

17 April 2023

Access to Witney Planning Committee Speech (R3.0039/22)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this planning application on behalf of the Applicant.

You've been presented with a thorough and comprehensive report from your officers and so I don't propose to repeat those details, but I do wish to highlight that it is clear that the principle of development has been firmly established, and there will be significant economic and environmental benefits of bringing forward this proposal for the construction of two new west-facing slip roads at the Shores Green junction of the A40.

The Proposed Development is a direct response to alleviating the long standing and problematic traffic congestion and air quality issues in Witney. It forms part of the wider A40 Corridor Improvement Plan being progressed by Oxfordshire County Council, which comprises a series of strategic improvement schemes along the A40 between Witney and Oxford.

The Proposed Development provides an alternative route between the A40 and destinations to the east and north-east of Witney, allowing this traffic to bypass the town centre by using the A40 and A4095 Jubilee Way in both directions.

As well as reducing traffic levels and congestion on Bridge Street and through Witney town centre, the scheme has been carefully designed to address a number of key challenges, including reducing the level of harmful air pollution within the town centre, providing a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists by offering enhanced facilities both alongside the new A40 slip roads and on the B4022, and enabling the development of strategic housing developments that will provide many new homes in Witney, which are identified in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan.

Throughout the evolution of the Scheme, the Applicant has both consulted widely and extensively, and has been responsive to the information gathered during the consultation process which has shaped and informed the proposed scheme design.

The Proposed Development has emerged following a rigorous option assessment study. Its design has also been iterative, whereby analysis of technical assessments and responses to public consultation on different design options were interpreted and refinements incrementally made to reach the final design solution which seeks to maximise the scheme's benefits whilst minimising any negative impacts. We were pleased to see support for the scheme design from the public prior to the submission of the planning application and from statutory consultees during the formal planning consultation stage, such as from Witney Town Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council's Transport Development Control team, who have raised no objection to the application on technical grounds.

As members will be aware, the National Planning Policy Framework, sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This means taking a positive approach to development and approving an application which accords with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Whilst we recognise that there is the potential for some adverse impact upon a small number of noise sensitive receptors, we have demonstrated that there are no practical effective noise attenuation measures that can be introduced due to the low vehicle speed in this vicinity. This conclusion has been agreed by West Oxfordshire District Council's Environmental Health team.

The proposals are in accordance with all other relevant development plan policies in relation to technical considerations.

The key benefits of the Proposed Development are considered to be:

- Improved access to the A40 from east and north-east Witney reducing the need for traffic to route through Witney Town Centre;
- A reduction of traffic and congestion in central Witney with associated improvements to air quality within the Witney Air Quality Management Area – providing benefits to public health;
- Enabling the delivery of planned new homes in Witney, particularly at the East Witney Strategic Development Area; and
- Improving the safety and quality of pedestrian and cycle paths through the local area, supporting active travel connections along the B4022 as well as enabling onward linkages to existing paths and development within the East Witney Strategic Development Area.

Overall, it is clear that the proposal will bring about significant benefits across the area which outweighs any isolated concerns and hence, in line with the officer recommendation, we kindly request that members grant permission for this application.