

HIF 1 Didcot Garden Town

Planning Application Initial Response - Landscape

To: Emily Catcheside

From: Environmental Coordinator Atkins on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council

Site 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

Proposal Detail:

- 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 systems.

Application Number: R3.0138/21

Date sent: 20 January 2022

As discussed please see below our initial response for Landscape for consideration by and discussion with the applicant. This response outlines the headline issues based on our initial observations at this stage where it would be helpful to have additional information or clarification. It is intended that a note that details our line-specific and other comments will also be made available.

1.0 Landscape

1.1 Key Documents Reviewed (not exhaustive list):

Environmental Statement Volume 1 Chapter 8
Didcot HIF1 ES Chapter 8 Landscape and Visual Figures Part 1 - 5
ES Volume 3 - Appendix 8
Outline Landscape & Biodiversity Management Plan (OLBMP)
Preliminary Ecological Mitigation Plan (x4)
Design and Access Statement
Non Technical Summary

1.2 Further information and/or clarification required

Headline Comment:

The landscape and visual assessment (LVIA) uses DMRB LA 107 with reference and regard to GLVIA 3 as set out in the scoping report and agreed with OCC. The LVIA is considered suitable to support the planning application and includes a defined study area, baseline including policy, landscape character and representative viewpoints from visual receptor groups, and sensitivity, and character of the night sky; assessment of likely impacts and effects; photomontage, landscape masterplans; and landscape and ecology management plan.

At this stage it is not possible to provide a substantive response. There are a number of issues/queries that have been identified and that require the provision of further information and clarification, and where necessary amendments to the assessment to ensure that there is a robust audit trail to provide transparency and confidence in the overall assessment findings and to inform the acceptability of the scheme in landscape and visual terms.

The following summarises the key concerns identified:

Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVIA)

Chapter 8 includes a conclusion of effects on landscape character (a significant effect at the site level but not significant on published LCAs), but there is no overall conclusion on the effects on visual amenity. It would be useful to understand how the assessor has considered the receptors and effects across the whole scheme and whether on balance a significant effect is expected.

Assessment of Sensitivity

There is a concern at this stage that the sensitivity of the landscape character and visual receptors may have been underestimated in some locations, which in turn has influenced the assessment of the likely significance of effect.

Whilst it is understood that a level of professional judgement is required by a practitioner to undertake LVIA it would be helpful to have clarification and further information on how the levels of sensitivity have been established in relation to value and susceptibility. This will provide an audit trail and evidence base to substantiate the overall findings of the LVIA but it is recognised are unlikely to change as a result.

This concern particularly relates to residential properties and recreation users. In addition it would be helpful to have clarification on how the visual assessment differentiated between motorists, and cyclists/pedestrians.

Discrepancies between assessment and mitigation proposals

There is concern at this stage that there are discrepancies in the mitigation proposed and assessed as part of the LVIA chapter and the proposed mitigation shown on the landscape masterplan drawings and the photomontages.

Clarification and further information is required on this inconsistency as this raises the question of whether the assessment is underestimating the effects as its assuming more mitigation that actually forms part of the scheme design and shown on the design plans.

For example:

VP01 – the text within App 8.6 Visual Assessment tables describes the vegetation between the A4130 and GWR as being retained and soft landscaping proposed along the realigned carriageway to the south.

Within the main chapter the mitigation described for this area states *“The proposed landscape planting seeks to integrate the A4130 Widening by replanting trees and hedgerows alongside the south side of the new westbound carriageway”*.

However, Figure 8.72A and VP01 Photomontage show there is just grass proposed to the southern widening and some vegetation to the north side of the A4130 is lost with a replacement fence indicated.

Similar comments apply to VP04.

Status of existing planting shown on the landscape masterplan drawings withing redline boundary

The landscape masterplan drawings show extensive areas of existing planting retained within the redline boundary. This raises the question of whether this is feasible and if the assessment is underestimating the effects as its assuming that this existing planting will stay.

Clarification is needed to explain the status of this planting and what assumptions have been made ie is it within the permanent landtake for the scheme and does it form part of the permanent mitigation? Who is responsible and how will they get access for maintenance?

For example:

The assessment appears to rely heavily on the retention and reinforcement of existing planting at Appleford to restrict views of the road, high sided traffic, noise barrier and Appleford Sidings overbridge.

For VP10 it is considered it is considered that better mitigation could be presented along this section of the road, with individual trees between the road and NMU route for instance, greening of the noise barrier and increased woodland planting to the Appleford crossing access road.

Impact of tree and vegetation loss

It is noted that the Scoping Report highlighted that the loss of vegetation is likely to be a *‘major factor resulting in landscape and visual impacts’*. In response the Scoping Opinion advised that to *‘reduce impacts, it is important that the loss of existing mature vegetation is avoided as much as possible. If this is not possible, then it is important that sufficient space for mitigation planting is provided alongside the scheme to mitigate impacts in the long term’*.

At this stage it is not clear if the redline boundary is the ‘site boundary’ and where and how existing retained vegetation will be retained that is identified on the landscape masterplans. As identified in the response on the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA), it is noted that there are discrepancies identified between trees and hedges shown on the scheme drawings compared with onsite features and in some case aerial photography.

It would be helpful to have a summary in the AIA of the total tree losses in area compared against the areas and identified for replacement planting to inform the acceptability of the scheme in landscape and visual terms. Additional Information is therefore required in the AIA (with cross reference in the LVIA) to demonstrate whether the new planting can adequately compensate for the loss of existing trees and hedges within the current redline boundary.

Furthermore, the areas of compensation planting should be provided (possibly included in the landscape design proposals) to enable an overall comparison between the current tree and hedge

cover without the scheme, the existing planting lost as a result of the scheme, and the replanted built scheme.

Photomontage

Whilst it is acknowledged that the locations of representative viewpoints had been agreed with OCC, the location of VP 10 needs adjustment to reflect the design development of the Scheme in this area and to enable a better appreciation of the potential view for receptors in this area ie due to the proposed raised road in this location the eye level is inappropriate to present an actual future view.

Scheme design in relation to wider context

Clarification and additional information is required to demonstrate the extent, relative height of the scheme, and juxtaposition to the landscape and visual receptors in the wider context. Extended cross sections would help to clarify what is happening in the vicinity of the A4130 widening, Appleford / Appleford Crossing and Appleford Sidings, Clifton Hampden, the River Thames crossing and in the absence of public accessible viewpoints - Culham Science Centre.

Future baseline

Clarification is needed to demonstrate what assumptions have been made regarding existing and future baseline, whether and to what degree contextual changes ie developments nearby have been taken into account in the assessment and how this has been assessed.

For example:

Although some developments near Didcot are mentioned reference in the LVIA to the strategic site allocations at Culham have not been found.

This information would be useful to clarify how the site context is likely to change in the future in landscape character and views of the proposed scheme. It would also be helpful to indicate by annotation the extent of this development on the photomontage. For example in views of the A4130.

Informing Scheme Design Development

It is noted that Section 8.2 Chapter 8 includes a number of policies from the Vale White Horse DC and South Oxfordshire DC local plan regarding the quality of design, enhancing local landscape character etc.

In the context of Section 8.2, it would be helpful to have clarification of how the LVIA has informed the scheme design process, in particular of the bridges, roundabouts and addressed vegetation loss.

Mitigation Proposals

Comparing the landscape masterplan drawings against section 8.8 Design Mitigation and Enhancement Measures there appears to be a discrepancies between the specific measures described and what is shown.

For example

A4130 Widening

Para 8.8.5 3rd Bullet: *'The landscape design includes substantial planting of trees and shrubs once established will help screen both infrastructure and traffic particularly around junctions'*.

Didcot to Culham River Crossing

Para 8.8.7 1st Bullet: *The landscape design seeks to integrate the Scheme by planting trees, woodland and hedgerows alongside the road to restore vegetation patterns and strengthen the landscape structure where practicable.*

Paragraph 8.8.7 2nd bullet: *'Substantial areas of proposed planting are proposed on the approaches to the Appleford Railway Sidings Crossing for the purposes of landscape integration and to partially screen the new bridge and embankments'.*

Clarification is required to explain why the proposed planting at Appleford Sidings has not been designed to reinforce the existing screening effect of the existing planting to screen views of the new bridge and embankments. It is considered it is considered that better mitigation could be presented along this section of the road, with individual trees between the road and NMU route for instance, greening of the noise barrier and increased woodland planting to the Appleford crossing access road.

In addition there is a suggestion between Didcot to Culham River Crossing in Para 8.8.7 that small scale woodland blocks have been used at Sutton Courtney and Abingdon Roundabouts to integrate the new infrastructure. The design of these junctions is predominately open grassland and bulb planting further rationale would be helpful to understand how these junctions are being integrated.

Further explanation of the Design Mitigation and Enhancement Measures between Culham River Crossing and Clifton Hampden Bypass is required.

In other areas the scheme relies wholly on the retention of existing planting and includes a mainly open layout of amenity grassland and drainage features, with very limited tree and shrub planting that is proposed at the base of a very limited section of the embankment approaches to Didcot Science Bridge (14.5m including HGV reference paragraph 8.6.6 bullet 2).

It is considered overall that the landscape mitigation and enhancements presented on the plans can be improved.