

R A DRAPER
STATEMENT AT INQUIRY APP/U3100/V/23/3326625

If I may, I shall take a macro look at the project rather than delving into the details. First, let me say that I was initially a supporter of the scheme with a new bridge across the Thames and am acutely aware of the national importance of expanding our scientific base.

Sadly, the more I examined the current proposal, however, the more aware I became of its flaws and in particular that of the modelling that underpins the application.

OCC had the opportunity to provide an exemplar of how to design a sustainable integrated transport scheme for a modern garden town, but rather trapped by a legacy project and concerned about losing government funding, it is set on replicating the mistakes others have made and embedding congestion in the area.

The Secretary of State particularly wishes to be informed about three issues plus any other matters the Inspector considers relevant. I ask that the Inspector initially focus on the 'other matters' as the 'extent to which' the development meets the Sof S's issues depends on the current proposal being viable and deliverable.

In addressing that it is important to first review the aims of the scheme which were:

- To ensure that the impact of increased housing on the traffic network was acceptable, whilst
- Future-proofing local infrastructure provision,
- Reducing congestion and
- Providing 'value for money'.

Disappointingly objective analysis has shown that the scheme fails to meet any of those aims. Additionally, nowhere in those aims, was the provision of a strategic national highway or a requirement to underpin national facilities such as the Fusion Centre, as UKAEA is now belatedly claiming as a justification for the scheme. Others will address how crucial it is to UKAEA, but I suggest that maximising the benefits of the adjacent railway station and introducing a transport plan similar to that at Milton Park, with frequent bus services and car share arrangements, would meet its requirements.

Furthermore, the close examination of the scheme by the Planning Committee last July provided 8 reasons for refusal. Those reasons remain largely extant, despite the Emergency PR&C rowing back from them on 26 Sep or the Leader of the County Council arguing that the 'Perfect is the enemy of the Good' at that meeting. Here for the record, I would like to raise concern at the manipulation of the planning process by the County Council, in addressing the reality that its own planning committee had rejected the application, which I consider should be brought to the SofS's attention.

The proposed scheme cannot be regarded as good as the Leader of the Council inferred. It is flawed and fails to meet the local aims it is meant to achieve so it

cannot be described as viable and whether it can be delivered remains highly questionable.

The other claim by the Leader of the County Council is that it is part of a wider scheme, is alarming. However, that is not a material consideration as no details are available and the scheme is really aimed at future-proofing local infrastructure requirements. Indeed, the proposal anyway fails to consider the wider impact on Abingdon or of the frequent diversions from the A34 or of HGVs using the route as a cut-through to the M4.

OCC Aim of Reducing Traffic - Induced Traffic

At the heart of my objection to the current proposal is that the traffic data underpinning the application is based on out-of-date input and fails to prove that the scheme will reduce traffic congestion in the area. Indeed, the application admits that congestion will return to current levels by 2034 and that it will result in a very substantial increase of approximately 42% in travel by private car.

Even more crucial, it makes insufficient allowance for the 'induced traffic' the scheme will attract, particularly through the villages. If that had been included, estimates vary, but congestion is likely to return to current levels much earlier and possibly in as little as two years. Professor Goodwin drew the attention of OCC to this as long ago as Feb 2022 and expands on it in his crucial Proof of Evidence, which contrasts with, what I view as an exercise in obfuscation, in Claudia Currie's Proof of Evidence. In this at para 6.23 she claims that *'the required modelling tests have been carried out on OSM and have shown that induced traffic for this scheme is not evident and is therefore not a cause for concern'*. Her view on the impact of Covid and Brexit in para 6.28 is equally questionable and I ask that the Inspector robustly challenges the author on those points and her overall assessment.

I note Madam, that you wish to gauge whether the extent of the traffic modelling is robust. In that, I ask that you query the input to and efficacy of the traffic modelling, through close examination of the input data and assumptions made, to inform your judgement on whether the scheme is securely underpinned by the modelling output, will deliver the objectives of the scheme and satisfactorily answer the issues raised by the SofS. In that, attention should also focus on the impact of the new road on Abingdon and Golden Balls roundabout and the exacerbation of further congestion as opposed to reducing it in Sutton Courtenay and Appleford.

Sutton Courtenay through its Parish Council has for some five years been seeking assurance that the belated addition of the roundabout on Appleford Road would not increase through traffic rather than decrease congestion through the villages. So far, no data has been produced to prove the OCC contention that the HIF1 scheme would reduce that congestion, especially as it makes no allowance for induced traffic attracted by the proposed roundabout on the Appleford Road. Claudia Currie in her Proof fails to address the issue of induced traffic attracted by that roundabout in the analysis of it as a Standalone Junction

The concern is that the network will quickly return to gridlock, at a cost of £296m without even allowing for inflation or the myriad of other risks facing the scheme.

That is hardly the 'value for money' the County Council aimed for and cannot be described as 'future-proofing local infrastructure provision'. In that context alone it fails to meet the assurances the SofS is seeking.

Moreover, given its failure to address induced traffic, the current HIF1 scheme will not meet the traffic requirements of further housing and expansion of facilities in meeting the aim of Science Vale without considerable improvement and a new application which would definitively reduce congestion and make better use of alternative modes of transport

As to the housing targets, may I suggest weight should be given to the Emerging Joint LP41 which takes a different approach to the earlier District Local Plans.

In addition, the county council's shift from 'Predict and Provide' to 'Determine and Provide' in its new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), means that the rejection of the current application will allow it to shift from the outdated methodology and modelling to a modern approach. That should be geared toward meeting the Council's transport aspirations in an integrated transport infrastructure in the Didcot Garden Town area, which the county can be proud of, instead of further embedding congestion across the area.

Deliverability of the Proposal. Given the complexity of the scheme and the limited budget, I urge you to also review its financial provision. This may not on the surface be a material planning consideration at the local level, but the Sof S in reaching his decision should be made aware of the limited financial provision and the lack of sufficient allowance for inflation, which Mr Chien lists in his Proof of Evidence.

I also consider that the construction risks, as highlighted by Mr Russell Harman in his Proof of Evidence, add hugely to concerns about the deliverability of the current scheme

You might also usefully examine OCC's thinking in the review it is undertaking of the project, including a 'value engineering' approach and what improvements the District Councils now envisage as necessary. The need for the review has already raised concerns that the scheme will only be partially completed, which would negate nearly all of the claimed benefits.

In summary, given the current flaws and without drastic improvements amounting to a new forward-looking integrated transport system, I contend that the proposal will not be consistent with the Government and Local Plans the SofS is seeking assurance on.

Moreover, the current scheme is not viable in terms of meeting the County Council's declared aims and there are grave doubts as to its financial underpinnings and deliverability. I ask madam that you, therefore, consider recommending that the current application be withdrawn at an early stage in these proceedings.

Robin A Draper

Sutton Courtenay

21 February 2024