

I'm here speaking as County Councillor for Berinsfield & Garsington Division, which also includes Culham, Clifton Hampden, Nuneham Courtenay and many more parishes affected in various ways by this scheme.

I should also note that I'm a South Oxfordshire district councillor with cabinet responsibility for Development and Regeneration, which includes the Garden Communities of Didcot and Berinsfield. As such, I recognise this is a very complex matter with a lot of knock on impacts whatever happens.

Even back in 2019, when SODC was reconsidering its local plan options, it was apparent that there was a strong determination from government ministers for this road scheme to proceed. Since that time, at least 4 ministers have intervened in this matter either using their powers or by correspondence.

Few question the amazing science and spin off business opportunities created at Culham Campus and Harwell, although many do question whether this was the best or most imaginative way to connect them.

I certainly don't doubt that Didcot has a long way to catch up in terms of infrastructure to match the housing it has already had built, with much more to follow.

Even if this entire scheme proceeds as set out, Didcot will still have many more requirements, for example the Didcot LCWIP has identified multiple necessary interventions at a cost of many millions of pounds. The Garden Village in Berinsfield will also require additional infrastructure links.

The pitfall of HIF schemes especially where they are used to backfill needed infrastructure for homes already built, is that they require large numbers of additional housing to make the business case, which themselves create additional infrastructure requirements.

This has not gone unnoticed by residents in my area, who have tried to vote in representatives who will do something about this. However, even when we tried to negotiate with CLG as long ago as 2019, this has not been possible, and ministers have stepped in. The sense of local agency is lost. Given the keen interest and repeated interventions, it is probably best that the government is now taking responsibility for this decision via this inquiry.

I was part of the OCC p&R committee which reviewed the initial much -delayed application, and I think we were rightly frustrated by the lack of information on several key points. Some of it has now been supplied. However, I will not reprise those arguments now, as I know others will make the points better than I can, including the Joint Parishes group.

I do ask for consideration of the severe impacts on my division, particularly of where the road ends just outside Clifton Hampden, and where it connects towards the heavily congested approach to Abingdon bridge.

We are assured that improvements will be made at Golden Ball roundabout, but what those are are not specified. I would hope for and expect more detail on this.

Only a couple of days ago, the roads onwards from there both northwards and eastwards were submerged in water and impassable. What other improvements will need to be made, and what will be the cumulative impact and cost of all of that?

When you are looking at the carbon impact of this scheme, I believe these impacts need to be considered and factored in. There is a current live appeals court case relating to cumulative climate impact of roads in East Anglia where a verdict has not yet been delivered.

And have we considered the overall impact on flooding enough? It's readily apparent that we are getting more and more localised flooding.

I do welcome some of the additional commitments that have been made since the original application. One vital one we are still waiting for is the Didcot Area Travel Plan - this could at least ensure that we are not just adding more and more road capacity to refill with traffic, and provide reassurance to residents that this is a fully thought through approach. I hope you'll urge the authority to provide this urgently.

Whatever the eventual decision, I think you for the time spent considering the issues and for listening carefully to residents concerns.