree removal. According to the report, this includes 152 individual trees, 34 groups of trees, seven hedges, 50 partial groups, 2 partial woodlands and 13 partial hedges. This includes trees protected by Tree Preservation Order (trees shown as T237, G262, G318, G327, T352 and G355 within the report) and trees within a conservation area (trees shown as G454 within the report). Many of these trees have sufficient arboricultural quality to normally be considered as a constraint to development.

Works are required within the root protection areas of a large amount of other trees and therefore have the potential to adversely impact on more trees than indicated in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment.

There are inconsistencies between the information included within the Arboricultural Impact Assessment and shown on the Tree Protection Plan and information shown within other plans submitted for the application. For example, drainage shown on the Tree Protection Plans is not consistent with the locations of drainage shown on the drainage plans. Therefore, this may lead to further arboricultural impacts than is shown in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment.

The submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment has not assessed the impact of works to existing services/utilities and new services/utilities will have on trees. Works for services/utilities have the potential to cause significant adverse impact on trees and should therefore be accurately assessed in an Arboricultural Impact Assessment.

It is not clear from assessing the Arboricultural Impact Assessment, whether or not all of the physical construction works that will be required to implement this project, for example any changes in land levels that may be required, have been assessed in relation to their impact on trees. The submitted Tree Protection Plans also include statements such as 'Final extent of tree removals to be determined following site clearance works and setting out of scheme'. It is therefore foreseeable that the proposed works may lead to a larger tree loss than has been identified in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment.

Tree shown as T424 has been categorised as a veteran tree. A drainage swale is shown within the root protection area/Buffer of this tree, contrary to BS 5837:2012,

Forestry Commission and Natural England standing advice and section 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

The preliminary landscape masterplans do not show the level of detail required to be able to scrutinise the mitigation planting in detail, to determine whether or not the proposed planting will mitigate the proposed tree loss. Considering the extensive tree removal proposed for this application, very considerable amounts of tree planting will be required. This is essential to ensure that the scheme delivers a net increase in canopy cover to address environmental issues such as climate change and carbon sequestration, as well as the landscape and amenity benefits required to be achieved for this project. Many of the landscape masterplans submitted appear to show very limited levels of tree planting along the route of the proposed road, for example from Sheets 6 of 19 to Sheets 12 of 19.

Conclusion:

When assessed against both local and national policies the impact of the proposal is contrary to:

- South Oxfordshire Local Plan policies ENV1, ENV8, DES1 and DES2
- Sections 131 and 180 of the NPPF
- As well as BS 5837, 2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction.

Conservation Officer

Heritage Assets to be considered:

Chapter 7 of the Environment Statement (ES) accurately identifies the designated and non-designated heritage assets likely to be impacted by the proposed infrastructure scheme. Appendix 7.1 to the ES provides a gazetteer of Cultural Heritage Assets and I am satisfied that this captures the assets relevant to the scheme.

Of particularly high sensitivity owing to the nature of the assets and the proximity to majors works are: Culham Road Bridge, the Culham Station Ticket Office and associated buildings that are listed Grade II and Grade II* respectively as well as some non-designated assets that form part of this group; Fullamoor Farmhouse, a grade II listed building; Clifton Hampden Conservation Area and Nuneham Courtenay Registered Park and Garden (RPG) and designated Conservation Area.

Discussion:

The assets most susceptible to harmful change to their setting are those in the vicinity of the works that extend from the A415 rail crossing to the northern end of the proposed Clifton Hampden bypass. These comments focus on those aspects of the proposals.

There is no direct physical impact proposed to any of the designated heritage assets. I have no objection to the proposed layout of the junctions or route on this basis as I do not consider there are alternatives that would result in less of an impact.

Lighting is likely to be one of the biggest changes to the context of all these assets. At present there is very little street lighting across the existing route network that surrounds the Culham Station assets, Fullamoor Farmhouse or Clifton Hampden Conservation Area and the listed buildings within it. The nature of Nuneham

Courtenay RPG is that some areas are more susceptible to impact from this proposal than others. The southern areas of the RPG will be more exposed to changes from lighting that erodes the sense of the area being rural than those to the north and on the higher ground above the river. The bypass is not proposed to be lit which will mitigate some of the impact to the wider setting of both the Nuneham Courtenay RPG and CA as well as the Clifton Hampden CA.

The ES indicates that lighting is proposed from the rail bridge on the A415 to the new junctions that provide CSC access and onward travel to the bypass. This lies to the north-west of Fullamoor Farmhouse. Specific mitigation should be provided to preserve the dark and rural setting of the farmhouse. Chapter 7 of the ES does not specifically assess Fullamoor Farmhouse which lies a similar distance from the new junction into Culham as the GWR Station buildings that have been assessed. This is an oversight and more detailed assessment of the impact on this heritage asset should be undertaken to ensure the proposal is fully informed by an understanding of the likely impacts and appropriate mitigation is incorporated into the scheme.

Conclusion and recommendations:

The conclusion of Chapter 7 of the ES is that some harm to the designated heritage assets is likely to arise as a result of the proposals. This is considered to be less-than-substantial under the tests of paragraphs 202 and 203 of the NPPF. I agree with this assessment as the impact of necessary lighting at the new junctions will alter the existing rural character of the area, compromising the experience of the assets in a rural setting, in particular this affects Nuneham Courtenay RPG and Clifton Hampden Conservation Area.

The impacts to Fullamoor Farmhouse have not been fully considered as a result of the omission of a detailed assessment of this heritage asset from Section 7.10 of Chapter 7 of the ES. Without this additional assessment that would directly inform potential mitigation, the impact of the proposed new roundabout on the A415 that provides access to CSC and the bypass is considered highly likely to cause harm to the Listed Building contrary to paragraphs 199 and 200 of the NPPF and Local Plan Policy ENV7.

Countryside Officer

The following summary comments are intended to aid Oxfordshire County Council in assessing this application but should not be considered as a full and comprehensive assessment of the proposed development.

Oxfordshire County Council, as the determining authority, is obliged by law to have regard for the impacts of the proposed development on biodiversity (section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) and consider the potential for adverse impacts on certain sites and species (regulation 9 of the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended)).

Comments:

The proposed development would cross areas of low ecological value (former power station, arable land) and high ecological value (reedbeds, lakes, rivers, woodland).

The proposed bridge crossing over the River Thames has been designed to be a clear span structure, which avoids direct impacts to the river channel itself. The position of supports and piles would be approximately 7m away from the top of the

bank and would have some impacts on the riparian zone either side of the watercourse. The river crossing is not proposed to be lit. "Hop over" planting is proposed to mitigate against mortality and severance impacts on commuting and foraging bats. Detailed planting is not proposed at this stage and the efficacy of such an approach described.

Great crested newt (GCN) surveys have concluded that impacts on the species are unlikely. Surveys concluded absence in waterbodies previously known to support GCN. OCC has their own GCN district level licence and the proposed development would impact habitats within the red and amber zones of the GCN impact risk map. OCC should consider utilising their own GCN district level licence to ensure that impacts on GCN are adequately mitigated and compensated.

The proposed development would involve direct and indirect impacts on waterbodies and aquatic habitats of high ecological value (ponds, lakes, reedbeds, etc.). It is likely that development, particularly around the Culham Finger Lakes, will require the draining of waterbodies, which are known to support protected species. This approach would require the capture and translation of species (e.g. European eel) from the waterbodies. It is not clear whether a receptor site has been identified for captured species. This matter should be confirmed prior to the grant of any permission.

Initial habitat surveys were conducted in January 2020, at a time of year unsuitable to determine botanical assemblage. Certain areas of the site were resurveyed in June 2020, related to changes in the red line area. The PEA recommends that further botanical surveys are undertaken at a suitable time of year to ensure that habitats, particularly grassland habitats near to the Culham Science Campus (known to support acid grassland, recorded as improved grassland), are adequately recorded. This would have impacts on the biodiversity net gain (BNG) assessment.

The BNG assessment has not provided justification for pre or post development habitat conditions. These should be justified against the technical supplement habitat condition tables.

The BNG assessment appears to take into account habitats proposed as part of minerals restoration agreements (e.g. Hanson Restoration Area). These areas of habitat creation have been agreed separately and should not be accounted for as benefits of the scheme. Indeed, in areas where previously agreed habits would be lost in these areas, the target condition of those habitats should be accounted for as if they were existing at the time of development.

It has been concluded that development will deliver a calculated 11% net gain for habitat units, 13% gain for hedgerow units and 1% net gain for river units. In the absence of part 6 of the Environment Act 2021 taking force, this level of gain would be compliant with the NPPF.

The proposed development is likely to result in adverse impacts on roosting, foraging and commuting bats. Tree lines, particularly those close to the River Thames and other waterbodies, have been demonstrated to have high levels of use by foraging and commuting bats. The habitats and levels of bat activity on site have been assessed as being of County importance. OCC, in determining the application, should be satisfied that the adverse impacts of the proposed development can be

adequately avoided, mitigated or compensated to ensure that the favourable conservation status of the local bat population is not prejudiced by the development. Specific mitigation details, such as hop over planting adjacent to roads, has not been described in detail and as such it is not clear whether mitigation measures would be adequate to ensure no impacts.

Impacts on designated sites are unlikely as reasonable impact pathways do not exist.

Details documents (landscape and biodiversity management plans, biosecurity management plans, construction environmental management plans, etc.) will need to be secured.

Air Quality Officer

Due to the nature and the size of the proposed development we would request a detailed Air Quality Assessment to be carried out in order to fully assess the air quality impacts of the development. This must be in line with the Council's Air Quality Guidance for Developers document and include both mitigation and incorporate basic good practice design in order to help mitigate against the air quality impacts and the potential cumulative effects of piecemeal developments and to enable future proofing of the development as laid out in the guidance.

Environmental Protection Officer

The acoustic report submitted in support of the application identifies 38 residential and two non-residential properties that will be subject to Significant Observable Adverse Effect by the operation of this scheme, but only two properties that are likely to qualify under the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975. How is it proposed that the identified significant adverse impact will be mitigated for those properties not qualifying for assistance under the Noise Insulation Regulations?

During the construction phase, a number of properties have been identified that will suffer Significant Observable Adverse Effect and vibration annoyance. The construction environmental management plan must identify specific, achievable and measurable steps to minimise noise and vibration impacts.

Contaminated Land Officer

Comments:

Following the site walkovers and scrutiny of historic mapping, areas for potential contamination relating to both historic and current land uses were identified. These included past and current landfills, above and underground storage tanks, sewage treatment works, unknown filled land, buried infrastructure related to the former Didcot power station, railways and agricultural land.

The preliminary conceptual site model resulted in a minimal/negligible risk to identified receptors for all four locations. Intrusive investigations revealed made ground at varying depths, with levels of contaminants in soils not exceeding the commercial/industrial and public open space (POS) generic assessment criteria (GAC), except for a slight exceedance at one location (TP401), for arsenic (180 mg/kg at 1.5 mbgl). Both groundwater testing and gas monitoring were undertaken, but only on a limited scale. While groundwater samples gave results for metals and non-metals above drinking water standards, sampling of hydrocarbons appears not to have been undertaken.

Further groundwater risk assessment is planned and should include samples taken for the measurement of hydrocarbons. Following limited monitoring, risks from ground gas can be regarded currently as non-significant for end users, but with risks to construction workers possible, due to the possible build-up of gas in enclosed spaces, such as drainage runs and manholes. Further visits will be required to ensure worse-case gas regime is established for all four locations.

It is anticipated that material excavated will be re-used on site. Where this occurs a Material Management Plan should be produced and followed, in accordance with best practice, as stipulated in the Definition of Waste: Code of Practice (CL:AIRE, Sept 2011). To ensure such re-use of material is appropriately undertaken details of the MMP activities followed are to be included with the verification report, following the completion of all remedial works required.

Conclusion and recommendation:

No objection to the development from a contaminated land perspective. However, given review of the above reports, it is evident that further investigations are required, and that remediation is likely in some areas. Therefore, the following contaminated land conditions are recommended, should the County Council be mindful to grant permission:

1. Prior to the commencement of the development a phased risk assessment shall be carried out by a competent person in accordance with current government and Environment Agency Guidance and Approved Codes of Practice such as Land Contamination: Risk Management 2020 and BS10175:2011 +A2:2017 'Investigation of potentially contaminated sites'. Each phase shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Phase 1 shall incorporate a desk study and site walk over to identify all potential contaminative uses on site, and to inform the conceptual site model. If potential contamination is identified in Phase 1 then a Phase 2 investigation shall be undertaken.

Phase 2 shall include a comprehensive intrusive investigation in order to characterise the type, nature and extent of contamination present, the risks to receptors and if significant contamination is identified to inform the remediation strategy.

Phase 3 requires that a remediation strategy be submitted to and approved by the LPA to ensure the site will be rendered suitable for its proposed use.

Reason: To ensure that any ground, water and associated gas contamination is identified and adequately addressed to ensure the safety of the development, the environment and to ensure the site is suitable for the proposed use in accordance with Policy ENV11 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

2. The developer shall confirm in writing to the Local Planning Authority the presence of any unsuspected contamination encountered during the development. In the event of any contamination to the land and/or water

being encountered, no development shall continue until a programme of investigation and/or remedial works to include methods of monitoring and certification of such works undertaken. Where land contamination investigation/remedial works are required this must be carried out by a competent person in accordance with current government and Environment Agency Guidance and Approved Codes of Practice such as Land Contamination: Risk Management 2020 and BS10175:2011 +A2:2017 'Investigation of potentially contaminated sites' and submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that any ground, water and associated gas contamination is identified and adequately addressed to ensure the safety of the development, the environment and to ensure the site is suitable for the proposed use in accordance with Policy ENV11 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

I hope the above comments will assist in your determination of the application and if you require any clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Bowerman
Principal Major Applications Officer

Planning

HEAD OF SERVICE: **Adrian Duffield**



Listening Learning Leading

Emily Catchside
Oxfordshire County Council
Environment & Place
County Hall
New Road
Oxford
OX1 1ND

CONTACT OFFICER: **Emma Bowerman**

registration@southoxon.gov.uk

Tel : 01235 422600

Textphone: 18001 01235 422600

Abbey House, Abbey Close
ABINGDON OX14 3JE

20 June 2023

Ref: P23/S1564/CM

Dear Emily

Re: R3.0138/21 Notice of Submission of Further Information

Proposal:

- The dualling of the A4130 carriageway (A4130 Widening) from the Milton Gate Junction eastwards, including the construction of three roundabouts;
- A road bridge over the Great Western Mainline (Didcot Science Bridge) and realignment of the A4130 north east of the proposed road bridge including the relocation of a lagoon;
- Construction of a new road between Didcot and Culham (Didcot to Culham River Crossing) including the construction of three roundabouts, a road bridge over the Appleford railway sidings and road bridge over the River Thames;
- Construction of a new road between the B4015 and A415 (Clifton Hampden bypass), including the provision of one roundabout and associated junctions;
- Controlled crossings, footways and cycleways, landscaping, lighting, noise barriers and sustainable drainage systems.

Location: A linear site comprising a corridor between the A34 Milton Interchange and the B4015 north of Clifton Hampden including part of the A4130 east of the A34 Milton Interchange, land between Didcot and the former Didcot A Power Station and the Great Western Mainline, land to the north of Didcot where it crosses a private railway sidings and the River Thames to the west of Appleford-on-Thames before joining the A415 west of Culham Station, land to the south of Culham Science Centre through to a connection with the B4015 north of Clifton Hampden.

Thank you for consulting South Oxfordshire District Council on the amendments to the above planning application.

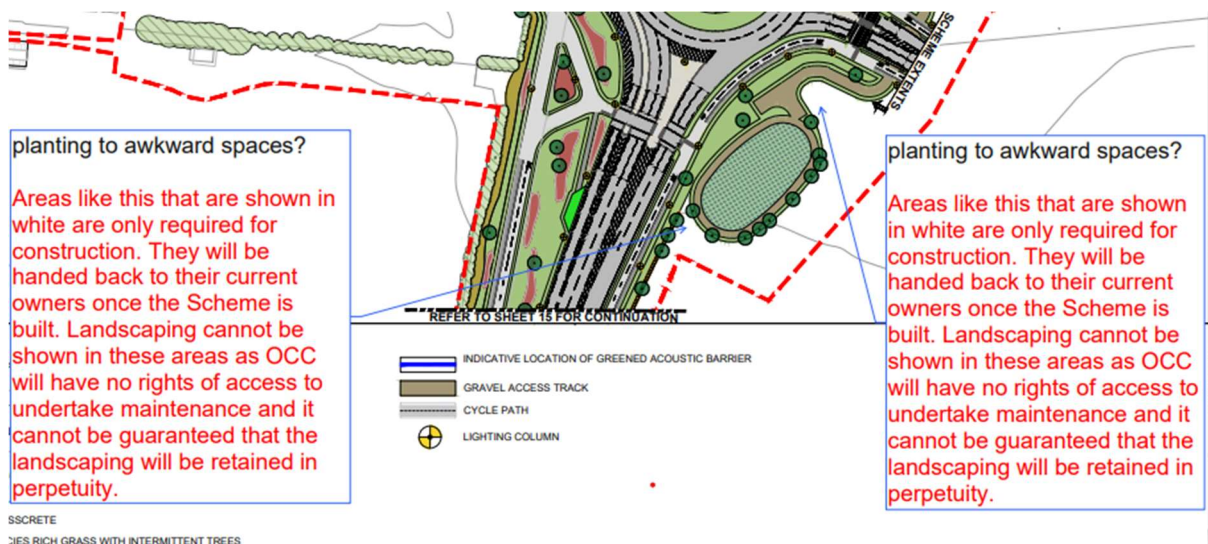
As per previous public statements South Oxfordshire District Council supports this project. South Oxfordshire District Council continues to support the principle of the proposals as the infrastructure will assist in delivering the housing and employment growth identified in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035. Without this proposed infrastructure planned new growth is unlikely to be delivered and therefore the council has no objection in principle to the proposal.

The following planning matters should be assessed ahead of any permission given. Previous comments provided by this council in its response dated 23 December 2022 remain applicable and further observations on the amendments are set out in the table below:

Landscape Officer

The extent of planting mitigation proposed remains inadequate, as noted in previous comments. There has been very little increase in planting compared to the previous proposals, limited to a hedge and a limited number of individual trees. Other than a commitment to agree the colour of acoustic barriers, these seem to be the only changes made, leaving most previous comments unaddressed. It is very disappointing that no significant changes have been made at the Culham Science Centre entrance which remains a major concern.

The response to landscape comments contained in Appendix C shows a lack of willingness to include even otherwise unusable areas of land for planting to help with mitigation. As shown on the extract from the application documents below, these awkward spaces will be of no use to the landowner, but to use them for additional planting would be beneficial in helping to screen the road and better integrate the scheme into the landscape.



This approach to landscape mitigation is reflected throughout much of the scheme, resulting in a scheme where the extent of mitigation appears to have been largely limited to within the engineering land take, rather than defined by an assessment of landscape and visual mitigation requirements.

The landscape plans still do not include sufficient information to enable a proper understanding of the scheme, such as embankments and cuttings, and vegetation removed.

Forestry Officer

These comments are in relation to the amendments made to the application and should be read in addition to previous comments.

A Revised Arboricultural Impact Assessment Addendum dated April 2023 has been submitted. This report sets out the changes to the proposal and how the revisions impact on trees.

The revised changes to the scheme allow for the retention of more trees than the previous proposals, as it set out at section 3.2, which is welcomed. As shown this includes the retention of all trees subject to a TPO and in the Conservation Area, that were previously effected. The revised plans now also ensure no works are proposed within the root protection area of T424 a veteran tree.

The report still identifies that the proposal will require a very significant amount of tree removal and will reduce canopy cover significantly. It is therefore essential that new planting is maximised as part of the scheme.

The preliminary landscape masterplans submitted still do not show the level of detail required to be able to scrutinise the mitigation planting in detail. Considering the extensive tree removal proposed for this application, very considerable amounts of tree planting will be required. This is essential to ensure that the scheme delivers a net increase in canopy cover to address environmental issues such as climate change and carbon sequestration, as well as the landscape and amenity benefits required to be achieved for this project.

If planning permission is to be granted, then conditions will be required to secure tree protection measures (Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Plans) in accordance with BS 5837:2012 and conditions to secure planting and its long term management, to ensure that the planting becomes successfully established to help mitigate the tree removal.

Conservation Officer

The revised detailing, specifically with regard to lighting and proposed planting and landscaping schemes, has been enhanced based on an understanding of the surrounding context - with regard to heritage assets.

The updated Heritage Chapter of the Environmental Statement and the proposed lighting plans show that in association with heritage assets there will be increased lighting in the wider area but when considered in the context of existing lighting near to heritage receptors this will not cause a significant harmful impact.

The replacement and new planting schemes have been further detailed on the proposed plans.

I suggest that a suitably worded condition is used in the grant of any permission to agree final details of proposed planting to ensure it can perform the required level of mitigation needed. This should include the proposed final detailing for the appearance of acoustic noise barriers.

Overall, there is likely to be some minor detrimental impact to the significance of heritage assets as a result of large infrastructure development in their wider setting. This is considered to be to the setting of the Clifton Hampden Conservation Area but will be a minor impact to the northern side of the designated area and is likely to be mitigated by enhanced landscaping and acoustic mitigation.

The impacts to Fullamoor Farmhouse are now better understood and the lighting strategy and planting proposals reflect this. Upon completion there will be a reduction in vehicular impacts as the main road is moved further away from the building and although lighting in the area will increase, this is set further from the building than existing street lighting.

I consider that the detail submitted is suitable to understand the likely impacts of the proposed infrastructure works. It is recommended that if you are minded to approve the plans, suitable conditions should be applied to agree the final details of planting and acoustic barriers where these serve to mitigate impacts on heritage assets.

Conclusion

I consider that there would be less-than-substantial harm to the significance of Fullamoor Farmhouse and the Clifton Hampden Conservation Area during the construction phases, at the lower end as this is still some distance away from any direct impacts and in the context of existing road infrastructure. I believe on completion this harm is likely to have significantly reduced to no harm as the infrastructure would take vehicles and lighting further away from the heritage assets than existing providing a moderate benefit as long as the acoustic and landscape mitigation proposed can be achieved.

Environmental Protection Officer (noise and vibration)

The acoustic report submitted in support of the application identifies that there are a number of properties that will experience a significant loss of amenity and for which there is no further cost-effective mitigation available. This negative impact ought to be balanced with positive impacts on noise exposure that the proposed scheme will provide at other locations.

I therefore offer no objection to the scheme but recommend that a condition be applied requiring that a Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan be submitted and approved in writing prior to the commencement of the development. Such a plan may form part of a wider Construction Environmental Management Plan.

I hope the above comments will assist in your determination of the application and if you require any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Bowerman
Principal Major Applications Officer

Appendix 2

Report and minutes of special meeting of the council
and letter from Leader of the council to Secretary of
State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Council



Listening Learning Leading

Contact Officer: Steven Corrigan

Tel: 07717 274704

E-mail: steven.corrigan@southandvale.gov.uk

Date: 21 August 2023

Website: www.southoxon.gov.uk

Summons to attend a special meeting of Council

to be held on

TUESDAY 29 AUGUST 2023 AT 6.00 PM

at

DIDCOT CIVIC HALL, BRITWELL ROAD, DIDCOT, OX11 7JN

Alternative formats of this publication are available on request. These include large print, Braille, audio cassette or CD, and email. For this or any other special requirements (such as access facilities) please contact the officer named on this agenda. Please give as much notice as possible before the meeting.

Patrick Arran
Head of Legal and Democratic

Note: Please remember to sign the attendance register.

Agenda

1 Apologies for absence

To record apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of interest

To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and non-registrable interests or any conflicts of interest in respect of the item on the agenda for this meeting.

3 Public participation

Members of the public who wish to address Council on the agenda item for this meeting must register to do so in writing or by email to democratic.services@southandvale.gov.uk no later than 5.00pm on Friday 25 August 2023.

4 Impact of the Housing and Infrastructure Fund (HIF1) Schemes Position (Pages 3 - 11)

To consider the attached report of the head of policy and programmes.

Patrick Arran
Head of Legal and Democratic



Council



Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

Author: Tim Oruye

Telephone: 07849 701774

E-mail: Tim.Oruye@southoxon.gov.uk

Cabinet member responsible: David Rouane

Tel: 07957 287799

E-mail: David.Rouane@southoxon.gov.uk

To: COUNCIL

DATE: 29 August 2023

Impact of the HIF1 Schemes Position

Recommendation(s)

To

(a) Note the content of this report, and

(b) Resolves to request that the Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council write to the Secretary of State to raise the importance of the swift determination of the HIF1 planning application made by Oxfordshire County Council.

Purpose of Report

1. To explain the background to the Housing and Infrastructure Fund (HIF1) in relation to South Oxfordshire and to facilitate discussion about the potential implications of the recent Oxfordshire County Council planning application process, and its consequence for the HIF1 schemes.

Strategic Objectives

2. Action on climate emergency – HIF1 has the potential to encourage behavioural change, improve air quality and support sustainable transport modes and active travel.

3. Improved economic and community well-being – HIF1 is a significant infrastructure investment in an area which has been subject to large levels of growth. The infrastructure directly supports jobs and provides existing business with benefits. Planned improvements in community facilities for example leisure centres, expansion of the Wave, are dependent on Section 106 developer contributions from the affected sites. There will also be an impact on the Enterprise Zones which will provide employment in the area.
4. Homes and Infrastructure that meet local need – HIF1 is directly related to the delivery of homes and infrastructure in and around Didcot Garden Town.
5. Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability – The HIF1 schemes are to be partly funded from Section 106 developer contributions.

Background

6. The Didcot Garden Town Housing Infrastructure Fund programme (hereon in referred to as HIF1) is a £296m capital project of linked infrastructure schemes including dedicated walking and cycling infrastructure and associated bus infrastructure. It is designed as supporting infrastructure for allocated housing and employment sites in the South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse Local Plans.
7. HIF1 has been part-funded by £218m from Homes England's Housing Infrastructure Fund, and grant funding was increased by 10% (£21.8m) in June 2022 to cover inflationary costs and to secure approval for the HIF1 deal at the June 2022 Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet meeting. Funding is also coming from the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (£14m capital investment generated from Enterprise Zones business rates retention). A further £16m has been secured against Section 106 developer contributions, with other funding being underwritten from Oxfordshire County Council's capital budget. As part of the HIF1 deal, the grant funding needs to be committed by March 2026.
8. The HIF1 schemes will provide almost 20km of walking and cycling infrastructure, connecting employment sites with Didcot, surrounding villages and existing walking and cycling routes. Specifically, the schemes are:
 - A4130 dualling - linking Valley Park to Didcot Science Bridge.
 - Didcot Science Bridge - a new bridge across the railway line and the former Didcot A power station site.
 - Didcot to Culham River Crossing - a new link road and bridge over the River Thames.
 - Clifton Hampden bypass - a new bypass to re-route traffic away from Clifton Hampden and Burcot.
9. The HIF1 project is linked to the delivery of Didcot Garden Town, alongside the pre-planned construction of circa 18,000 new homes and circa 10,000 new jobs through the delivery of additional high tech employment development in the local area.

10. HIF1 is linked to the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035, as it is necessary infrastructure to unlock allocated large strategic sites and other development in and around Didcot and Science Vale. Some of these sites are being implemented, and when they are completed, they place pressure on the local and wider transport network without the HIF1 infrastructure being in place.
11. Oxfordshire County Council submitted a planning application for the HIF1 schemes in November 2021, with supplementary information in November 2022. At the Oxfordshire County Council Planning and Regulation Committee of 17-18 July 2023, councillors and members of the public raised several issues they had with the HIF1 planning application. Ultimately seven committee members voted against the granting of permission for the HIF1 planning application whilst two voted for the permission, which had been recommended for approval by the officers.
12. In the days following Oxfordshire County Council's Planning and Regulation Committee meeting no decision notice was published with the committee's outcome. The week following the committee, the Secretary of State intervened by 'calling-in' the planning application to be determined by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS). The Secretary of State has the power to direct a local planning authority to refer an application to him for decision, under section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The Secretary of State will, in general, only consider the use of his call-in powers if planning issues of more than local importance are involved. There is a call-in policy which was last updated in an October 2012 Written Ministerial Statement (WMS). The criteria for call-in within the WMS states:

"Such cases may include, for example, those which in his opinion:

- may conflict with national policies on important matters;
- may have significant long-term impact on economic growth and meeting housing needs across a wider area than a single local authority;
- could have significant effects beyond their immediate locality;
- give rise to substantial cross-boundary or national controversy;
- raise significant architectural and urban design issues; or
- may involve the interests of national security or of foreign Governments.

However, each case will continue to be considered on its individual merits."

13. We now await information about the details of the timetable that PINS will be following, including the date for an inquiry that PINS will hold, and a date for the reporting of the appointed Inspector's conclusions and recommendation. This report will be sent to the Secretary of State who will make a decision about the Inspector's recommendation. His decision will be explained in a decision letter.
14. Officers will formally request that South Oxfordshire District Council is made a party to the inquiry once it is commenced to make sure that the council's views are properly represented.

15. The HIF1 schemes are closely linked to the emerging Joint Local Plan 2041. Those sites that have been allocated in the adopted South Local Plan 2035 that have not yet built out, could be included within the emerging Joint Local Plan. This continues to make the delivery of HIF1 schemes essential to ensure that these sites can be brought forward and thus the adopted Local Plan strategy of focussing development on Didcot and Science Vale can be maintained.
16. Importantly, the Oxfordshire County Council transport modelling that the adopted South Local Plan 2035 relied upon assumed that the HIF1 schemes would be delivered. Therefore, without the HIF1 schemes there are potential impacts on the transport network capacity and connections across a much wider area. Given the outcome at Oxfordshire County Council's committee there has been a need to consider implications and for a time to pause certain aspects of work on the Joint Local Plan, this has meant a short delay in the scheduled milestones of around 3 months for the emerging Joint Local Plan.
17. The milestones have been corrected in an update to the Local Development Scheme, published on the Council's website. As discussed below, officers do not consider that the current approach to HIF1 that Oxfordshire County Council officers are taking cause an imminent risk to the emerging Joint Local Plan, however this report also details the risks should the HIF1 schemes not be delivered, which for the Joint Local Plan are likely to be substantial.
18. As no decision notice was published by Oxfordshire County Council following their 17-18 July 2023 Planning and Regulation committee, the HIF1 schemes remain subject to a live planning application. Given that the HIF1 schemes remain fully funded and subject to the planning process, Oxfordshire Highway Authority's position is that their 'Releasing Development Strategy' (see pages 325-352 of Agenda Item 13 for a copy: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/g6378/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%2022-Jun-2021%2014.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>) remains current and its contents will be applied to all live and in-coming planning consultations until further notice. This means that delivery of some development can continue for now, without there being a risk of highway related objections where the strategy is followed.
19. A number of development sites are linked to HIF1 being delivered and form part of our housing land supply. Following the Secretary of States call-in, Oxfordshire County Councils' formal position on HIF1 remains unchanged from before the Planning and Regulation Committee and as there continues to be a funded, live planning application, at this time, there is no reason to remove development sites from our next update to the five-year housing land supply position due to this. Officers intend to publish this year's Housing Land Supply Statement by 11 September 2023.

Climate and ecological impact implications

20. HIF1 has a significant benefit in securing transport infrastructure of different modes to mitigate against the planned delivery of homes and jobs. Without HIF1 being delivered alongside the significant number of planned homes there would be more congestion and less modal choice.

Financial Implications

21. Oxfordshire County Council are the HIF1 recipients and the agent for the delivery of the scheme.
22. There is a risk of loss of the secured funding if the HIF1 planning application is not secured and the March 2026 funding commitment deadline is not reached.
23. There is a risk that S106 contributions may need to be returned, If planning permission is not secured.
24. South Oxfordshire District Council will request to be an "interested party" in the called-in application to ensure that the Councils interests are protected. Any involvement will have impact on officer resource.
25. There is also a risk of significant costs attributable to the delays and additional work that would be necessary to the Joint Local Plan 2041 were HIF1 not to proceed. This has shared financial implications for neighbouring Vale of White Horse District.

Legal Implications

26. Whilst the concept of HIF1 and its impact on the council, which has been set out in the body of the report, has clear legal implications, there are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report. As mentioned in the body of the report, officers will ensure that the councils' interests are properly represented in any inquiry and will engage leading counsel for that purpose if necessary.

Risks

27. It is critical that the PINS process and SoS determination is undertaken as diligently and as swiftly as possible as any further delay will increase planning, delivery and funding uncertainties. There are several current risks should HIF1 not be delivered which include:
 - Impact on the immediate determination of planning applications in the Didcot and wider area. Officers have previously seen appeals upheld for the refusal of single dwellings without the benefit of the HIF1 infrastructure;
 - Failure to deliver the remainder of Didcot Garden Town, leaving implemented development without the necessary wider transport infrastructure to support it and communities affected as a result;
 - Impact on the sites that are able to be included within the five-year housing land supply, likely leading to us being unable to demonstrate a supply of sufficient homes for some time and implications of speculative developments elsewhere in the district;
 - Impact on the approach in the emerging Joint Local Plan 2041 which members have been engaged on delivering for a planned consultation in 2023. Without HIF1 there are limits to what spatial strategy and sites can be used to meet our housing and employment needs. If, as would be likely, we need to reconsider

our strategy, policies, allocations and supporting evidence base, this could cause very significant delays to the delivery of the Joint Local Plan;

- Wider impacts on investment, economic growth and prospects in Science Vale including the impact on key employment areas within and just outside the district; and
- Impact on the delivery of economic development in the Didcot Growth Accelerator Enterprise Zones, which are intended to support 2,400 local employment opportunities alongside around £110m in retained business rates growth over the next ten years.

Other Implications

28. There are potentially wide ranging implications associated with the risks identified, these will need to be kept under consideration and actions taken as appropriate to the future circumstances once the outcome of the Secretary of State's call-in is known.

Conclusion

29. That members note the content and recommendations of this report.

Background Papers

None



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Emily Catchside
Planning Officer
Oxfordshire County Council

Sent by email only:
planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Please ask for: William Cole

Email: will.cole@levellingup.gov.uk

Your ref: R3.0138/21

Our ref: PCU/RTI/U3100/3326455

Date: 25th July 2023

Dear Ms Catchside

Town and Country Planning Act 1990 – Section 77
Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure)
(England) Order 2015
Town and Country Planning (Inquiries Procedure) (England) Rules 2000

Application by Oxford County Council c/o Jonathan Hill, AECOM (agent) for the dualling of the A4130 carriageway, construction of the Didcot Science Bridge, road bridge over the Appleford railway sidings and road bridge over the River Thames and associated works between the A34 Milton Interchange and the B4015 north of Clifton Hampden, Oxfordshire (Application no: R3.0138/21)

1. I am directed by the Secretary of State to refer to the above named planning application.
2. In deciding whether to call in this application, the Secretary of State has considered his policy on calling in planning applications. This gives examples of the types of issues which may lead him to conclude, in his opinion, that the application should be called-in. In the light of his policy, the Secretary of State has decided to call-in this application. He accordingly directs, under his powers in section 77 of the 1990 Act, that the application shall be referred to him instead of being dealt with by the Local Planning Authority.
3. To consider all the relevant aspects of the proposed development, the Secretary of State has decided to hold a local inquiry. For the purposes of the 2000 Rules this letter is the “relevant notice” that an inquiry is to be held and the date of this letter is the “starting date”. All the arrangements for holding the inquiry will be made by the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol.

Planning Casework Unit
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
23 Stephenson Street
Birmingham
B2 4BH

Tel: 0303 44 48050
pcu@communities.gov.uk

4. The Planning Inspectorate will write to you shortly about the procedure for determining the called-in application.
5. The original application, together with any plans and other documents accompanying it will need to be supplied to the Planning Inspectorate (including any related certificates and correspondence). The Inspectorate will contact you shortly to discuss this further.
6. Should you have any questions please contact the Planning Inspectorate (email Mark.Boulton@planninginspectorate.gov.uk or telephone 0303 444 5239).
7. On the information so far available to the Secretary of State, the matters which he particularly wishes to be informed about for the purposes of his consideration of the application are:
 - a) The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for delivering a sufficient supply of homes as set out in the NPPF (Chapter 5); and
 - b) The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for building a strong, competitive economy as set out in the NPPF (Chapter 6); and
 - c) The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with the development plan for the area; and
 - d) any other matters the Inspector considers relevant.
8. This is to be taken as the Secretary of State's statement under rule 6(12) of the 2000 Rules.
9. In accordance with rule 6(1) and (2), the local planning authority shall ensure that two copies of a statement of case are received by the Secretary of State, and one copy has been received by any statutory party as defined in rule 2 within six weeks of the starting date (unless the Planning Inspectorate notifies you otherwise - you may wish to contact them). Your attention is drawn to rule 6(11). The Secretary of State will comply with rule 6(4).
10. You will be required to submit a statement of case, and the Planning Inspectorate will write to you about this. The statement of case should contain the full particulars of the case which you propose to put forward at the inquiry and a list of any documents to which you intend to refer or put in as evidence. If you are proposing to give evidence, or call another person to give evidence, at the inquiry by reading a written statement (i.e. proof of evidence), your attention is drawn to rule 13.

11. Your attention is drawn to rules 4 and 6(2), in particular to the requirement upon your Council to inform forthwith the Secretary of State of the names and addresses of any statutory parties.
12. Your attention is also drawn to the provisions in rule 14 of the 2000 Rules that the local planning authority and the applicant shall together prepare an agreed statement of common ground and ensure that a copy is received by the Secretary of State and by any statutory party within 6 weeks of the starting date (unless the Planning Inspectorate notifies you otherwise – you may wish to contact them).
13. In pursuance of Article 31 of the 2015 Order, the Secretary of State hereby directs the Council not to grant planning permission, without specific authorisation, for any development which is the same kind as that which is the subject of the application referred to above on any land which forms part of, or includes, the site to which the application relates until the Secretary of State has issued his decision on this application.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lynch

**Andrew Lynch – Decision Officer
Planning Casework Unit
Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**

This decision was made by the Minister of State for Housing on behalf of the Secretary of State and signed on his behalf.

Minutes



Listening Learning Leading

OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE Council

**Held on Tuesday 29 August 2023 at 6.00 pm
Didcot Civic Hall, Britwell Road, Didcot, OX11 7JN**

Present:

Councillors: David Turner (Chair), Ken Arlett, Pieter-Paul Barker, James Barlow, Robin Bennett, David Bretherton, Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Sue Cooper, Peter Dragonetti, Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Mike Giles, Ali Gordon-Creed, Georgina Heritage, Alexandrine Kantor, Katharine Keats-Rohan, Mocky Khan, Axel Macdonald, Denise Macdonald, Ben Manning, Zia Mohammed, James Norman, Andrea Powell, Leigh Rawlins, Jo Robb, David Rouane, Anne-Marie Simpson, Ed Sadler, Ian Snowdon, Freddie van Mierlo and Tony Worgan

Officers: Patrick Arran, Head of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer, Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, Ore Idowu, Trainee Solicitor and Mark Stone, Chief Executive

Also present: Bill Cotton, Corporate Director Environment and Place at Oxfordshire County Council.

26 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bearder, Gawrysiak, Gregory, James-Lawrie, Hinton and Tinsley.

27 Declarations of interest

None.

Members were advised that, whilst members who are Oxfordshire County Councillors will have registered their interests as Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) under employment, the matter before Council did not directly relate to the DPI and they were therefore entitled to take part.

In addition, due to the matter for debate, there was no issue with members taking part if they were involved in the Planning and Regulatory Committee decision or had made their views about HIF1 known in either a positive or negative way. Whilst this could be an issue for future decisions relating to the Joint Local Plan, this did not prevent any member from taking part at this meeting.

28 Public participation

The following members of the public addressed Council in opposition to the HIF1 application:

- Robert Harding representing the Campaign for Rural England.
- Greg O’Broin, Chair of Appleford-on-Thames Parish Council and the Neighbouring Parish Council Joint Committed (NPC-JC) which comprises the Parish Councils of Appleford, Sutton Courtenay, Culham, Burcot and Clifton Hampden and Nuneham Courtenay.
- Chris Hancock, member of the Appleford Parish Council Working Group.
- Robert Parker, Chair of Shirburn Parish Council.
- Sarah Nohre, a Green Party Didcot Town Councillor (representing her own views).
- Caroline Baird, representing Culham Parish Council.

They made the following points in respect of the proposed schemes:

- would provide an out-of-date solution which would increase car dependency and car traffic undermining climate change strategies;
- inadequate traffic modelling which did not include induced traffic and assumed traffic would be the same whether or not a new road is built;
- would provide for a road corridor between the A34 and M40 and attract a greater use by HGVs;
- lack of adequate and safe provision for cyclists and pedestrians and shift to public transport;
- fails to address the climate emergency and need to reduce carbon emissions;
- lack of local support for the schemes;
- lack of local decision making following the call in of the application by the Secretary of State;
- schemes will unlock further development and increase congestion;
- detrimental impact on the countryside and farmland.

Ryan Padgett, a Didcot resident, spoke in support of HIF1. He expressed the view that the infrastructure would support the provision of much needed homes to meet current and future demand and would provide for different modes of transport.

29 Impact of the Housing and Infrastructure Fund (HIF1) Schemes Position

The Chair, Councillor Turner, invited Mr Bill Cotton, Corporate Director Environment and Place at Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), to provide Council with an update on the situation from the perspective of Oxfordshire County Council as the applicant. Mr Cotton responded to questions from members. Mr Cotton confirmed that it remained the County Council’s policy to deliver the HIF1 schemes in support of both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district council local plans. In response to a question, he replied that any decision to withdraw the planning application would be a matter for politicians. The HIF1 funding was time limited and therefore any significant reworking of the planning

application would impact on the availability of funding from Homes England which remained time limited. Oxfordshire County Council did not have the funds to meet the costs of the identified infrastructure if the funding was no longer available.

Council considered the report of the head of policy and programmes which explained the background to the Housing and Infrastructure Fund (HIF1) in relation to South Oxfordshire District Council and invited Council to consider the implications of the recent Oxfordshire County Council planning application process and its consequences for the HIF1 schemes.

Council noted that the county council's Planning and Regulatory Committee had voted against the granting of permission for the HIF1 planning application. The decision notice had not been published. Council also noted that the application had since been 'called-in' by the Secretary of State for the application to be determined by the Planning Inspectorate. Council noted that a public inquiry was scheduled to commence on 5 December 2023

Councillor Rouane moved, and Councillor Bennett seconded the amendment as set out below.

- (a) Council notes the content of this report,
- (b) Council notes the importance of local decision making,
- (c) Council resolves to request that the Leader write to the Secretary of State to raise the importance of the swift determination of the HIF1 planning application made by Oxfordshire County Council,
- (d) Council welcomes that officers will formally request that South Oxfordshire District Council is made party to the inquiry and that the council's views are properly represented, in particular:
 - i The importance of infrastructure funded by HIF1 to the delivery of housing and economic sites allocated in the adopted Local Plan 2035
 - ii South Oxfordshire's target of becoming a net zero district by 2030
 - iii The need for high quality design throughout, as set out in the Design Guide and the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan
 - iv Minimising harmful impact of any scheme on our natural and historic landscape, including the River Thames, and maximising biodiversity
 - v Respecting the views of affected communities including both Didcot and the surrounding villages

The majority of members supported the view that Didcot and the surrounding areas required major infrastructure to support the existing housing and the delivery of future housing and economic growth sites identified in the district council's Local Plan 2025. A number of members expressed a personal view that OCC's Planning and Regulation Committee had good reasons to refuse the planning application on the grounds of design and impact on the environment. It was their view that alternative options existed in terms of the design of the schemes, their environmental impact and provision of alternative transport options to the car.

Members supported the view that it was important that the council had the opportunity to be a party to the inquiry to reinforce its policies and articulate the views of local people from Didcot and the surrounding villages. It was noted that the district council had made submissions in respect of the planning application to balance the need for infrastructure with the council's priorities on climate and biodiversity and its own design guide. It was felt important that these issues are known to the inquiry, namely the council's policies to

become net zero by 2030, to minimise the harmful impact of any scheme on the district's natural and historic landscape and maximise biodiversity.

Some members expressed concern regarding the refusal of planning permission which risked the loss of substantial infrastructure funding to meet the needs of residents and business and a return to speculative planning applications over many years.

Following debate, and being put to the vote, the amendment was declared carried and became the substantive motion.

Councillor Khan moved and Councillor A Macdonald seconded an amendment, set out below, with additional words shown in bold.

- (a) Council notes the content of this report,
- (b) Council notes the importance of local decision making,
- (c) Council resolves to request that the Leader write to the Secretary of State to raise the importance of the swift **positive** determination of the HIF1 planning application made by Oxfordshire County Council,
- (d) This Council explicitly supports HIF1 and requests it is delivered.**
- (e) Council welcomes that officers will formally request that South Oxfordshire District Council is made party to the inquiry and that the council's views are properly represented, in particular:
 - i The importance of infrastructure funded by HIF1 to the delivery of housing and economic sites allocated in the adopted Local Plan 2035
 - ii South Oxfordshire's target of becoming a net zero district by 2030
 - iii The need for high quality design throughout, as set out in the Design Guide and the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan
 - iv. Minimising harmful impact of any scheme on our natural and historic landscape, including the River Thames, and maximising biodiversity
 - v. Respecting the views of affected communities including both Didcot and the surrounding villages

Those members in support of the amendment expressed the view that the additional words emphasised the importance of HIF1 to secure the required infrastructure for Didcot. However, the majority of members opposed the amendment supporting the view that the proposed inclusion of the word positive in (c) was a step too far as it was not within the council's gift to tell the Secretary of State how to deal with the call in. It was also the case that the substantive motion already referenced the council's clear support for HIF1 and also identified other matters that should be brought to the attention of the inquiry.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 68, which provides for a recorded vote if three members request one, the chair called for a recorded vote on the amendment which was declared lost with the voting as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Members	Members	Members
Ken Arlett	Pieter-Paul Barker	
Mocky Khan	James Barlow	

For	Against	Abstain
Axel Macdonald	Robin Bennett	
Denise Macdonald	David Bretherton	
Ian Snowdon	Sam Casey-Rerhaye	
	Sue Cooper	
	Peter Dragonetti	
	Maggie Filipova-Rivers	
	Mike Giles	
	Ali Gordon-Creed	
	Georgina Heritage	
	Alexandrine Kantor	
	Katharine Keats-Rohan	
	Ben Manning	
	Freddie Van Mierlo	
	Zia Mohammed	
	James Norman	
	Andrea Powell	
	Leigh Rawlins	
	Jo Robb	
	David Rouane	
	Ed Sadler	
	Anne-Marie Simpson	
	David Turner	
	Tony Worgan	
5	25	0

On being put the substantive motion was approved.

RESOLVED: To

- (a) note the content of the report of the head of policy and programmes to the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 29 August 2023,
- (b) note the importance of local decision making,
- (c) request that the Leader write to the Secretary of State to raise the importance of the swift determination of the HIF1 planning application made by Oxfordshire County Council,
- (d) welcome that officers will formally request that South Oxfordshire District Council is made party to the inquiry and that the council's views are properly represented, in particular:
 - i The importance of infrastructure funded by HIF1 to the delivery of housing and economic sites allocated in the adopted Local Plan 2035.
 - ii South Oxfordshire's target of becoming a net zero district by 2030.
 - iii The need for high quality design throughout, as set out in the Design Guide and the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan.
 - iv Minimising harmful impact of any scheme on our natural and historic landscape, including the River Thames, and maximising biodiversity.
 - v Respecting the views of affected communities including both Didcot and the surrounding villages.

The meeting closed at 8:27pm

Chair

Date

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The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities

**Councillor David Rouane
Leader of the Council**

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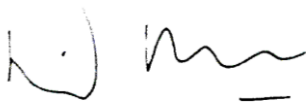
6 September 2023

Dear Mr Gove,

**Public Inquiry - Didcot Garden Town HIF 1 Scheme – Oxfordshire County
Council Planning Reference R3.0138/21**

I am pleased that the date of the Inquiry on the HIF1 scheme in Didcot has been confirmed for 5 December 2023. South Oxfordshire District Council have confirmed that they will be party to the Inquiry and will be submitting comments to the Planning Inspectorate by 4 October 2023 deadline. I would like to stress the importance of a swift determination given the importance of HIF1 to the delivery of housing and economic sites allocated in the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

Yours sincerely



Cllr David Rouane
Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council