



# Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

Rt Hon Claire Coutinho MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Energy Security  
& Net Zero  
1 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0ET

[www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

Leanne Palmer  
The Planning Inspectorate  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Temple Quay House  
2 The Square  
Bristol  
BS1 6PN

October 2023

Dear Leanne,

Thank you for your letter of 23<sup>rd</sup> August to Grant Shapps MP regarding the application by Oxfordshire County Council for Land between A34 Milton Interchange, and B4015 north of Clifton Hampden, Oxfordshire. I am responding as the Secretary of State for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

My department's interest in this decision relates to the potential impact on the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy in Oxfordshire. This centre is run by the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) and is central to the UK's ambition to lead the world in the development of commercially viable fusion energy.

Fusion energy could be a low carbon, continuous, effectively unlimited power source and provide the UK with an unrivalled economic opportunity given our global lead in the most promising technologies in the field. Fusion could also play a major future role as part of global net zero efforts, as part of a low carbon energy mix. In the last Spending Review the Government invested over £700m in UKAEA's cutting-edge research programmes, facilities, and industrial support programmes. This investment is designed to grow the capability of the UK fusion industry and make the UK the primary global hub for fusion innovation. In September this year we announced a boost to that investment of up to £650m to 2027.

The Culham Centre for Fusion Energy is key to our global advantage. The campus is home to the Joint European Torus - the world's largest operational fusion machine. It also houses a globally unique (and commercially valuable) set of research facilities looking across all the major technological challenges for fusion energy. It is a hub for private sector innovation and R&D companies that want to benefit from the unique expertise and mix of skills and capabilities at Culham. The campus complements the campus at Harwell and contributes to the economic wellbeing of the local community. A London Economics report published in 2020 showed that total economic impact of UKAEA to the UK economy is estimated to be between £1.3 billion and £1.4 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA), for the period 2009/10 to 2018/19.

A central part of the UK's Fusion Strategy<sup>1</sup> is to grow the Culham campus, taking advantage of its attractiveness as a centre for global fusion investment and firms that want to take advantage of the concentration of expertise and skills such a centre brings. As the campus grows it will become the natural home for global fusion R&D

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towards-fusion-energy-the-uk-fusion-strategy>

in the same way that Silicon Valley is the natural home of tech development. This supports wider economic growth across the UK given the geographical dispersal of the fusion technology supply chain in the UK.

Any decision regarding new transport links in and around Abingdon is likely to have considerable implications for the ability of the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy to grow and capitalise on its globally unique position. I would be grateful if the potential impact on the UK's Fusion Energy strategy, and consequently impact on potential economic growth, would be fully considered when the Planning Inspectorate undertakes its review.

I understand that the UK Atomic Energy Authority will give a fuller account of the detailed impacts planning decisions will take on individual workstreams.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claire Coutinho', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**RT HON CLAIRE COUTINHO MP**  
Secretary of State for Energy Security & Net Zero