



The Inspector  
HIF1 Public Inquiry  
Didcot

8 April 2024

Dear Madam

I was the Conservation Officer for South Oxfordshire District Council from its inception in 1974 until 1991. I was subsequently Professor of Conservation and the Historic Environment at the University of Oxford. I am a Past President of both the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain. In 2019 I was awarded an OBE for 'services to conservation, education and the historic environment'.

During my time at South Oxfordshire I was responsible for the designation of the Nuneham Courtenay conservation area and for negotiating the unique legal agreement for the protection of the historic village. I have remained engaged with the continuing conservation of Nuneham ever since. I am attaching a copy of the text of the leaflet that I wrote in 2018 on behalf of SODC which was published to remind the current owners of the properties in the village of their responsibilities under that agreement. It sets out the history of the park and the village and establishes its national importance as one of the best preserved estate villages of the eighteenth century. The statutory recognition of that importance is demonstrated by the Grade 1 designation of both the park and the village as a Historic Park and Garden, the listed status of all the original buildings in the village and the extent of the conservation area together with the additional restrictions imposed by the legal agreement.

The original design of the village with the cottages aligned close to both sides of the road and built off shallow foundations means that the listed buildings are particularly vulnerable to any increase in traffic on the A4074. It is quite unacceptable that no traffic survey has been carried out to assess the implications of HIF1 on the fragile character of such an important heritage asset. Despite the assertions to the contrary, it is self-evident that the construction of the proposed road network to enable major house-building to take place in Didcot and Culham will result in a greatly increased volume of traffic to the Golden Balls junction. A significant proportion of that traffic will choose to head north towards Oxford through the village street. Its tranquil character is already compromised by the current level of traffic and there must be a real concern that the stability of the listed buildings will be threatened by the vibrations caused by heavy goods vehicles passing in close proximity to their fabric. In the absence of any strategy for the mitigation of such a damaging consequence, it must be concluded that the tests set out in Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 cannot be met.

It is my sincere belief that the public interest cannot be served by the predictable threat to a heritage asset which is recognised as being of outstanding national importance and I hope that you will give due weight to the consequences in determining the application.

I will copy this letter to the Nuneham Courtenay Parish Council so that they are aware of my strong concern.

Yours Sincerely

Professor Malcolm Airs OBE