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THE OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (DIDCOT GARDEN TOWN HIGHWAYS INFRASTRUCTURE – A4130 IMPROVEMENT (MILTON GATE TO COLLETT ROUNDABOUT), A4197 DIDCOT TO CULHAM LINK ROAD, AND A415 CLIFTON HAMPDEN BYPASS) COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER 2022

THE OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (DIDCOT TO CULHAM THAMES BRIDGE) SCHEME 2022

THE OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (DIDCOT GARDEN TOWN HIGHWAYS INFRASTRUCTURE – A4130 IMPROVEMENT (MILTON GATE TO COLLETT ROUNDABOUT), A4197 DIDCOT TO CULHAM LINK ROAD, AND A415 CLIFTON HAMPDEN BYPASS) (SIDE ROADS) ORDER 2022

THE CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION BY OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL 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)

PLANNING INSPECTORATE REFERENCE:

APP/U3100/V/23/3326625 and NATTRAN/SE/HAO/286 (DPI/U3100/23/12)

Rebuttal proof of evidence of

JANE ELIZABETH ASH

(Landscape and Visual Impact)

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1 SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

1.1 This Rebuttal Proof of Evidence has been prepared regarding landscape and visual matters relating to Neighbouring Parish Councils – Joint Committee (NPC-JC) Proof of Evidence on Landscape, by Alan James and Design, by Chris Hancock.

1.2 The aim of this Rebuttal Proof of Evidence is to offset out my views on various points raised by Mr James in his proof of evidence on landscape and Mr Hancock in his proof of evidence on design to the extent that these points have not already been addressed in my main proof of evidence, or to provide further clarification of my evidence or to correct misunderstandings within evidence presented by other parties. I have sought to avoid unnecessary repetition of matters already addressed at length, with the ultimate intention of assisting the Inquiries. Where I do not respond to a point raised, my lack of response should not be construed nor interpreted as agreement, unless explicitly stated so within this Rebuttal Proof of Evidence.

1.3 Where I refer to paragraph numbers within this Rebuttal Proof of Evidence, they are paragraph numbers of Mr James' (Section 2) or Mr Hancock's (Section 3) proof of evidence, unless stated otherwise.

2 RESPONSE TO ALAN JAMES PROOF OF EVIDENCE ON LANDSCAPE

General Comments

2.1 In his paragraphs 5 to 7 Mr James raised various points in respect of the processing of the Planning Application, tree planting and general landscape issues These matters are already addressed in paragraphs 2.22 to 2.26 of my main proof of evidence.

2.2 In summary, the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) [CD A.15, Chapter 8] does not suggest that the new planting removes the need for further consideration of landscape matters, and this is reflected by landscape matters being dealt with via condition and detailed design.

Main landscape points of objection raised by Mr James

2.3 In his paragraph 8, Mr James states that '*the landscape assessment notes several large or very large adverse impacts in its LVIA and WebTAG analyses, but seeks to play them down as either having minimal effect on Landscape Character Areas overall or being inevitable in any highways scheme, therefore by implication not all that important'*.

2.4 The LVIA does not ignore or downplay the impacts of the highway scheme, the assessment and the residual effects on landscape and visual receptors are set out in Section 4 ('Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of the Scheme') of my main proof of evidence. In relation to WebTAG, my response is set out at paragraphs 2.9 and 2.14 below.

2.5 The landscape assessment in the LVIA does predict a large adverse (significant) effect on Local Landscape Character Area (LLCA) 16 Clifton Hampden Farmland during construction. This reduces to a moderate adverse (significant) effect during year 1 of operation, and to a slight adverse effect at operation year 15. This is presented in the assessment and therefore it is not considered that the LVIA '*seeks to play them down*'.

2.6 The suggestion that the effect is inevitable is not to imply that the effect is not important; it is inevitable due to the change in land use from fields to highways, which is recorded.

2.7 In paragraph 8, Mr James states that '*The assessment uses both LVIA and WebTAG guidance, but does not follow WebTAG guidance adequately, covered in more detail in the next section of this proof, in particular with reference to the 'most adverse rule*''.

2.8 As noted in paragraph 6.8 of my main proof of evidence, the WebTAG appraisal was undertaken by Atkins in 2018 [CD A.17 ES Appendix 3.1]. WebTAG is used for an earlier stage of scheme development, and it is now more appropriate and robust to use the LVIA assessment. Therefore, my main proof of evidence relates solely to the LVIA produced by AECOM and submitted as part of the Planning Application [CD A.15, Chapter 8]. This LVIA followed the methodology [CD A.17, Appendix 8.2] for the assessment that was agreed at EIA Scoping stage, which did not include WebTAG. As per the following section 1.3 from the TAG Unit A3 guidance, the WebTAG guidance states:

"It is important to recognise the distinction between environmental impact assessment and environmental impact appraisal and to appreciate how these two processes should be linked together during the project cycle … Guidance in this TAG Unit addresses environmental impact appraisal. This is the process of developing environmental impact information for inclusion in a transport appraisal … During Stage 2, further appraisal, environmental impact assessment should proceed through simple and/or detailed assessments (see DMRB LA 101 for an explanation of these terms) as appropriate…"

2.9 In paragraph 8, Mr James suggests that

'*The most important impacts are at:*

- the Thames bridge which significantly impacts on the nationally significant Thames Path National Trail but which is treated as much the same as any other impact;

- the countryside setting of the Clifton Hampden bypass, where the road intrudes into a peaceful enclave of fields, mature hedgerows and trees, woodland, on the edge of the village and criss-crossed with footpaths enabling public access;

- the viaduct across the gravel lakes to the South of the Thames (not even addressed in earlier assessments, as it was apparently not realised that the lakes were there), where a tranquil water body of increasing biodiversity and potential recreational value will have its character shattered by a squat brutalist concrete viaduct;

- and the Appleford sidings, where the importance of visual impact on residents is significantly underplayed.'

2.10 Significant effects have been identified in the LVIA at the Thames Path National Trail, Clifton Hampden and Appleford Sidings. These are detailed at paragraph 6.9 of my main proof of evidence and have, therefore, not been underplayed as suggested by Mr James.

2.11 In relation to the gravel lakes area, I understand this to relate to the area north west of Appleford, where the Scheme crosses the River Thames on viaduct. I acknowledge that the current sensitivity of this area (LLCA 9) would be higher due to the presence of the lakes and the now maturing wetlands than that stated in the LVIA, and the landscape effect would therefore be significant. There are no residual significant visual effects predicted within the LVIA as, whilst it was understood that access paths may be created in future following completion of the Scheme, there was no public access to this area at the time of the assessment and, therefore, no visual receptors identified or requested in this location. It is acknowledged that there would be significant adverse visual effects for recreational users.

2.12 In paragraph 9, Mr James raises '*the issue of tree loss and inadequate replacement planting*'. The issue of tree loss is fully understood, and the proposed replacements are considered adequate, as detailed in paragraph 6.24 of my main proof of evidence.

WebTAG Landscape Appraisal

2.13 In response to Mr James' comments in relation to WebTAG (pages 3 and 4), my response is as detailed at paragraph 2.8 above, which refers to paragraph 6.8 of my main proof of evidence. Mr Alex Maddox also refers to the subject of WebTAG from a general EIA methodology point of view in paragraph 3.2.24 of his main proof of evidence.

2.14 Mr James is incorrect to suggest that the prediction of a moderate adverse effect is a misnomer. This is a clear conclusion via an assessment process of identifying the sensitivity of a receptor and the impact of the Scheme and is a significant adverse effect. It is, therefore, not simply referring to a category between large and slight, but to a category which is entirely valid in its own right. The use of definitions from WebTAG is incorrect, as set out in my responses on WebTAG above.

2.15 In paragraph 13, Mr James states that '*The HIF1 Planning Statement's LVIA conclusion (7.4.7) is that "no significant landscape effects are predicted on published landscape character areas". (see my para 8 first bullet above, and my Appendix 1). As outlined above, the TAG 'moderate' impact makes it very unlikely that the effects would not be significant on landscapes of high sensitivity and/or importance'*.

2.16 The conclusion in respect of the LVIA as noted in paragraph 7.4.7 of the Planning Statement [CD A.4] refers to the LVIA [CD A.15, Chapter 8] assessment that there are no significant landscape effects (at year 15) on '*published landscape character areas'*. The LVIA summary does however acknowledge that '*The Scheme will result in a range of significant adverse landscape and visual effects due to the introduction of a new road and river crossing and associated lighting, within a predominantly agricultural landscape*' (LVIA paragraph 8.11.1). Concluding that '*By operational year 15, once the proposed new landscape planting has established across the Scheme, the earthworks will be better integrated into the underlying pattern of landform, the extent of vegetation loss will be mitigated and the perception of the Scheme will reduce. Due to this, there will be no permanent significant landscape effects beyond those at the Site level, which are considered to be inevitable from the change in land use*' (LVIA paragraph 8.11.9). This is addressed further in paragraphs 4.40 to 4.42 of my main proof of evidence.

2.17 Section 11 'Summary Table' of the WebTAG appraisal [CD A.17, Appendix 3.1] also notes the following: '*This WebTAG Environmental Impact Appraisal has been undertaken at an early stage of the Scheme design to highlight the key areas of environmental risk at this Stage…. whilst landscape and townscape need to be incorporated into the design process to ensure mitigation becomes inherent in the design*.' This further supports that the LVIA assessment is the appropriate assessment to be considered, not the earlier WebTAG appraisal.

2.18 In response to WebTAG comments in paragraphs 14-15 of Mr James' proof, as already set out in this rebuttal proof of evidence, the use of TAG as a comparison for this assessment is neither valid nor appropriate given the TAG guidelines and that the Scheme methodology has been agreed with various parties.

2.19 In paragraph 16, Mr James raises that '*A very important principle of WebTAG is the 'most adverse category' rule*'. The LVIA for the Scheme systematically addresses landscape and visual receptors throughout the process and does not provide an overall judgement, as this is not required. As such, it is incorrect to try and link the LVIA conclusions with a WebTAG approach.

Annex 5 and Mature Tree Planting

2.20 In paragraph 17 to 22, Mr James queries the design intent and management of the semi-mature tree planting, as referred to in paragraphs 2.22 to 2.26 of my original proof of evidence.

2.21 The design response of semi-mature trees is appropriate at these locations to provide a more immediate response to the potential visual impact. In terms of the suggestions regarding risk, the Outline Landscape and Biodiversity Management Plan [CD A.11] does set out measures to ensure successful establishment of larger trees, and in my opinion this is perfectly possible to do. A Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) will also follow at condition discharge stage and provide further detail on management and maintenance of all proposed trees (along with other landscape elements of the Scheme).

2.22 Within this section of his proof of evidence (at paragraph 22), Mr James also refers to '*a commitment by OCC Applicant to establish a 'Landscape Enhancement Fund' for community-led additional tree planting. This is possibly somewhat more useful than planting semi-mature trees, but with all such schemes there is many a slip twixt intention and realisation. There are many unanswered questions over management, the ease and cost of land acquisition, maintenance agreements, distribution of funds between District and Parish Councils, and ultimately how effective £50,000 worth of planting across all four sections of HIF1 would be*'.

2.23 The LPA has confirmed that consideration of these measures through detailed design can be addressed by planning condition.

3 RESPONSE TO CHRIS HANCOCK PROOF OF EVIDENCE ON DESIGN

3.1 Section 4.5 of Mr Hancock's proof of evidence relates to '*Bridge Designs'*, where he states '*The Parish Councils commented on the design and appearance of the road bridges and landscaping of the HIF1 scheme on 14th November 2022, see Appendix 2 tab 9 as a reply to the Regulation 25 response issued by OCC. The generally poor and unsympathetic design of three bridges structures have been cited by the Planning Team of the Vale of White Horse District Council in their comments, dated 22 December 2023 to the Regulation 25 response, and by others'*.

3.2 The design of the bridges, in relation to highways requirements and technical constraints, are discussed in Mr Chan's proof of evidence.

3.3 The landscape and visual impact of the bridge designs was considered within the LVIA [CD A.15, Chapter 8], refer to Section 4 of my original proof of evidence where likely effects of the Scheme are summarised in paragraphs 4.18 to 4.31.

Science Bridge

3.4 In paragraph 4.5.1 Mr Hancock states '*The standard of design for the structures of the HIF1 road scheme fall below the requirements local plans. SODC and VoWHDC have commented that the "Science Bridge" fails to meet the objectives of paragraph 3.3 of the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan (the DGTDP),14 see Appendix 2 Tab 9. SODC further states that the poor design is contrary to paragraphs 126, 130 and 131 of the NPPF and core policies 37 and 44 of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1'*.

3.5 Specific measures have been incorporated into the Scheme design regarding the Didcot Science Bridge, and these are described in paragraph 4.13 of my original proof of evidence.

3.6 The landscape assessment on Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCA) 3 Didcot Farmland and LLCA 4 Didcot Industrial considered the impact of the Didcot Science Bridge, and the residual landscape effects, by operational year 15, were predicted to be non-significant (Slight Adverse for LLCA 3 and Neutral for LLCA 4).

3.7 The visual impacts of the Didcot Science Bridge were assessed from representative viewpoints (RV) 4,5,6 and 7. The residual visual effects, by operational year 15, were predicted to range from Neutral to Slight Adverse.

3.8 The revised submission in response to the Regulation 25 Request (November 2022), incorporated changes to the mitigation described for Didcot Science Bridge, including largely retaining the existing hedgerow on the north side of the A4130 and additional trees proposed to further reinforce visual mitigation on the south-west and south-east side of the structure, refer to paragraph 2.10 and 2.11 of my original proof of evidence.

3.9 Furthermore, the landscape masterplans were updated in relation to consultee comments and formed part of the Revised Submission: June 2023 (CD D.134 to D.152), and paragraph 4.34 of my original proof of evidence states '*The Revised Landscape Masterplan Sheet 4 of 19 (CD D.137) shows additional individual tree planting to the southern embankments of Didcot Science Bridge (30 No. trees), over and above the species rich grass with intermittent trees originally proposed'*.

3.10 In consideration of the eight reasons given in the Committee's resolution to refuse planning permission, September 2023, the Applicant proposed measures in correspondence that was attached as Annex 5 to the Planning and Regulation Committee report (CD F.5) that could be provided as part of Planning Conditions, including at Didcot Science Bridge, where, as stated in my original proof of evidence paragraph 2.23, '*a selected number of trees could be planted on the southern verges adjacent to the alignment, on the southern side of the Didcot Railway Line, at a semi-mature size at Operation Year 1. The emphasis is to reduce the immediate magnitude of visual impact at Year 1, and therefore the resulting visual effect, from the key adjacent residents or stakeholders that are affected. Due to vegetation establishment rates, the visual effect will not be reduced at Year 15'.*

Thames Bridge

3.11 In paragraph 4.5.2 Mr Hancock states '*VOWHDC commented "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 bridge will be an attractive feature or sensitive to it's rural setting. A landscape expert has described the river bridge and viaduct 15 as a "low, squat, functional concrete structure, anything but the image of a soaring bridge allowing the landscape to flow effortlessly beneath." The impact of the viaduct and bridge on the riverbanks and overwise tranquil area of the wetlands has not been properly examined*.

3.12 The landscape assessment on Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCA) 9 Didcot Mineral Workings and LLCA 12 Thames Floodplain considered the impact of the River Thames Crossing, and the residual landscape effects, by operational year 15, were predicted to be non-significant (Slight Adverse for both LLCA 9 and LLCA 12).

3.13 The visual impacts of the River Thames Crossing were assessed from representative viewpoint (RV) 16 and views from the Thames Path National Trail, RV 18 to 21. Of these the residual visual effects, by operational year 15, were predicted to be significant for RV 18 (Moderate Adverse) RV 19 (Large Adverse), RV 20 (Large Adverse) and RV 21 (Moderate Adverse).

3.14 Paragraph 2.11 of this rebuttal proof discusses the impact of the viaduct and bridge on the wetland area with regards to changes to landscape sensitivity and presence of visual receptors, since the LVIA was carried out in 2020/2021.

3.15 The revised submission in response to the Regulation 25 Request (November 2022), incorporated changes to the mitigation described for the River Thames Crossing, including a sedum blanket and increased riparian vegetation on the northern side of the River Thames. It was also proposed to colour the acoustic barrier/bridge parapet in a colour palette from the 'North Wessex Downs National Landscape Guidance, refer to paragraph 2.10 and 2.11 of my original proof of evidence.

Appleford Sidings.

3.16 In paragraph 4.5.3 Mr Hancock states '*The proposed alignment of the HIF1 road as it crosses private rail sidings at Appleford requires a bridge structure to form a very acute angle with the rail lines below. The design has been described by engineers as "extremely lazy and wasteful of resources which could be significantly reduced by an improved design. Redundant deck projecting approximately 12m towards the homes in Appleford" has a detrimental "visual impact on Appleford residents". The height of the structure, at more than 10m above adjacent gardens, will dominate the skyline for adjacent dwellings. The structures fail to meet the objectives of NPPF paragraph 126 and for sustainability paragraph 157*'.

3.17 The landscape assessment on Local Landscape Character Area (LLCA) 9 Didcot Mineral Workings considered the impact of the Appleford Sidings Bridge, and the residual landscape effect, by operational year 15, was predicted to be non-significant (Slight Adverse).

3.18 The visual impacts of the Appleford Sidings Bridge were assessed from representative viewpoints (RV) 10 and 11. The residual visual effects, by operational year 15, were predicted to be significant for RV10 (Moderate Adverse) and non-significant (Slight Adverse) for RV 11.

3.19 The revised submission in response to the Regulation 25 Request (November 2022), incorporated changes to the mitigation described for Appleford Sidings Bridge, including substantial areas of proposed planting proposed on the approaches to the crossing, the noise barrier is to include climbing vegetation, and a sedum blanket was proposed on either side of the crossing to help soften the appearance of the structure and provide intrinsic biodiversity value. Refer to paragraph 2.10 and 2.11 of my original proof of evidence.

3.20 In consideration of the eight reasons given in the Committee's resolution to refuse planning permission, September 2023, the Applicant proposed measures in correspondence that was attached as Annex 5 to the Planning and Regulation Committee report (CD F.5) that could be provided as part of Planning Conditions, including at Appleford Sidings Bridge Area, where, as stated in my original proof of evidence paragraph 2.23, '*a selected number of proposed trees within the proposed woodland planting and woodland scrub mix on both the western and eastern side of the Scheme alignment could be implemented at a semi-mature size at Operation Year 1. The emphasis is to reduce the immediate magnitude of visual impact at Year 1, and therefore the resulting visual effect, from the key adjacent residents or stakeholders that are affected. Due to vegetation establishment rates, the visual effect will not be reduced at Year 15*'.

4 STATEMENT OF TRUTH AND DECLARATION

4.1 I confirm that, insofar, as the facts stated in my rebuttal evidence are within my own knowledge, I have made clear what they are and I believe them to be true and that the opinion I have expressed represent my true and complete professional opinion.

4.2 I confirm that my rebuttal evidence includes all facts that I regard as being relevant to the opinions that I have expressed and that attention is drawn to any matter which would affect the validity of those opinions

4.3 I confirm that my duty to the Inquiry as an expert witness overrides any duty to those instructing or paying me, and I have understood this duty and complied with it in giving my evidence impartially and objectively, and I will continue to comply with that duty as required.

4.4 I confirm that, in preparing this rebuttal evidence, I have assumed that same duty that would apply to me when giving my expert opinion in a court of law under oath or affirmation. I confirm that this duty overrides any duty to those instructing or pay me, and I have understood this duty and complied with it in giving my evidence impartially and objectively, and I will continue to comply with that duty as required.

4.5 I confirm that I have no conflicts of interest of any kind other than those already disclosed in this rebuttal evidence.

JANE ELIZABETH ASH

9 February 2024