

HIF Inquiry Speech

If I may start by introducing myself and my background.

I have owned and managed my family's Private Hire business, based in Didcot for over 40 years. I grew up and was educated in the town.

I am proud to be the sixth generation of my family to carry on the family tradition of being traders in Didcot and the surrounding area.

For the last 15 years I have been chair of Didcot First, a cross community, non-aligned organization that brings together major employers, educators and community groups. I am trustee and active committee member for local sports groups, determined that future generations in the town have better sports facilities than I experienced.

I would like to tell you my thoughts on Didcot. A town I describe as living on the edge!

In the 1974 boundary changes Didcot found itself located on the edge of two district councils, feeling unwanted and uncared for by both, massively disconnected with South Oxfordshire its legal home, whilst excluded from its local neighboring towns based in the Vale.

Didcot is also on the southern edge of Oxfordshire, and for years had very little influence on the plans of the county. Fortunately, unlike the majority of the county, our economy is not dependent on the city of Oxford. Our rail links has always helped us be equally influenced by Reading and London.

Historically, with some compelling evidence, residents of Didcot feel strongly that they get the short straw when it comes to support from our neighboring villages, district and county councils.

Didcot has been a focus for housing growth for over half a century. From the arrival of the railway it has grown rapidly from a Hamlet, through to a village, a small town and now a major town with a population heading to over 50K, probably before any of the subjects being discussed at this inquiry might come to fruition... if indeed they do.

Both South and Vale have consistently chosen the Didcot area for substantial parts of its housing development. The community assets and infrastructure investment typically lag 30 years behind.

Without doubt Didcot will continue to expand with more houses for the rest of my lifetime. And that is why this significant investment in infrastructure is so critical for its residents.

Didcot is also at another edge.

Didcot sits at the heart of a science and technology powerhouse, referred to as Science Vale. We are surrounded by companies and research facilities whose potential for innovation from breakthrough technologies is miles beyond comparison with any other similar sized town in the UK.

The campuses of Culham, Harwell and Milton Park are home to innovation that brings potential for massive economic growth, across a breadth of science and technology that is simply mind blowing.

This area is regarded as a world leader in matters ranging from fusion energy, revolutionary environment protecting jet engines, robotics, battery development, fighting cancer, conquering malaria, learning about DNA, microbiology, building satellites understanding this universe and exploring further universes.

The list is virtually endless.

The economic potential and our opportunity to develop crucial environment changing skills and knowledge, by using the research and development work being undertaken in the greater Didcot area is astonishing. It is not only of vital importance to Didcot and Oxfordshire, but can play a key part of our national economy for generations to come.

The campuses need to recruit the best brains from around the world to come and work there. They are competing with Silicon Valley and Boston Massachusetts, not Swindon and Banbury.

A significant majority of these high quality recruits will look to live in the new houses that are being constructed in and around our town.

For the UK to achieve the full economic benefit it is absolutely key that the town of Didcot is seen as a positive and pleasant place to live.

Didcot must have good infrastructure to allow these workers to travel to work, whether it is by foot, bicycle, bus, car or rail.

The HIF proposal addresses three key 'roadblocks' that have been severe problems for many years and simply will not cope with the further housing expansion needed to accommodate the demand by growth in jobs.

At present, our areas ancient travel infrastructure is choked to capacity and some more.

It is fascinating to review current key transport crossings in our area.

Along the 40 mile stretch of the River Thames from Caversham to Oxford there have only been two new river crossing built in the last 160 years.

The bridge on the Wallingford bypass transformed Wallingford, when opened in 1993.

Donnington Bridge in south Oxford was opened in 1962 and undoubtedly had the same affect.

Our other river crossings are not quite so modern.

The bridge between Clifton Hampden and Long Wittenham is the next youngest, constructed in 1867.

Shillingford Bridge arrived in 1827.

The bridge between Sutton Courtenay and Culham has been in its current form since 1807.

The current town bridge in Wallingford took its current form in 1810, but the majority of it was created in medieval times.

Abingdon Bridge has been in situ since 1416.

All of Didcot's nearest river crossings were built long before the motor car had even been invented.

The routes to Culham and Clifton Hampden are both increasingly prone to closure because of flooding, leaving Culham Science Centre workers living south of the Thames massive detours for days or weeks at a time.

The proposed infrastructure has been required for decades. Without it, Didcot will have calamitous travel problems and this in turn will have a major impact on the UK being a world leader in the essentially environmental revolution and the green economy.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.