TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 – SECTION 77

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE) (ENGLAND) ORDER 2015

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (INQUIRIES PROCEDURE) (ENGLAND) RULES 2000

SUMMARY OF PROOF OF EVIDENCE

APPLICATION BY OXFORD COUNTY COUNCIL

Emma Baker BA (Hons) MRTPI on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council

Appeal reference: PCU/RTI/U3100/3326455

Council's reference: P23/S2955/CM

January 2024

INTRODUCTION

1. I am Emma Baker, a Chartered Town Planner (MRTPI) holding a Bachelor of Arts (hons) Town Planning Degree and a Post Graduate Diploma in Town and Country Planning. I am employed by both South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council as a Planning Policy Team Leader. I have 20 years of experience working in various planning policy roles in local government, including over 17 years in lead policy roles.

Scope of Evidence

2. My Proof of Evidence considers three topics including the need for and benefits of the scheme, whether the transport modelling on which the proposal is based is robust and takes account of any significant traffic impacts in the wider area, and whether the proposal would make acceptable provision for sustainable travel, including walking and cycling and accord with the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP).

3. My evidence should be read in conjunction with the other Proof of Evidence for South Oxfordshire District Council prepared by Emma Bowerman.

THE NEED AND BENEFITS OF THE SCHEME

Wider employment and housing objectives

Housing

4. Funding was awarded for the HIF1 Scheme in 2019, following a competitive bid process. An assessment panel were required to review bid documents' claims about the links between potential housing sites and the HIF scheme being promoted.

5. The HIF1 scheme is consistent with the Government's aim of boosting the supply of housing. The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 included a housing

requirement in Policy STRAT2 of 23,550 dwellings. The planned housing supply totals 30,056 dwellings, exceeding the evidenced housing need by 27%.

6. During the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 examination in 2020, a calculation was undertaken to assess how many homes HIF1 would underpin and it was provided in a note (Core Document G.16) to the Local Plan examination. It demonstrated that HIF1 would underpin at least 19,319 homes directly.

7. The homes linked to HIF1 are plan-led, in adopted development plans (Core Document G.1, G.2.1 and G.2.7). The planned homes and the HIF1 scheme have developed as an integrated, sound, and tested package, which is plan-led and funded together with the necessary infrastructure.

8. Significant weight should be placed on the ability of HIF1 to help support the delivery of the housing supply established in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

Employment

9. The HIF1 scheme will unlock the potential of Science Vale to deliver significant economic, social, and environmental benefits across the area and for the UK. This was part of the rationale for the focus on Science Vale that was adopted for the spatial strategy for the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

10. The planned employment development directly linked to HIF1 include 9.5 hectares of employment around Didcot in South Oxfordshire, the redevelopment and intensification of Culham Science Centre, and 7.3 hectares (net) of new employment and at least 5 hectares of additional employment land at Berinsfield.

11. Significant weight should be placed on how the scheme aligns with paragraph 85 of the NPPF by supporting economic growth and productivity, creating conditions for businesses to invest and expand, and allowing areas to build on their strengths. Significant weight should be placed on the ability of HIF1 to address

infrastructure challenges to secure a significant employment development of high value within Science Vale.

Development and local transport policy framework

12. The emerging Joint Local Plan has reached its second Regulation 18 consultation. It is at a relatively early stage and only limited weight can be afforded to it. In any case, the emerging Joint Local Plan is reliant on the sites that have not yet been delivered from the existing adopted plans.

13. The relevant current transport policy framework includes Oxfordshire County Council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 2022 (Core Document G.4). South Oxfordshire District Council had not raised concerns regarding the scheme's compliance with the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.

Identification of broad need

14. The commitments in the previous South Oxfordshire Core Strategy and the outcomes of wider economic strategies as well as the transport evidence pointed to significant demand and pressure on the road and rail network.

15. In 2016 when the South Oxfordshire Local Plan was early in development, transport modelling work was being undertaken to support the Local Plan, the Local Transport Plan at that time (LTP4, Core Document G.5) and its related Area Strategies, especially the Science Vale Area Strategy[1] which was updated in 2016.

16. Significant housing need was identified in the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment[2]. This would trigger a demand for several transport schemes, when factoring in housing needs with past job growth and projections for future

[1] Science Vale Area Strategy (page 35 onwards) https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-connecting-oxfordshire/ConnectingOxfordshireAreaStrategies_1.pdf
[2] Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/ccm/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=1670533659&CODE=F0466A8D7F61D0D6EB661DFD1A27AEA0

job growth. Housing and employment development, if not plan-led, would have compounded existing traffic impacts without the development of the HIF1 scheme.

17. The Science Vale Area Strategy outlined that the infrastructure enhancements would enable better connections around Science Vale, that the planned route would provide some relief to the A34, it would give network resilience, more direct and attractive walking and cycling routes, and enable improvements to access Culham Science Centre.

18. Atkins was commissioned in 2015 to undertake an Evaluation of Transport Impacts (ETI). The ETI stages progressed alongside the Local Plan, and after funding was confirmed for HIF1 the modelling assumed mitigations including the schemes related to HIF1.

19. The scenario testing undertaken in the ETI Stage 3 (Core Documents G.1.4, G.1.5 and G.1.6) tested growth scenarios, all with the baseline traffic levels presented as if the HIF schemes were in place. Also the HIF1 infrastructure was included in the do-minimum scenario. This means that the do-minimum scenario is fully dependent on that mitigation scheme happening – this therefore underpins the Local Plan's strategy for development in Science Vale as a whole.

20. With Vale's housing requirement of at least 22,760 homes and South Oxfordshire's supply of 30,056 homes, this is at least 52,816 homes indirectly at risk (although some of these will already have been developed).

21. Without approval for the HIF1 scheme, the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 housing supply would be at risk both directly (with the sites that are dependent on HIF1 for mitigation) and indirectly (because of the baseline assumptions in the ETI that were used to test overall growth scenarios in the Local Plan).

22. With only a small proportion of existing permitted growth, the highway network would be over capacity. In 2019 and 2020 there were several highway-related objections upheld at appeal. An interim strategy was put in place to prevent

highway objections called the ‘releasing development strategy’ but this was not a permanent solution. Without HIF1, the current interim strategy enabling planning permissions with highway impacts to be granted can’t continue.

Benefits

23. Without the scheme, the delivery of more homes is undermined and the current connectivity issues and traffic impacts in the area, and the delivery of fewer new homes to support job growth will have a negative economic impact.

24. The HIF1 scheme will benefit the area by helping overcome physical constraints and offer more choices by various modes of transport to travel between major employment areas and Didcot. This could lessen the car dependence in Didcot giving options for journeys to work.

25. The scheme also has the benefit of offering alternative routes over the River Thames in times of flooding.

26. With better and quicker connections north of Didcot, public transport operators will have more reliable options to help cut journey times.

27. Didcot has been transforming, after accepting significant planned growth in successive plans, but with the assumption that HIF1 would help achieve several aims for better employer connections, easier movement around Science Vale, and economic and environmental benefits more widely.

28. Without the critical HIF1 scheme the vision for the Garden Town, which is part way through being achieved, would be unachievable. The adopted Local Plans embed the scheme, and the emerging Joint Local Plan and its draft policies and sites depend on this scheme being approved. With the HIF1 scheme the emerging Joint Local Plan can progress and enable the planned growth of the Didcot Garden Town as a key part of its strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

29. My Proof of Evidence outlines the significant strategic need and multiple benefits of the HIF1 scheme. It is also clear that there is a relationship between significant levels of identified housing and employment in adopted and emerging Local Plans that are dependent on the delivery of the HIF1 scheme.

30. Based upon the planning balance judgement made by Emma Bowerman in her Proof of Evidence, planning permission should be granted.