

Planning

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Ref: P23/V1046/CM

Dear Emily

Re: Application R3.0138/21

- **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;**
- **Controlled crossings, footways and cycleways, landscaping, lighting, noise barriers and sustainable drainage systems.**

Location: A linear site comprising a corridor between the A34 Milton Interchange and the B4015 north of Clifton Hampden including part of the A4130 east of the A34 Milton Interchange, land between Didcot and the former Didcot A Power Station and the Great Western Mainline, land to the north of Didcot where it crosses a private railway sidings and the River Thames to the west of Appleford-on-Thames before joining the A415 west of Culham Station, land to the south of Culham Science Centre through to a connection with the B4015 north of Clifton Hampden.

Thank you for re-consulting the Vale of White Horse District Council on the above application.

As per previous public statements The Vale of White Horse District Council supports this project. The council consider that the proposed infrastructure will assist in delivering the housing and employment growth identified in the Vale of White



Horse Local Plan 2031 Parts 1 and 2. Without this proposed infrastructure planned new growth is unlikely to be delivered.

The following planning matters should be assessed ahead of any permission given:

Planning Team – Development Management

Bridges

In response to this council's comment that the Science Bridge should be a landmark feature as envisaged in the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan (the DGTDP), paragraph 3.3 of the Aecom EIA Regulation 25 response states *"Given the recent plans for large monolithic data centres and warehousing immediately north of the Science bridge the appropriateness of a 'spectacular bridge' structure may now be inappropriate"*.

Perceived *"large monolithic"* structures justify a 'spectacular bridge' design to enhance the approach to Didcot.

The design of the River Thames Crossing between Didcot and Culham is not revised. Appendix G (Oversized bridge examples) of the Reg 25 response, provide little confidence that the bridge will an attractive feature or sensitive to its rural setting.

The NPPF places great weight on good design. Paragraph 126 of the NPPF expects *"The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities"*.

The bridge designs by reason of their concrete materials, massing, unbroken grassed banks, lack of vertical landscaping on the approaches to the Science Bridge and on the banks of the bridge will result in them being an unspectacular and visually intrusive feature comprising poor design contrary to paragraphs 126, 130 and 131 of the NPPF, core policies 37 and 44 of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan.

Tree and Hedge Planting

The DGTDP envisages Didcot as a *"super green town prioritising green infrastructure including tree lined streets"*. This aligns with the principles of core policies 44 and 45 of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and paragraph 131 of the NPPF. The widened A4130 is a key gateway to Didcot. To aspire to the DGTDP vision, the A4130 needs to be judiciously tree and hedge lined.

Tree and hedge planting is necessary to screen the road in views from new housing proposed on the southern side of the A4130 e.g. Valley Park, and act as a noise buffer.

Trees and hedges should visually separate the road from the cycle and pedestrian paths alongside the road.

The planting comprising shrub planting and occasional trees is weak and will not achieve the aims above or the expectation in paragraph 131 of the NPPF that streets should be tree lined.

A comparison of the landscaping and street lighting plans shows that street lighting conflicts with the proposed locations of trees and even more so if OCC requires 10m gaps between lighting columns and trees. Consequently, landscaping will be further weakened.

The proposed landscaping is considered inadequate to address the expectations of the DGTDP, core policies 44 and 45 of the Local Plan and paragraph 131 of the NPPF.

Street Lighting

Street lighting continues to be shown extending north of Didcot beyond Hartwright House (OX14 4PJ) when there appears to be no overriding need for it particularly as this is a rural area whereby the lighting will be intrusive.

Acoustic Barriers and Noise

Acoustic barriers of unspecified height but possibly 2 or 3 metres in height, beside the road leading from Didcot to the River Thames Crossing will be visually intrusive in this primarily rural area.

Given the comments made by the council's Environmental Protection Team (see below), whereby a number of residents of affected dwellings will experience significant adverse effects despite acoustic barriers and given the visually intrusive appearance of the acoustic barriers, this authority questions the suitability of the road alignment between Didcot and the Thames Crossing and consideration should be given to moving the road further west.

Environmental Protection Team – noise and vibration

Aecom's response indicates that there is little further that can be done to mitigate the noise impacts of the proposed development. This suggests that there will remain a number of properties which will experience a significant adverse impact from this development but will not benefit from the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975. The decision process will have to balance this negative impact against any benefits that the development is expected to bring.

Forestry Team

A Revised Arboricultural Impact Assessment Addendum dated April 2023 has been submitted. This report sets out the changes to the proposal and how the revisions impact on trees.

The report still identifies that the proposal will require a very significant amount of tree removal and will reduce canopy cover significantly. It is therefore essential that new planting is maximised as part of the scheme.

The preliminary landscape masterplans submitted still do not show the level of detail required to be able to scrutinise the mitigation planting in detail. Considering the extensive tree removal proposed for this application, very considerable amounts of tree planting will be required. This is essential to ensure that the scheme delivers a net increase in canopy cover to address

environmental issues such as climate change and carbon sequestration, as well as the landscape and amenity benefits required to be achieved for this project.

If planning permission is to be granted, then conditions will be required to secure tree protection measures (Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Plans) in accordance with BS 5837:2012 and conditions to secure planting and its long term management, to ensure that the planting becomes successfully established to help mitigate the tree removal.

Landscape Architect

Holding objection

The extent of planting mitigation proposed remains inadequate, as noted in previous comments. There has been very little increase in planting compared to the previous proposals, limited to a hedge and some individual trees. In a number of places where vegetation has been removed, there is a reference that the landowner of allocated sites will provide this replacement as part of yet unknown planning applications. It is essential that HIF1 mitigates for its impacts.

The submitted response to landscape comments shows a lack of willingness to include even otherwise unusable areas of land for planting to help with mitigation, see below, these awkward spaces will be of no use to the landowner, but to use them for additional planting would be beneficial in helping to screen the road and better integrate the scheme into the landscape and replace lost vegetation. This approach to landscape mitigation is reflected throughout the proposals, resulting in a scheme where the extent of mitigation appears to have been predominantly limited to the operational land take, rather than defined by an assessment of landscape and visual mitigation requirements.

The landscape plans still do not include sufficient information to enable a proper understanding of the scheme, such as embankments and cuttings, and vegetation removed. There is also an excessive amount of gravel access paths which circle the Suds features (in some cases 7m wide paths), this limits the design of the Suds features and the ability to integrate them into the landscape further highlighting their highly engineered design.

Where the scheme abuts the Valley Park Vale of White Horse Local Plan housing allocation, the proposed drainage basins will abut or overlap the housing schemes SUDs basins and will not leave any space for mitigation planting. I am unsure why there is no roadside hedgerow provided north of the Valley Park site (on the southern side of the road, sheet 2), but hedgerow is provided further to the east near the entrance to the Valley Park site and the Science Bridge.

Recommendations

Please refer to landscape comments on the previous application and the County Council's Landscape Specialist comments.

Holding objection maintained

Yours sincerely,

A Butler

Adrian Butler
Principal Major Applications Officer