

**CORRIDOR BETWEEN THE A34 MILTON INTERCHANGE AND THE B4015 NORTH OF  
CLIFTON HAMPDEN: “THE HIF1 SCHEME”**

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**OPENING STATEMENT**

**SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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**Introduction**

1. The HIF1 scheme comprises four distinct elements,<sup>1</sup> of which:
  - a. the Clifton Hampden Bypass section lies wholly within SODC’s administrative area,
  - b. the northern and southern ends of the Didcot to Culham River Crossing section lie within SODC’s administrative area,<sup>2</sup>
  - c. the eastern end of the Didcot Science Bridge section is within SODC’s area where it rejoins the A4130, from Hawkers Roundabout up to where the Culham River Crossing section begins.
  
2. SODC strongly supports this planning application. The delivery of the HIF1 scheme is essential to facilitate significant housing and employment growth which is planned for in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (‘SOLP’).

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<sup>1</sup> Summarised in the Applicant’s SoC at p.20 and following **CD**

<sup>2</sup> From the River Thames northwards at the northern end, and a small section of the A4310 west of the Collet Roundabout at the southern end.

## Need for and benefits of the scheme

3. The HIF1 road infrastructure is necessary to mitigate strategic housing allocations of 3,500 homes at Culham Science Centre (policy STRAT9) and 1,700 homes at Berinsfield (STRAT10i), and to support significant development at Didcot Garden Town, including 6,339 homes in SODC's area over the plan period (STRAT3 and H2). These are all sustainable locations close to important employment opportunities, to support employment growth and limit journey length. These allocations are fundamental to SODC's spatial strategy. The relevant policies each make clear that the delivery of the housing is contingent on the delivery of HIF1.<sup>3</sup> Put simply, without the HIF1 scheme, this planned growth cannot come forward.
4. The scheme is also necessary to support planned employment growth in the Science Vale, in particular 5ha at Berinsfield Garden Town and at least 7.3ha at and adjacent to Culham Science Centre. CSC is an internationally important research and knowledge centre owned by UKAEA and home to the Culham Center for Fusion Energy, it is essential that its continued success and growth is supported.
5. More generally, the HIF1 scheme was included in the transport modelling which formed the evidence base for the SOLP and thus underpinned the housing allocations and planned transport improvements. The need for HIF1, and the risk that slippage would jeopardise housing delivery and threaten the 5YHLS position, was also a major reason why the SOLP identified housing supply which exceeded its housing requirement by 27%.<sup>4</sup>
6. The need for HIF1 was fully accepted by the Inspector who examined the SOLP and found it sound. His report identifies that the HIF1 scheme "*must be delivered prior to any significant development at Culham*",<sup>5</sup> that it "*needs to be in place prior*

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<sup>3</sup> STRAT 3 para 3, STRAT 9 para 6, STRAT 10i para 4

<sup>4</sup> Examination report p44-45 para 205 **CD G 1.8**

<sup>5</sup> Examination report p29 para 121 **CD G 1.8**

*to the commencement of development at Berinsfield*<sup>6</sup> and that it “*will enable infrastructure to support key development sites in and around Didcot*”.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the development and examination of the SOLP it was assumed that the HIF1 scheme would come forward – in fact it was anticipated that it would be delivered by 2024.<sup>8</sup> The existence of this important highways infrastructure thus underpins the soundness of the allocations, and indeed the spatial strategy.

7. It is not an exaggeration to say that the refusal of planning permission for HIF1 would be catastrophic for the District.
8. The benefits of the scheme are largely the other side of the coin to the needs. Thus the major benefit of the scheme is, unsurprisingly, the delivery of necessary infrastructure to enable significant plan-led housing and employment growth. Both housing and employment growth are matters which are to be given a high level of weight as a matter of national policy, and the scale of benefit in this case is huge. SODC also considers that the segregated provision for walking and cycling throughout the entire length of the HIF1 scheme, and the proposal to secure bus priority measures via conditions, are significant benefits which align with its policies on sustainable transport. This is not diminished by the presence of the road – both are needed, and both would deliver important benefits.

### **Planning policy and planning balance**

9. For reasons already explained, the HIF1 scheme is fundamental to the spatial strategy of the SOLP and its successful delivery. The scheme is clearly in accordance with, and supported by, the spatial strategy and the housing, transport and employment policies of the plan.
10. It is inevitable that a scheme of this nature and scale cannot be delivered without some harmful effects. SODC does not shy away from this. On the basis of the

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<sup>6</sup> p31 para 136

<sup>7</sup> p40 para 182

<sup>8</sup> Examination report p29 para 121 and p31-32 para 136 **CD G 1.8**

application materials, there would be harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape, which would be exacerbated by the significant tree loss. There is some valid criticism of the design of the bridges. SODC also considers that the HIF1 scheme would impact on the openness to the Green Belt.

11. SODC will carefully consider the evidence presented to the inquiry on these (and other) topics and will reflect on it and update its position as necessary in the planning evidence and in closing submissions.

12. SODC will argue that the need for, and benefits of, the HIF1 scheme clearly establish the very special circumstances required to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. Although the HIF1 scheme would conflict with local plan policies on character and appearance, it is supported by the key strategic policies and is judged to be clearly in accordance with the plan as a whole. SODC will argue that there are no other material considerations which indicate that the application should be refused, therefore permission should be granted so that this essential infrastructure can be delivered.

## **Appearances**

Counsel	Emma Dring (instructed by Vivien Williams, Head of Legal and Democratic & Monitoring Officer (interim), SODC and VOWHDC)
Witnesses	Topic 1: Emma Baker, Planning Policy Team Leader, SODC and VOWHDC Topic 14: Emma Bowerman, Principal Major Applications Officer, SODC and VOWHDC

**Emma Dring**

**20 February 2024**

