

This is the 2nd time in 3 years that South Oxfordshire has been disenfranchised. In 2020 Robert Jenrick 'directed' SODC to adopt the highly controversial Local Plan 2035 (LP35). The call-in of the rejected HIF-1 application is a further assault on local democracy and a most unusual occurrence in the case of a rejected application.

On 18 July last year an unequivocal decision was taken on the HIF-1 application by OCC's Planning & Regulation (P&R) committee, after **25 speakers**, including **SIX parish councils**, were heard: the application was decisively rejected 7 against, 2 for. This overwhelming rejection reflected the public opinion from the consultations:

1st round of consultation: 97% were objections / 3% in favour.

2nd round of consultation on amendments: 98% were objections.

3rd round (and the least responses): 96% were objections.

It is important to point out that the route for what we now call HIF1 was outside any safeguarded land in the version of SODC Local Plan that was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. It is a brand new route.

There was no public exhibition for this new and now 'preferred route', as there had been for the previous 4 or 5 routes. No evidence base was provided for its sudden preference and the public consultation took place during the Covid-19 national lockdown which meant that the Europa School, for one, were unaware of how close the proposed river crossing is to the school and playing fields.

It was only at the Examination in Public that Culham's environmental consultant, Nicola Simonson, pointed out to the Inspector that the route was not in the maps of safeguarded land, and was about half a mile closer to Culham than even the nearest of the previous routes. The Inspector called on the Oxfordshire County Council representative to explain and it was at this point that the route was added to the LP35 as a Modification. Just like that.

There are five rural parishes opposing this enormous scheme (Appleford, Clifton Hampden, Culham, Nuneham Courtenay and Sutton Courtenay (the Neighbouring Parish Councils Joint Committee). Huge investments of personal time and locally raised funds have seen the commissioning of expert reports to point out the flaws in the scheme at many levels including inadequate traffic modelling, conflict with existing policies, danger to health and wellbeing and damage to the environment, Air Quality and climate.

Culham and our rural community will be severely harmed by the plan. Two new roundabouts on our only east-west road, the A415, will cause additional queuing and in close proximity to the Europa School and its playing fields. The proposed new roads and their induced demand will undeniably bring extra traffic from Didcot and the A34 directly to the A415 very close to Culham's highly regarded International Baccalaureat school, endangering staff and pupils and parents, whose health and safety will be at risk. Traffic jams and the need to be on school on time will also raise stress levels for parents and children with the risk of mental health issues.

The HIF road, either side of the viaduct across the River Thames (itself a truly ugly design) will undoubtedly need to be built at a raised level -- like the railway -- in order to act as a causeway on floodplain and fields that have been waterlogged for months. This will bring excessive, and continuous, traffic noise to the Culham village and, at night, light pollution to the village and nature's creatures.

Culham is situated in a loop of the river and this January and February's floods saw the 9ft deep lock overflowing, and floodplains bringing water very close to dwellings. If more land -- more Green Belt -- is taken for roads and roundabouts we will lose vital areas of absorption and the flood risk will surely be increased. Alarm bells should ring knowing that the A415 from Culham to Abingdon is called The Causeway, and has a raised pedestrian causeway, built in the 1400s. The medieval bridge over the river, with cottages still in Culham Parish, was partially closed for over a year for repairs of cracks. OCC's traffic modelling ignores Abingdon and fails to consider how the town's bridges and one-way system could hope to cope with the increased traffic.

Much hyped in the HIF documents is the "20km of walking and cycling infrastructure". In 2017 we were sold the dream: A 'Garden Line': '*a green ribbon connecting Didcot Town Centre with Culham Science Centre*' with cycle and footpaths; and in the longer term '*an extended zone*' for driverless pods or overhead transport system'. In its place, HIF: busy roads and consequent noise and emissions, and a cycle lane, separated by, I quote, a '*narrow strip of sedum blanket*'. A perfectly horrid walk or cycle.

Moreover, in addition to crossing the river and the Thames National Path, the route of HIF crosses or encompasses **13** footpaths and bridleways in, and connecting, our villages, and part of National Cycle Route 5, a very pleasant off-road cycle from Sutton Courtenay to Didcot, ruining these rural paths, with some 'permanent closures and diversions' to these Public rights of way, cutting off vital links between our villages. (see para 142 Direct Impacts on ProW).

The world has changed dramatically since it was first considered. There is a climate emergency, there are more sustainable ways to move people from point to point and there is a very prevalent Work from Home culture, including c. 50% of employees at Culham Campus (formerly Culham Science Centre). The scheme has not moved with the times. It is out of date. The huge destruction of the landscape is unnecessary. The site area of 155 hectares is predominantly agricultural land including wetland habitat. There will be a terrible loss of hedgerows and tree canopy -- green lungs and noise inhibitors. And the loss of yet more Green Belt in Culham which is currently serving the purposes of Green Belt.

Para 200 in respect of the Landscape and Visual Impact is unequivocal. There would be "inevitable and significant harmful effect", only "reduced in the longer term (after 15 years)" but would "remain significant adverse in the most part."

We dread the legacy the scheme would leave.

Can I beg something, Madam -- and apologies if I offend my co-objectors: you will note that most objecting speakers you hear in the course of the inquiry are grey haired and elderly speakers, like me. Do not be misled into thinking that the young do not object. We are not

NIMBYS. We are not against proportionate new housing. We have many young people, young families in our vibrant communities. Many of them are in Culham and neighbouring villages because of the Europa School and are bilingual or trilingual. These young people support us. Young people have full time jobs, they are raising children. They will come out to rallies and fundraising events at weekends when they can, but do not have time to come and speak at hearings or read and produce hundred-page documents.

They want some housing, and they want safe spaces, safe roads, so that their kids and future generations can walk safely to school. They are relying on us to defend our village, our villages, our environment.

Alternative options and in particular ones that encourage a modal shift away from cars have NOT been properly explored. We firmly believe that the £300+ million of public money could be put to better use. And that it IS possible to deliver the employment and housing needs of the district, and reduce the peak hour bottlenecks WITHOUT HIF-1.

Just a few months ago, on December 19th, Michael Gove highlighted the 5 factors guiding the revised National Planning Policy Framework, NPPF. The BIDEN principles:

BEAUTY, INFRASTRUCTURE, DEMOCRACY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD.

Spelling BIDEN.

The HIF-1 scheme certainly fails to meet four of these principles and the Infrastructure proposed is flawed and not fit for purpose.