

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990
PINS REFERENCE:**

APP/U3100/V/23/3326625

**STATEMENT OF CASE
OF
THE UNITED KINGDOM ATOMIC ENERGY AUTHORITY**

CALLED IN PLANNING APPLICATION:

**CORRIDOR BETWEEN THE A34 MILTON INTERCHANGE
AND
THE B4015 NORTH OF CLIFTON HAMPDEN**

DECEMBER 2023

Carter Jonas

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Statement of Case is presented by the UK Atomic Energy Authority (“**the UKAEA**”), which is a ‘Rule 6’ party in this case.

1.2 The scheme the subject of the inquiry is known as The Didcot Garden Town HIF roads scheme (“**the Scheme**”) and is more fully described as:

‘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.’

1.3 Oxfordshire County Council (“**OCC**”) is promoting the Scheme. Pursuant to reg. 3 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations, OCC applied to itself for planning permission for the Scheme. The application for planning permission for the Scheme (“**the Application**”) was considered by OCC’s Planning & Regulation Committee (“**the Committee**”) at a meeting on 17 and 18 July. The Committee resolved to refuse the Application and to refuse to grant planning permission for the Scheme.

1.4 Before OCC issued a decision notice to give effect to the Committee’s resolution, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (“**the Secretary of State**”) called in the Application pursuant to s. 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (“**TCPA 1990**”) on 25 July 2023.

1.5 The Committee met again on 27 September 2023 to consider a further report from OCC’s officers which: (1) explained the Secretary of State’s call in; and (2) sought to refine what OCC’s reasons for refusal would have been, had the Application been determined by OCC. At that meeting, the Committee agreed that its final reasons for refusal would have been (in summary):

*‘Reason 1 – The Climate Change Committee’s June 2023 Report to Parliament had not been properly taken into account in the application.
“This could be managed by an appropriate condition.”*

*Reason 2 – Lack of Very Special Circumstances for the development set against Green Belt Policy.
“Not maintained.”*

*Reason 3 – The impact of traffic on Abingdon and Didcot had not been assessed in the application.
“The committee maintains a concern about this and asks in reaching their recommendation to the Secretary of State, the inspector only recommended*

approval if they were satisfied that the traffic modelling carried out had robustly examined.”

Reason 4 – *Noise impacts on Appleford.*

“The committee maintains a concern about this and asks in reaching their recommendation to the Secretary of State, the inspector only recommended approval if they were satisfied that the benefits did outweigh the harms.”

Reason 5 – *The absence of a Health Impact Assessment*

“Not maintained.”

Reason 6 – *The harm to landscape.*

“This could be managed by an appropriate condition.”

Reason 7 – *The Science Bridge was not of adequate design for a gateway feature to Didcot.*

“This could be managed by an appropriate condition.’

- 1.6 At the time of writing, UKAEA awaits a further ‘technical note’ from OCC as the Local Planning Authority. It is expected that this ‘technical note’ will explain OCC’s position as the Local Planning Authority on the reasons for refusal, in particular reasons 3 and 4.
- 1.7 The Secretary of State has indicated the matters which he particularly wishes to be informed about, for the purposes of his consideration of the application are:
- (1) the extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for delivering a sufficient supply of homes as set out in the NPPF (Chapter 5); and
 - (2) the extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for building a strong, competitive economy as set out in the NPPF (Chapter 6); and
 - (3) the extent to which the proposed development is consistent with the development plan for the area; and
 - (4) any other matters the Inspector considers relevant.
- 1.8 Regarding matter (4), the Inspector has identified the following relevant other matters:
- (1) whether the extent of traffic modelling is robust, including wider traffic impacts and consideration of Oxfordshire County Council’s Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (“**the LTCP**”);
 - (2) the effect of the proposal’s carbon impact and contribution to climate change;
 - (3) the effect of noise from the proposal upon the living conditions of people living and working in Appleford;

- (4) whether the design for the Science Bridge is suitable; and
- (5) whether there are any reasonable alternatives.

1.9 The Inspector has also indicated that the evidence for the called in inquiry will be dealt with on a 'topic' led basis. These topics will be:

- (1) strategic need and benefits;
- (2) scheme selection and alternatives;
- (3) technical highways engineering;
- (4) transport planning;
- (5) environmental effects; and
- (6) planning policy

1.10 With these topics in mind, the UKAEA's case will focus on topics 1, 4, 5 and 6.

2.0 SUMMARY OF THE CASE FOR UKAEA

2.1 UKAEA supports the Scheme and submits that planning permission should be granted.

2.2 The Scheme will:

- (1) meet a critical need for improved infrastructure in the District;
- (2) support the delivery of essential sustainable development within the District; and
- (3) as a result, unlock the delivery of significant economic, social and environmental benefits within the District and more widely, across the UK.

2.3 The impact of the Scheme on the development of Culham Science Centre ("**CSC**"), the headquarters of the UKAEA, is one of the foremost examples of how the Scheme will deliver significant benefits for both the District and the UK.

3.0 THE UKAEA

3.1 The UKAEA is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

3.2 The UKAEA researches fusion energy and related technologies. UKAEA's mission is to lead the delivery of sustainable fusion energy, to position the UK as a leader in

sustainable nuclear energy and to maximise the scientific and economic benefit of this research.

4.0 CULHAM SCIENCE CENTRE

- 4.1 CSC is situated approximately 2.75 miles to the east of Abingdon, 4.5 miles north of Didcot and 5.5 miles south of Oxford.
- 4.2 CSC is owned and run by the UKAEA.
- 4.3 CSC occupies land formerly used as a naval airfield. In 1959, the UKAEA sought a site for a new laboratory for plasma physics and nuclear fusion research. The site needed to be within easy reach of the UKAEA's existing facilities at Harwell and Aldermaston, and in close proximity to Oxford University. The old naval airfield at Culham came nearest to meeting those requirements and on 29 January 1960, the UKAEA secured planning permission from OCC for the development of the site as a research establishment with access (OCC reference M.1015/59).
- 4.4 The laboratory, which covers some 80 hectares, was conceived, planned and built as a whole, and remains largely as it was when construction was completed in the mid 1960s. The original complex of buildings extended to approximately 59,000m².
- 4.5 CSC combines world-class, publicly funded research into fusion power; commercial technology organisations and Culham Innovation Centre, to create a powerhouse of high technology innovation and enterprise in South Oxfordshire. CSC is an established part of the southern Oxfordshire cluster of education, science and technology, now known as Science Vale, and has established a broad high technology business base. The UKAEA is a partner in Science Vale and as such, is committed to working together with the other partners, including the Oxfordshire authorities and Local Enterprise Partnership, to help to promote and develop the Science Vale area as an internationally recognised location for enterprise and innovation in science and technology.
- 4.6 The CSC forms a key part of Science Vale and the Oxfordshire Knowledge Spine and is one of the largest employment centres in the County. CSC currently supports over 2,300 jobs. It also has policy support for significant further growth under Policy STRAT8 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 ("**the Local Plan**"), which sits alongside planned housing growth on the allocated 'Land Adjacent to Culham Science Centre' Strategic Housing Site (Policy STRAT 9 of the Local Plan).
- 4.7 The UKAEA is committed to further develop CSC, in line with the ambition recorded in Culham Science Centre Framework Masterplan (January 2022). To that end, UKAEA has obtained planning permission for substantial development within the CSC, including, most recently, 9000 square metres of office/research space (South Oxfordshire District Council ("**SODC**") reference P16/S1753/O) and a fusion demonstration plan (SODC reference P22/S1410/FUL. UKAEA continues to progress other development within the CSC in accordance with the Framework Masterplan.

5.0 THE UKAEA'S CASE ON THE INSPECTOR'S IDENTIFIED TOPICS

5.1 The UKAEA's case is summarised below, referring to the Inspector's relevant 'topics' in turn.

1) Strategic need and benefits

5.2 The need for the Scheme first emerged through the Local Plan drafting exercises of SODC and the Vale of White Horse District Council around 10 years ago. The Scheme is intended to relieve development pressures, which are a legacy of the previous Core Strategy in South Oxfordshire. The Scheme is also required to support new growth as allocated in the extant South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2034 and the Vale of White Local Plan 2031 - in all, the delivery of around 14,000 homes, and several thousand jobs.

5.3 CSC is at the northern end of the Scheme. The Scheme will unlock further employment development at CSC. The Scheme is very clearly the best solution for the transport constraints on future development at CSC. Although other transport options may allow a degree of future development at CSC, they are all considerably inferior alternatives.

5.4 In turn, further development at CSC will support the UK's Fusion Energy Strategy at CSC. Towards Fusion Energy: the UK Government's fusion strategy¹ was launched in October 2021 placing CSC (and its growth) at the centre of the UK's Fusion and sustainability ambitions. This was supported by the injection of c £184m of funding via the Fusion Foundations Programme (FFP). The government has shown its commitment to realising the Fusion strategy by announcing a £700M package of support within the UK's Energy strategy² (which incidentally was launched by the Prime Minister from the CSC, exemplifying its importance) and only this month announcing an additional £650M for fusion development³ UKAEA has been working to establish a Framework Masterplan for the site and to deliver the first phase of this by 31st March 2025. This includes the delivery of a new Main Gate building and infrastructure works directly linked to the Scheme.

5.5 The consequential risk of the Scheme not being delivered is that the UKAEA's planned infrastructure works will no longer be deliverable within the FFP funding window. Furthermore, UKAEA will miss out on opportunities to improve Active Travel (improved cycle routes for example) and support the modal shift towards a more sustainable "campus" that the Scheme is due to enable.

5.6 In addition, the failure to deliver the Scheme would undermine the vision in the Local Plan for the development of the CSC. The Local Plan recognises CSC's status as '*the leading UK centre for fusion research technology and [its] international importance*' as well as '*the key role of the CSC site and supports and encourages its redevelopment*'.⁴ However, the Local Plan also recognises that CSC cannot expand without the necessary infrastructure, including road infrastructure.⁵ The Scheme is a specific

¹ [Towards fusion energy: the UK government's fusion strategy \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

² [Powering Up Britain - The Net Zero Growth Plan \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

³ [Government announces up to £650 million for UK alternatives to Euratom R&T - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

⁴ See paragraphs 3.67 and 3.68.

⁵ See paragraph 3.67.

response to that need (amongst others) and a failure to deliver the Scheme will be directly harmful to the objectives of the Local Plan.

- 5.7 UKAEA's Framework Masterplan clearly articulates the vision for redevelopment of CSC. It is ambitious and, with the right supporting road infrastructure, will deliver significant growth on site both in terms of building density and job creation. Consistently with the Government's Plan for Growth and its support for the science and technology sector, and in particular Fusion-related research and development, these high-quality jobs - bringing together those working directly in the private Fusion sector and those in its wider supply chain – will support the local economy as the transition to Net Zero continues.
- 5.8 The UKAEA will explain its local investment and growth plans in detail at the inquiry.
- 5.9 In summary on this topic, UKAEA will demonstrate that (1) its own development needs at CSC are a good example of the strategic need for the Scheme within the District; and (2) the benefits that will arise from unlocking future development at CSC (and the adjacent planned strategic housing site) will have a significant effect at both a local (District) scale and at a national scale, given the critical importance of UKAEA's work to the UK as a whole.

4) Transport planning

- 5.10 There are capacity constraints on the local road network, and UKAEA's consultants must work very flexibility and innovatively to find solutions to the existing challenges. Part of the strategic and Plan led response to the local road network constraints was the promotion of the Scheme.
- 5.11 Planning applications for growth at CSC, which are currently with SODC, are contingent upon the Scheme progressing.
- 5.12 Should the Scheme not be consented, the consequential (and inevitably) failure by OCC to upgrade the road network in the area, in particular tackling long standing traffic issues, will make realising the development potential of the site more challenging.
- 5.13 The UKAEA will explain how it has worked strategically, and in detail, with OCC to support finding solutions to the local highway network constraints and set out how what is currently proposed is an improvement to the situation, and represents appropriate and important provision of transport infrastructure.
- 5.14 In summary on this topic, UKAEA will demonstrate that its own transport constraints are a good example of the issues which the Scheme is intended to address and that the Scheme represents the best way to overcome those constraints.

5) Environmental effects

- 5.15 It is important to note that the UKAEA is at the forefront of unlimited and climate resilient energy creation. The fusion research programme truly is a world leader in managing the environmental effects of humankind.

- 5.16 Not delivering the Scheme will place in jeopardy UKAEA's mission to lead the delivery of sustainable fusion energy and the scientific and economic benefit. This has not only national but global significance which will be explained by the UKAEA in its evidence.
- 5.17 The UKAEA will also detail how the delivery of the Scheme will improve active and sustainable travel; it is not a road scheme simply to support more car journeys - the intention is that improved bus services, rail services and cycle and pedestrian connections will be provided alongside the road construction programme. This is of particular importance to the UKAEA and its active travel programme which will also be explained at the inquiry.
- 5.18 In summary on this topic, UKAEA will demonstrate that the delivery of the Scheme will give rise to positive environmental effects of significant importance.

6) Planning policy

- 5.19 The UKAEA will set out how the Scheme is a plan led and strategic solution to a known constraint. The roads will support the delivery of a range of strategic growth allocations in the Local Plan, in particular the substantial planned investment and growth at CSC.
- 5.20 The CSC is 'inset' from the Oxford Green Belt and is allocated under Policy STRAT8 for significant growth in the Local Plan. The CSC also forms a key part of two regional employment strategies: "Science Vale" and the "Knowledge Spine," and is one of the largest employment centres in Oxfordshire. CSC currently supports around 4,000 jobs.
- 5.21 The supporting text to Policy STRAT8 states that:

"The delivery of the following infrastructure is expected to be complete in 2024, as it is to be forward funded by the Government's 'Housing and Infrastructure Fund' and other existing funding:

- the Didcot to Culham River Crossing; and*
- the Clifton Hampden Bypass."*

- 5.22 Policy STRAT8 is a key component in the overall strategy for the District. See Policy STRAT1 of the Local Plan which specifically identifies development in the Science Vale, including at Culham as being a focus of major new development.
- 5.23 The land for the road scheme is also 'safeguarded' through Local Plan Policy TRANS3: Safeguarding of Land for Strategic Transport Schemes.
- 5.24 UKAEA worked closely with SODC and OCC, in its role as highway authority, to secure the Policy STRAT 8 allocation. The Inspector appointed to examine the then emerging Local Plan commented in his report (at his paragraph 112) that:

'[Culham Science Centre] is internationally important for research, and it is essential that change and growth can be accommodated in the future. The purpose of the allocation is to enable the site in its entirety to realise its full potential as a science campus where publicly funded science research and commercial technology growth can flourish.'

- 5.25 Crucially, the Inspector also concluded (again at his paragraph 121) that accompanying infrastructure was necessary to help facilitate growth at CSC and the adjacent housing allocation for 3,500 new homes and associated services and facilities (Policy STRAT9: Land adjacent to Culham Science Centre):

'Policy STRAT9 [Land Adjacent to Culham Science Centre] requires contributions towards a new crossing of the River Thames between Culham and Didcot and a bypass of Clifton Hampden (as clarified by MM12) and they must be delivered prior to any significant development at Culham. The intention is that the transport schemes will be delivered by 2024. The site is particularly well located in respect of the planned Didcot to Culham River Crossing and the Clifton Hampden Bypass, which are not only road links but also include pedestrian and cycle links and will help to facilitate new bus services, and there are also other opportunities for sustainable transport modes; in the interests of creating a sustainable development, MM12 requires high quality walking and cycling facilities and infrastructure to support public transport within the site.'

- 5.26 The delivery of the Scheme is designed to improve active and sustainable travel; it is not a road scheme simply to support more car journeys - the intention is that improved bus services, rail services and cycle and pedestrian connections will be provided alongside the road construction programme as part of a wider package of S106 measures linked to the proposed growth in housing.

6.0 STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND

- 6.1 The UKAEA is working with (a) the Council as the LPA, and (b) the Council as the applicant (and potentially other Rule 6 'supports') to produce Statements of Common Ground in good time before the Inquiry.

7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 In conclusion, UKAEA's position on the issues identified by the Secretary of State is that the Scheme:

- (1) will support significant – internationally important – economic growth and investment;
- (2) will support the complimentary delivery of new homes; and
- (3) is directly supported by – and in accordance with - the development plan.

- 7.2 UKAEA's position on the additional issues identified by the Inspector (so far as relevant to its interest in the CSC) is that:

- (1) OCC's traffic modelling is robust; OCC has had adequate regard to wider traffic impacts; and the Scheme is consistent with the LTCP;

- (2) the Scheme's impact on carbon is acceptable and the Scheme will make a positive contribution to climate change;
- (4) the design for the Science Bridge is suitable; and
- (5) there are no reasonable alternatives which should be pursued instead of the Scheme.

7.3 Overall, the UKAEA's position is that the Scheme is supported by the development plan and national planning policy, the harms are limited, and the need, benefits and other matters in support of the grant of planning permission are substantial. Accordingly, the Scheme is in accordance with the development plan, read as a whole, and the other material considerations support the conclusion that planning permission should be granted. It follows that the Secretary of State should grant planning permission for the Scheme without delay.