

For: PLANNING AND REGULATION COMMITTEE – 2 MARCH 2015

By: DEPUTY DIRECTOR (STRATEGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING)

Development Proposed:

Development of a single carriageway road between the B4493 (Didcot Road) and the A417 (London Road), including new roundabout junctions with the B4493 and A417, diversion of 'The Driftway' bridleway along the eastern edge of the new link road, provision of a Pegasus signalised crossing, combined footway/cycleway along the full length of the link road, surface water drainage balancing pond, site compound, street lighting, signage, landscaping and planting

Division Affected: Hendreds & Harwell; Didcot East & Hagbourne
Contact Officer: Mary Thompson **Tel:** 01865 815901
Location: Land between the B4493 Didcot Road and the A417 London Road, to the east of the A34

Application No: R3.0133/14 (OCC)
P14/V2593/CM (VOWH)
P14/S3617/CM (SODC)

Applicant: Oxfordshire County Council
District Council Area: South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council
Application Received: 3 November 2014
Consultation Period: 13 November – 4 December 2014

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Recommendation Summary: APPROVAL

• Part 1- Facts and Background**Site Location (see plan 1)**

1. The site is located to the east of the A34 dual carriageway. The nearest properties include those on the B4493 Didcot Road. Hillview and Sunny Side lie immediately opposite the northern site boundary on the other side of the B4493 from the proposed new road, immediately north east of the proposed new roundabout. Zulu Farm, Meadow View and Alma Barn lie close to the eastern edge of the northern end of the site, Zulu Farm on the north side of the B4493 and Meadow View and Alma Barn to the south. A row of 18 properties starts approximately 45 metres west of the north west extent of the site and 180 metres from the proposed northern roundabout on the B4493 towards Harwell. These properties are on the other side of the A34 from the proposed new road and roundabouts. The Kingswell Hotel and Folly Cottage lie approximately 100 metres from the southern end of the proposed new road and the proposed new roundabout forming the junction with the A417. These properties lie on the opposite side of both the A34 and the A417 from the proposed new road.
2. The site is currently arable agricultural fields, with an agricultural land classification of 3a and 2, and is bounded by agricultural land to the east, the A34 to the west, the B4493 to the north and the A417 to the south. Part of the site area comprises existing highway carriageway at either end of the proposed new road.
3. A public bridleway known as The Driftway runs on a track across the field to the east of the A34, the bridleway then continues north adjacent to the A34 to the B4493. As this section runs through the application site it would need to be diverted to allow the development to go ahead.
4. The North Wessex Downs AONB lies approximately 70 metres south of the A417, outside of the area likely to be affected by this development. The site is not affected by any SSSIs although there are two Local Wildlife Sites within 2km of the site. The site is not within the floodplain, as it lies in flood zone 1.
5. Most of the site lies within the Vale of White Horse District; however the proposed new roundabout at the southern end is in South Oxfordshire.
6. The site lies within an area that is subject to an outline planning application, submitted in December 2014, for a residential development of up to 4450 dwellings. This is the Valley Park development which is also a proposed strategic housing allocation in the emerging Vale of White Horse Core Strategy. The proposed plans for this residential development show the Harwell Link Road.

Details of the Development

7. It is proposed to construct a new section 1.1 km of single carriageway road running adjacent to the A34 between the B4493 and the A417 to the east of Harwell. The proposal also includes roundabout junctions at the northern end of the road where it meets the B4493 and at the southern end where it meets the A417. There would also be a combined footway and cycleway running the length of the new road and street lighting at the junctions, signage, embankments and a new balancing pond. The total site area would be 10.9 hectares.
8. The purpose of the new road would be to provide a link between the residential areas of Didcot with the new science, innovation and business campus in Harwell.
9. The northern roundabout would have three arms, with the potential to convert to four arms in the future to provide access to the Valley Park development. The southern roundabout would be three arms.
10. New signage would not be lit but it would be reflective. There would be a sign on every approach to each roundabout and signs for each exit off the roundabouts. Street lighting would be provided at the roundabouts and on the stretches of roads leading to and from them.
11. There would be a new signalised Pegasus crossing on the B4493 to the east of the site. A Pegasus crossing allows pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders to cross the road.
12. The application proposed that the new road would be subject to the national speed limit; however the applicant has subsequently confirmed that it would be subject to a lower 50 mph limit. The speed limit on the B4493 would be lowered from 40 mph to 30 mph.
13. Landscape vegetation is proposed to screen the development, including trees, hedgerows and shrubs. A temporary noise barrier would be installed for the duration of construction works to reduce noise impacts at Sunnyside and Hillview.
14. It is estimated that the construction period would result in a total of 5185 loads over a 21 month period. This equates to an average of 22 movements per day, or less than 3 per hour. The proposed construction route would be via a farm access off the A417.
15. The development would involve the diversion of the existing bridleway known as 'Driftway'. It is proposed to divert it parallel and to the east of the present route, along the eastern edge of the new link road to meet the B4493. This would then link to a new stretch of bridleway to the north of the northern roundabout via the Pegasus crossing.

16. The plans and details which comprise the application and supporting information can be viewed at <http://myeplanning.oxfordshire.gov.uk> using reference [R3.0133/14](#)

Part 2 – Other Viewpoints

Consultation Responses

17. South Oxfordshire District Council – Planning – No objection. The majority of the site area falls within VOWH District Council. No comments other than to offer support for the scheme as part of the ongoing infrastructure delivery work around the Science Vale Oxford Enterprise Zone. Understand that the work is identified within the emerging VOWH Local Plan 2031.
18. South Oxfordshire District Council – Environmental Health – No response.
19. Vale of White Horse District Council – Planning – No objection. The application supports the provision of necessary infrastructure as set out in the Local Plan 2031 Strategic Sites and Policies document.
20. Vale of White Horse District Council – Environmental Health – No objection.
21. Harwell Parish Council – Welcomes and supports the proposals overall. Width restrictions should be placed appropriately with the new road layouts. Welcomes the new bridleway, but there is no indication of what will happen to the bridleway once the Valley Park access road is added to the roundabout. New planting to protect residents from light and noise pollution is not likely to be adequate and would need to be removed at a later date to allow for the new access road.
22. Didcot Parish Council – No objection, subject to conditions to ensure that the Great Western Park spine road between the A4130 and the B4493 before this new road is opened and the improved cycle and foot way linking Great Western Park and Foxhall Road are both completed before this new road is opened.
23. West Hagbourne Parish Council – No response received.
24. Environment Agency – First Response – Object in the absence of an acceptable Flood Risk Assessment. Further details of methodology and calculations should be provided to support the conclusions.
25. Final Response – Withdraw objection. A condition should be added to any planning permission granted to ensure that the development is carried out in complete accordance with the Water Environment Assessment and associated email and attachments. This would ensure that surface water run-off would not increase the risk of flooding.

26. Highways Agency – No objection.
27. North Wessex Downs AONB – No comments other than that the proposed landscaping scheme and measures to reduce light pollution should be implemented. The development is outside the AONB but very close and therefore within its setting. Subject to the proposed landscaping being undertaken successfully and the lighting design being as proposed the impact from this development on the AONB should not be significant.
28. British Horse Society – A reduction in traffic through Harwell as a result of the new road would be welcome. It is suggested that the B4493 could be re-routed along the new road to make the road through the village a minor road. It is also suggested that a new bridleway could be created further north from the B4493 to connect with Cow Lane. The best solution for horseriders would be to reconnect the Driftway bridleway across the A34. Concerned about the proposal to stop up the existing bridleway parallel to the A34.
29. Rights of Way – No objection, subject to the unsealed surfacing of the bridleway sections being specified to British Horse Society specifications and there being an appropriate long term management and maintenance regime for the bridleway surface and planting.
30. It is understood that the reinstatement of the Driftway over the A34 is out of scope and that there is a need to stop up the existing bridleway.
31. The section of bridleway to be stopped up under Side Roads Order should have access control measures put in place at each end to prevent access and egress onto the bypass. It is recommended that the speed and classification of the Harwell Road B4493 is reduced as much as possible so it becomes more of a local access only route attractive and safe for walkers, cyclists and equestrians. It is recommended that the potential 4th Arm to the Harwell roundabout (to proposed Valley Park) should be designed in from the start in order to minimise future disruption to non-motorised users from cut-out operations. At the south end of the bypass, it is suggested that a cycle track could be created to provide an off-road connection between Harwell and West Hagbourne/Upton, although it is appreciated that this is also outside of scope.
32. Ecologist Planner – First Response – Further information is required regarding farmland birds, reptile mitigation, the planting scheme and mammals.
33. Final Response – No objection, subject to conditions requiring a detailed ecological mitigation and enhancement scheme, updated surveys should the development not commence within 1 year, implementation and maintenance of the approved landscaping scheme, appropriate methods for tree felling, a precautionary method of working for reptiles, lighting to be appropriate for bats, seeding as proposed unless the soils are found to be suitable for calcareous

grassland mix instead, ramping of deep excavations and covering of pipework to protect badgers.

34. The woodland proposed in the landscaping plan could encourage deer and other mammals to the area near the road. However, this is a matter for Transport Development Control to comment upon in terms of highway safety.
35. Arboricultural Officer – No objection as the works will not affect amenity value trees.
36. Transport Development Control – First Response – No objection. However, have a number of comments and observations:
 - Care should be taken to ensure that there is no driver distraction or confusion due to the location adjacent to the A34
 - Recommended that a lower speed limit is applied to the link road.
 - Given the short overall length of the scheme and the proposal to light both ends, considerations should be given to the potential need to light the whole road
 - On the northern part of the route the combined cycleway and footway being separated from the road by an embankment. This would not provide an attractive route and there could be isolation and safety concerns, especially if the road is unlit.
 - On the southern part of the route the cycleway and footway would be located adjacent to the carriageway with a 0.5 metre separation. Further consideration should be given to the safety and attractiveness of a walking and cycling facility so close to a fast road.
 - It is not understood why the vertical alignment of the road is not more assimilated with the topography
 - It is considered likely that the construction HGV movements have been underestimated
37. Final Response – No objection subject to conditions for a monitoring scheme to assess potential for driver confusion due to proximity to the A34 and implementation of measures to mitigate this if required, scheme for lighting on the cycleway and a Construction Traffic Management Plan. The 50 mph speed limit now proposed is considered to be acceptable.
38. Archaeology – First Response – An archaeological field evaluation is required prior to the determination of the application as the site lies within an area of archaeological interest. It is likely that this proposal will encounter further aspects of the prehistoric through to Saxon features identified in the area and has the possibility of encountering further significant sites.
39. Final Response – No objection to the application and no conditions are required. The evaluation requested for this site has now been undertaken. The evaluation recorded a small number of linear features likely to relate to medieval and post medieval agricultural practices. Two small possible prehistoric features were recorded within a single

trench. These features were recorded within the evaluation. No further evaluation is required.

40. Drainage/Lead Local Flood Authority – No objection. The drainage design and storage proposals are fine, restricting the outfall to green field run off rates. Catchpits 23 and 24 should be changed to benched manholes for maintenance. This can be shown on a detailed drainage scheme to be required by condition.

Representations

41. Five third party representations have been received. One was in support of the application, two expressed concerns and two were letters of objection. Details of the comments which were made and an officer response to these can be found in Annex 2.

Part 3 – Relevant Planning Documents

Relevant planning documents and legislation (see Policy Annex to the committee papers)

42. Planning applications should be decided in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

43. The relevant Development Plan policies include:

44. Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 (VLP):

NE5 - Biodiversity
NE6 – North Wessex Downs AONB
NE9 – Lowland Vale
NE10 – Important open land between Harwell and Didcot.
L10 – Safeguarding and Improving Rights of Way
DC9 – Amenities of neighbouring properties
DC14 – Surface water

45. South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (SOCS):

CSS1- Overall strategy
CSM1 – Transport
CSEN1 – Landscape
CSB1 – Conservation and improvement of biodiversity

46. South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP):

G2 - Protection and enhancement of the environment
C6 – Biodiversity conservation
T1 – Transport requirements for new developments
EP1 – Pollution
EP2 – Noise
EP3 – Light Intrusion

47. The Vale of White Horse District Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan 2031. Part 1 of this plan will be considered at a public examination in 2015. These are not yet development plan policies but carry some weight due to the advanced stage of the process that the plan has reached.
48. Vale of White Horse Core Strategy 2031 Part 1 (Publication Version November 2014)(VOWHCS)
Core Policy 6 - Meeting Business and Employment Needs
Core Policy 17 – Delivery of Strategic Highway Improvements within the South-East Vale sub-area.
Core Policy 33 – Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility
Core Policy 35 – Promoting Public Transport, Cycling and Walking
Core Policy 36 - Biodiversity
Core Policy 44 - Landscape
49. The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 27 March 2012. This is a material consideration in taking planning decisions. The National Planning Policy Guidance provides further guidance on many topics.

Part 4 – Assessment and Conclusions

Comments of the Deputy Director for Strategy and Infrastructure Planning

50. The key planning issues are:
 - i) Highways
 - ii) Amenity
 - iii) Rights of Way
 - iv) Countryside
 - v) Biodiversity

Highways

51. VOWHCS core policy 6 identifies 129 hectares of available land for employment development at Harwell campus.
52. VOWHCS core policy 17 lists highways infrastructure to mitigate the impact of planned growth across Science Vale (which extends east-west from Culham and Didcot to Wantage and Grove) and secure the future economic viability of the area. This includes a new Harwell Link Road between the B4493 and the A417.
53. VOWHCS Core Policy 33 states that the District and County Council will work to ensure that the impacts of new development on the strategic and local road network are minimised and promote sustainable transport linking new developments with facilities and employment.

54. SOCS policy CSS1 states that proposals for development in South Oxfordshire will be consistent with the overall strategy, including focussing major development at the growth point of Didcot.
55. SOCS policy CSM1 Transport states that the Council will actively seek to deliver the transport infrastructure and measures which improve movement in Didcot, in particular linking Didcot with the major employment sites at Harwell and also encourage the use of sustainable modes of transport.
56. Transport Development Control have not objected to this application but initially raised a number of queries regarding the design. The applicant has addressed these, explaining that the proposed screen planting would screen headlights from the A34 and anti-dazzle fencing could be used if needed, that lighting the whole length of link road could cause confusion on the A34 which is unlit, that the location of the footway and cycleway at the base of the embankment would mean a more pleasant environment for users, that the distance between the carriageway and the footway cycleway is in accordance with standards, confirming that the speed limit on the link road will be reduced to 50 mph, explaining the rationale behind the vertical alignment of the road and that details of construction traffic will be agreed through a Construction Environmental Management Plan. The applicant has agreed to provide ducting so that lighting could be installed along the whole length of the road in the future should it become appropriate due to housing development in the surrounding land. Transport Development Control therefore have no objection to this application, subject to conditions to ensure that opposing vehicle flows on the A34 do not cause driver confusion, for lighting of the cycleway and footway and for a Construction Environmental Management Plan.
57. The Ecologist Planner has advised that the landscaping proposals would encourage deer and other mammals to the area adjacent to the road. Advice was sought from Transport Development Control on whether this posed a highway safety issue and they advised that the risk to highway safety attached to this would seem to be no more than it would be generally on the rural network and did not request any conditions or change to the planting proposals.
58. The proposed development of a new link road is therefore in accordance with emerging VOWHCS policy aimed at providing the necessary infrastructure to mitigate and facilitate planned employment growth at Harwell. This scheme is one of 17 specifically supported by VOWHCS core policy 17. It is also supported by VOWHCS policy 33 as it would help minimise the impact of growth in the area on local roads and provide options for walking, cycling and horse riding. It is also supported by SOCS policies CSS1 and CSM1 aimed at focussing growth at Didcot and linking the town to employment sites at Harwell.

Amenity

59. VLP policy DC9 states that development will not be permitted if it would unacceptably harm the amenities of neighbouring properties and the wider environment in terms of loss of privacy, daylight or sunlight; dominance or visual intrusion; noise or vibration; smell, dust, heat or gases; pollution or external lighting.
60. The SOLP also contains policies protecting the environment from pollution (EP1), noise (EP2) and light intrusion (EP3).
61. The proposed roundabout at the northern end of the development is in close proximity to the adjacent dwellings of Sunnyside and Hillview. This has the potential to cause nuisance as a result of increased noise, light intrusion, emissions and visual impacts. The applicant has confirmed that there is no scope to move the location of the roundabout due to constraints on the site. However shrub planting to screen the roundabout from the nearby properties would assist in mitigating a number of potential impacts.
62. In terms of lighting, the proposed new junctions would be lit and this has the potential to impact properties in the vicinity. The impact would be reduced by the proposed use of LED luminaires mounted horizontally to avoid excessive light spill and intrusion. Information submitted with the application suggests that increased light levels would not impact any residential buildings, although there would be small increases in light levels in the front garden of some dwellings. However, full details of the proposed lighting design could be required by condition to ensure that there is no excessive impact on the properties due to the detailed angling and positioning of the new lighting. Subject to this, I consider the proposed development would be acceptable in terms of SOLP policy EP3 and VLP policy DC9 with regard to the impact of lighting.
63. Regarding noise, the applicant has stated that they would consider the use of surfacing materials which reduce road noise. It is recommended that this is a requirement secured through planning condition. The original noise report submitted with the application predicts a minor decrease in noise levels at Sunnyside and Hillview, opposite the northern roundabout. This was considered to be an indicative result as the model used predicts road traffic noise only from freely flowing traffic. Therefore a more detailed noise report was requested and has been submitted.
64. The noise report confirms that there would not be any significant impact on any other sensitive receptors. The study predicts that certain properties (Cross Winds, Meadow View, Long Reach, The Kingswell Hotel and Folly Cottage) would experience a minor increase in noise upon the scheme opening. The updated noise report confirms that Sunnyside and Hill View would experience a negligible increase in noise.

65. The Environmental Health Officer has confirmed that the detailed assessment is realistic and predicted increases are negligible and he has no objection to the proposed scheme.
66. The noise report states that a temporary noise barrier should be installed for the duration of construction works to reduce noise impacts at Sunnyside and Hillview. However, it states that there would still be a significant impact from construction noise for both the earthworks and road construction at these properties. No other properties would experience a significant effect from construction noise. Therefore, it is recommended that conditions are applied to require full details of the proposed noise barrier, and to limit construction hours and require good working practices are complied with. There has been no objection from the Environmental Health Officer in terms of the impact of construction period noise and the effects, although potentially significant, would be temporary and lessened through the proposed mitigation.
67. The noise study predicts minor and moderate decreases in noise levels at some properties in Harwell village as a result of decreased traffic flows once the link road is opened.
68. A Noise Insulation Regulations Assessment has been submitted. These regulations require the Highways Authority to offer insulation or provide grants in respect of a new road if certain criteria are met in terms of noise level increases. The assessment demonstrates that no properties would qualify for noise insulation in association with road traffic noise from this scheme.
69. Therefore, the information submitted with the planning application has demonstrated that SOLP policy EP2 and VLP policy DC9 (in terms of noise) can be complied with. Conditions should be attached to ensure that the mitigation measures proposed in the noise study and the further noise assessment work are implemented.
70. The air quality report submitted with the application contains detailed modelling to quantify potential changes in pollutant concentrations and concludes that concentrations of key pollutants at all modelled receptors are expected to be below relevant Air Quality Strategy objective and European Union limit value thresholds. The assessment included cumulative effects when wider developments in the area are also in place. The construction phase was also assessed and it is recommended that dust mitigation measures are secured through a site Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). This could be secured through condition. These measures should ensure that any residual effect on air quality from construction emissions is not significant.
71. The resident of Sunnyside has expressed concern about a loss of privacy resulting from car headlights shining through windows. However, the property is already located on the B4493 and is set back from the road frontage. Loss of privacy from the construction of the

proposed new roundabout is not considered to be a significant concern and the proposals accord with VLP policy DC9 in this respect.

72. Therefore, subject to conditions, the development is considered to be in accordance with SOLP policy EP1 and VLP policy DC9 (in terms of gases and pollution).
73. The Landscape and Visual Assessment submitted with the application concludes that the most significant visual effects would be on dwellings fronting onto the B4493 and impacts would decrease with distance. The main views would be from the north and east as views from the south would be mitigated by distance and views from the west would be mitigated by the existing A34 and its vegetation. The proposed new screening vegetation would further mitigate visual impacts. I consider that the development accords with relevant policy in terms of visual impact.
74. Harwell Parish Council has expressed concern that the proposed new planting designed to protect residents is likely to be inadequate and would have to be removed at a later date to allow for the development of a new access road to the Valley Park development from the roundabout. The applicant has confirmed that the roundabout has been designed to accommodate a fourth arm for a Valley Park road, however there is no certainty at this point in time that such a road will be constructed, or when. Should additional screening be required in association with works to develop a road to Valley Park then this would be the responsibility of the developer for that application.
75. Given that there has been no objection or adverse comments from the Environmental Health Officer I do not consider that the potential impact on amenity from this development would cause unacceptable harm. Conditions can be used to ensure that the impact on properties is reduced to an acceptable level.

Rights of Way

76. VOWHCS Core Policy 35 states that sustainable modes of transport will be encouraged and supports the provision of new cycle routes.
77. VLP policy L10 states that development over public rights of way will not be permitted unless alternative provision can be made that is equally or more attractive, safe and convenient to rights of way users.
78. SOLP policy T1 states that proposals for development will provide safe and convenient routes for cyclists and pedestrians.
79. Although the development would require the diversion of a section of the existing Driftway bridleway, it does propose an alternative route that would also be safe, attractive and convenient to rights of way users, along the eastern boundary of the new link road and around the proposed new northern roundabout. This would be in accordance with VLP policy L10. The scheme would also incorporate a new footway

and cycleway, which is supported by VOWHCS core policy 35 and SOLP policy T1. The rights of way officer has no objection to the application, subject to provision for the maintenance of the new bridleway and it being surfaced to appropriate specifications.

80. As the new section of bridleway to the east of the road and around the roundabout would be slightly longer than the existing bridleway it is considered necessary to secure funding for the long term maintenance of the additional length. This could be done through the use of a Section 106 planning obligation to secure a commuted sum. As this is necessary to ensure a satisfactory alternative route to the bridleway which is to be stopped up, it is recommended that any permission granted is subject to this requirement. The applicant has indicated that they would be prepared to provide this. The specifications for the surfacing of new bridleway would be a matter to be covered by the diversion order and not a matter for the planning consent.
81. In response to the other comments from the rights of way team, the applicant has confirmed that a new section of road restraint system would be installed across the existing access of the stopped up bridleway. The new roundabout at the northern end would be designed to ensure that a fourth arm to Valley Park could be provided, however it would be the responsibility of the Valley Park developer to construct it when needed.
82. The British Horse Society has commented that the best solution would be if the Driftway could be re-connected over or under the A34 so that users could travel directly into Harwell without using the B4493. They would also like to see the existing bridleway adjacent to the A34 retained. However, these measures are not proposed as part of the scheme and it is accepted that they are not needed to ensure adequate rights of way provision in the area. It is anticipated that the development would reduce traffic on the B4493 through Harwell village, which would improve that road for horseriders and cyclists. The reduction of the speed limit on the B4493 would also increase its safety and attractiveness to pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians.
83. The British Horse Society has also suggested a further new length of bridleway further north and the downgrading of the road through Harwell village. These are outside the limits of this scheme and are not proposed. However, the construction of the proposed new link road is predicted to lead to a reduction in traffic flows through Harwell village, which would make the route safer and more pleasant for horseriders, cyclists and pedestrians.
84. Harwell Parish Council has commented that there is no indication what will happen to the proposed new bridleway around the new B4493 roundabout when an access road to Valley Park is added to the roundabout. The applicant has confirmed that a new crossing point would be needed at that time.

85. Alternative solutions for the rights of way network in the area have been suggested in letters of representation and consultation responses, including reconnecting the two sections of the Driftway on either side of the A34, which were severed when that road was constructed. Although there are a number of ideas that have the potential to benefit rights of way users in the area, these are not proposed as part of the scheme. The proposals as submitted have been considered against the relevant policies and I consider that they comply with rights of way policy as they offer a suitable diversion route, a new crossing and a new cycleway and footway.

Countryside and Landscape

86. VOWHCS Core Policy 44 states that the key features that contribute to the nature and quality of the Vale of White Horse District Council's landscape will be protected from harmful development and where possible enhanced. High priority will be given to conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs AONB and planning decisions will have regard to its setting.
87. VLP policy NE6 states that development which would be visually prominent, would detract from views from public vantage points or would spoil the appreciation of the landscape quality of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will not be permitted.
88. The application area is also identified as falling within the 'Lowland Vale' in the VLP. VLP policy NE9 states that development in the Lowland Vale will not be permitted if it would have an adverse effect on the landscape, particularly on long open views within or across the area.
89. The application area falls within the important open space between Didcot and Harwell, as identified in the VLP. VLP policy NE10 states that in this area development or changes of use which would harm their essentially open or rural character will not be permitted.
90. SOCS policy CSEN1 states that the district's landscape character and key features will be protected against inappropriate development. High priority will be given to the conservation of the North Wessex Downs AONB. SOLP policy G2 states that the district's countryside, settlements and environmental resources will be protected from adverse developments.
91. A landscape and visual assessment was submitted with the application. This concludes that there would be a moderate adverse impact on the impact on the 'large scale farmland' character area, a slight adverse impact on the 'small scale farmland' character area, a slight adverse effect on Harwell and a slight adverse impact on Didcot. It concludes that there would be no effect on the North Wessex Downs AONB. There has been no objection from the AONB board.

92. It is clear that there is a need for this development as part of the wider growth of employment and housing in the area. This specific scheme is also supported by emerging policy. The need and the policy support must be weighed against some potential planning policies relating to the protection of the countryside and landscape. The proposed new road would have some impact on the landscape of the area and would impact an area that is currently open, agricultural countryside. This is not fully supported by policies such as VLP NE9 and NE10.
93. Although there would be some adverse impacts to the local landscape from a development of this scale, none of the effects have been classified as major adverse. The impact would be mitigated to some extent by the location of the development adjacent to the existing A34 dual carriageway and in the future it would be viewed in the context of other new development in the area. The impact on the landscape would be softened with the proposed screen planting, further details of which can be required by a planning condition attached to any planning permission which may be forthcoming. The development is outside of the AONB and would not affect it.
94. I consider that the support given to the proposal by other policies in the existing and emerging plans and the benefits of the proposal to the area outweigh the potential minor and moderate adverse impacts which the new road would have on the local landscape. Given the support elsewhere in policy the proposals are not considered to be inappropriate, adverse or harmful and it is not considered that they would be visually prominent or impact the AONB. Therefore, the proposals are not considered to be contrary to VOWHCS policy 44, VLP policy NE6, SOLP policy G2 or SOCS policy CSEN1.

Biodiversity

95. The NPPF states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible.
96. VLP policy NE5 states that development likely to have an adverse impact on a specially protected species will not be permitted.
97. SOLP policy C6 states that in considering proposals for development, the maintenance and enhancement of the biodiversity resource of the district will be sought. Full account of the effects of development on wildlife will be taken. Where there is any significant loss in biodiversity as part of a proposed development, the creation and maintenance of new landscape features, habitats, habitat links and wildlife corridors of appropriate scale and kind will be required to ensure there is no net loss in biodiversity resources.
98. SOCS policy CSB1 states that a net loss of biodiversity will be avoided and opportunities to achieve a net gain will be actively sought.

99. VOWHCS Core Policy 36 states that if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission will be refused.
100. An Ecological Impact Assessment was submitted with the application. This concludes that the mitigation measures proposed would ensure that the development had a positive impact on the nature conservation value of the application site, although the overall effect is unlikely to be significant. The mitigation includes new planting and the avoidance of night time work to avoid disturbance to bats. The only habitat which would be subject to net loss would be arable fields. There would be a net gain in hedgerow length, species rich grassland, deciduous woodland, wetland habitats, scrub and scattered trees. These habitats would be managed for 5 years by the contractor and then for a further 20 years by the County Council. This 25 years management and maintenance period could be secured by a planning condition should planning permission be forthcoming.
101. There has been no objection from the Ecologist Planner, subject to conditions.
102. Subject to the proposed mitigation, which can be required by condition, the development would not lead to adverse impacts on protected species or on the biodiversity resource of the area. It would therefore comply with the NPPF and relevant development plan policy including VLP policy NE5, SOLP policy C6 and SOCS policy CSB1 and also with emerging policy VOWHCS Core Policy 36.

Flooding and Drainage

103. VLP policy DC14 states that developments generating surface water run-off likely to result in adverse effects such as flooding, will not be permitted unless there is an effective surface water management system. Although the site is not in the flood plain, a flood risk assessment was required due to the size of the application area. The Environment Agency originally objected because detailed calculations supporting the conclusions of this assessment had not been provided. These were subsequently provided and the Environment Agency has removed its objection. The surface water drainage proposals have been considered and there is no objection. The development is therefore considered to be in accordance with development plan policy relating to flood risk, specifically VLP policy DC14.

Agricultural Land

104. The area of land affected by this development is not considered to be significant. Consultations with Natural England are only required when development would cause a loss of 20 hectares or more of best and most versatile agricultural land. In this case the loss would be 8 hectares. The applicant has provided an assessment of the impact on

agricultural land and concluded that any adverse impact would be very slight as the fields are part of large arable enterprises.

105. Therefore, it is considered that the development would not have a significant impact on agricultural land in the area and that it would comply with the NPPF in respect to best and most versatile agricultural land.

Other Matters

106. Didcot Town Council has requested two conditions, firstly that the Great Western Park spine road is completed between the A4130 and the B4493 before this new road is opened and secondly that the improved cycle and foot way linking Great Western Park and Foxhall Road is completed before this new road is opened. The applicant has confirmed that it is intended to have both these two pieces of infrastructure in place before the link road would open. The Great Western Park spine road is estimated to be completed towards the end of 2016 and the cycle and footway linking Great Western Park to Foxhall Road by the end of this year. However, it is not considered necessary to condition the timings of these infrastructure projects to make the development proposed here acceptable.
107. The development would lead to the loss of land classified as 'best and most versatile agricultural land.' NPPF paragraph 112 states that local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land and where significant development of agricultural land is necessary seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.

Conclusions

108. The proposed development of a new road to link new residential development in Didcot with employment in Harwell would be in accordance with emerging and development plan policies related to highways infrastructure and facilitating growth at Didcot and Harwell, including VOWHCS policies 6, 17 33 and 35 and SOCS policies CSS1 and CSM1.
109. The development would have the potential to cause amenity impacts on nearby dwellings, however the design and the proposed mitigation measures are considered to adequately protect amenity in accordance with VLP policy DC9 and SOLP policies EP1, EP2 and EP3.
110. The proposal would involve the stopping up of an existing public right of way. However, alternative provision is proposed which is considered to be similarly safe, convenient and attractive, in line with policy VLP L10.
111. The development is located in the open countryside and in an identified area of open space between Didcot and Harwell; therefore there is some conflict with policies aimed at protecting the countryside and

landscape (VLP policies NE9 and NE10). However, the impact on the countryside and landscape would not be severe and given the support for this scheme in other policies it is considered that any conflict with these policies is outweighed by other considerations. The development is considered to accord with the provisions of VOWHCS policy 44, VLP policy NE6 and SOCS policy CSEN1.

112. The proposals comply with relevant policies protecting biodiversity (VLP policy NE5, SOLP policy C6, SOCS policy CSB1 and VOWHCS policy 36.)

RECOMMENDATION

113. It is RECOMMENDED that subject to:

- i) conditions to be determined by the Deputy Director for Environment and Economy (Strategy and Infrastructure Planning) to include the matters set out in Annex 1 to this report;**
- ii) Provision for the funding of the long term maintenance of the additional section of bridleway and additional maintenance over and above what is currently required for the existing bridleway;**

that planning permission for application no. R3.0133/14 be granted.

BEV HINDLE
Deputy Director (Strategy and Infrastructure Planning)

February 2015

Annex 1: Conditions

1. Three year commencement;
2. Complete accordance with approved plans;
3. Standard construction hours;
4. Submission, approval and implementation of a Construction Environmental Management Plan, including dust mitigation;
5. Submission, approval and implementation of details of surfacing materials that reduce noise impact;
6. Submission, approval and implementation of detailed lighting plan, complaint with best practice guidance on bats;
7. Implementation of noise mitigation measures as set out in noise assessment;
8. Submission, approval and implementation of additional noise assessment of mitigation measures arising from it;
9. Submission, approval and implementation of details of proposed noise barrier;
10. Submission, approval and implementation of detailed drainage proposals;
11. Ecological mitigation measures;
12. Implementation of approved landscape planting within the first planting season following the completion of the development;
13. Soil testing prior to seeding and use of calcareous grass mix rather than proposed wildflower grass mix should the site be suitable
14. Ramping of excavations and covering of pipework during construction to protect badgers
15. Submission, approval and implementation of long term management of landscaped areas;
16. Submission, approval and implementation of a detailed Ecological Mitigation and Enhancement Scheme
17. Updated ecological surveys should work not commence within a year
18. Submission, approval and implementation of Precautionary Method of Working for reptiles
19. Submission, approval and implementation of additional road restraint system sections to secure the end of stopped up bridleway
20. Submission, approval and implementation of ducting to facilitate lighting of whole length of road should this be necessary at a later date
21. Submission, approval and implementation of a monitoring and survey scheme for headlight glare from opposing vehicle flows on the A34, implementation of any necessary mitigation arising
22. Submission, approval and implementation of details of lighting for the cycleway/walkway.
23. Submission, approval and implementation of a Construction Traffic Management Plan

Informatives

1. Protected species
2. Birds nesting
3. Maximum 50 mph speed limit
4. The stopping up of a section of public bridleway 243/12 and its replacement with a new section of public bridleway requires an

application to the Rights of Way team for an order under section 257 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Compliance with National Planning Policy Framework

In accordance with paragraphs 186 and 187 of the NPPF Oxfordshire County Council take a positive and proactive approach to decision making focused on solutions and fostering the delivery of sustainable development. We work with applicants in a positive and proactive manner by;

- offering a pre-application advice service, and
 - updating applicants and agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application and where possible suggesting solutions.
- Issues which arose in the processing of the application included concerns raised by consultees about the impact on the rights of way network and amenity and these were addressed with the applicant through the provision of additional information.

Annex 2 - Representations

1. Five letters of representation have been received from individuals in response to this application. This includes one letter of support, two letters expressing concerns and two letters of objection.

2. These letters are summarised below and a response to the points raised is provided.

3. Representation 1 – Support - (Harwell resident)

- Support the proposal without reservation
- The link road will help avoid traffic gridlock in Harwell village when more homes are built in the area
- Will benefit both road users and residents of Harwell

4. Representation 2 – Object - (Occupant of Sunnyside)

- Impact on value of property
- Amenity impact of traffic, which will be stationary at peak times
- Amenity impact of street lighting
- Headlights will shine through windows
- Amenity impact of noise
- Concern about parking for his HGV
- Concerned about access to property – disabled person living there
- Concerned that it will no longer be possible to walk his three dogs.

Officer Response – The potential impact on the value of the property is not a material consideration for the determination of the planning process. The objector has been provided with details of the scheme for compensation should the development of a new road decrease the value of their property. The land on which the objector parks his HGV is highways land and is needed for the scheme. The proposals include a number of mitigation measures to reduce the impact of the two properties close to the new roundabout on the B4493. This includes appropriate lighting and surfacing materials and shrub screening vegetation. The applicant has confirmed that it is not possible to move the roundabout further from these properties due to the constraints on the site. A noise assessment has been carried out for this development and confirms that the increase in traffic noise on scheme opening would be negligible. There is the potential for construction noise at this property, but it is considered that this could be satisfactorily managed by condition. The air quality assessment work carried out for the application concludes that there would be an ‘imperceptible’ effect at this property. There has been no objection from the Environment Health Officer to this application and therefore it is considered that the potential amenity impacts on nearby properties can be adequately addressed through condition. Access to the property will be retained and alternative rights of way provision is proposed.

5. Representation 3 – Concern (Resident of West Hagbourne)

- The noise assessment excludes West Hagbourne and the application cannot be approved without this being corrected.

Officer Response – Further advice was sought from SODC’s Environmental Health Officer (EHO) in relation to concerns that the noise impact assessment did not adequately cover noise impacts on South Oxfordshire residents in West Hagbourne. The EHO confirmed that he agreed with the scope and findings of the submitted noise impact assessment because it assessed the potential impacts on properties closer to the site than West Hagbourne and found impacts to be negligible.

7. Representation 4 – Object (Resident of Harwell)

- Object to building a new road on what is currently a public right of way surrounded by open space
- Walking is beneficial for physical and mental health and it is more beneficial to walk in a natural environment than on a manmade footway/cycleway such as the one proposed.
- Wildlife would be lost.
- More roads will lead to more traffic
- It will not be such a pleasant environment to walk in
- Instead of building new roads and houses across the countryside the council should discourage developers.

Officer Response – The proposals do involve the stopping up of an existing right of way, however, they also involve the diversion of the bridleway route and a new footway and cycleway. The proposals also include a new crossing point on the B4493. This has the potential to improve the situation for users of the rights of way. Overall there would be an increase in a number of habitat types for wildlife and a slight improvement of the biodiversity value of the site. Traffic modelling shows that the proposed road would decrease traffic in Harwell village.

9. Representation 5 – Concern – (Resident of Didcot)

- Concerned about the proposed alignment of the bridleway
- Route would increase the distance travelled along the margin of a busy road
- The proposal does not adequately cater for cyclists travelling from Didcot and Harwell. The new crossing should be immediately south of the new roundabout on the B4493, not east of it.
- If the new road is subsequently extended north towards Milton Park there would probably need to be another detour and the route would be even less attractive.
- Disagree with the proposed stopping up of the existing bridleway
- Best solution would be to reconnect the Driftway bridleway, which was severed by the construction of the A34, using a bridge over the A34 and a crossing on the new link road.
- Also concerned that the proposal would increase traffic on local roads. Aim should be to divert traffic onto the A34.
- Suggests an alternative solution of connecting the A417 and B4493 to the A34 with an additional lane in each direction on the A34.

Officer Response – It is the case that the diverted route would be longer than the existing route. However, it is necessary to stop up the existing section of bridleway for safety reasons as it would be dangerous if users were to

attempt to cross the new link road. Therefore, the diversion route is considered to be a satisfactory option for users of the bridleway. Reconnecting the Driftway across the A34 is not proposed as part of the scheme. This is not considered necessary to make the proposed development acceptable. Traffic modelling shows that the new link road would reduce traffic flows through Harwell village, rather than increase them. The siting of the Pegasus crossing on the B4493 to the east of the new roundabout is proposed because it is considered to be the safest location.

Annex 3 – European Protected Species

The Local Planning Authority in exercising any of their functions, have a legal duty to have regard to the requirements of the Conservation of Species & Habitats Regulations 2010 which identifies 4 main offences for development affecting European Protected Species (EPS).

1. Deliberate capture or killing or injuring of an EPS
2. Deliberate taking or destroying of EPS eggs
3. Deliberate disturbance of a EPS including in particular any disturbance which is likely
 - a) to impair their ability –
 - i) to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young, or
 - ii) in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate; or
 - b) to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.
4. Damage or destruction of an EPS breeding site or resting place.

Our records and ecological survey results indicate that European Protected Species are unlikely to be present. Therefore no further consideration of the Conservation of Species & Habitats Regulations is necessary.

