

DC.46

**MINUTES OF A MEETING
OF THE DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT THE GUILDHALL,
ABINGDON ON WEDNESDAY, 26TH
JULY, 2006 AT 6.30PM**

Open to the Public, including the Press

PRESENT:

MEMBERS: Councillors Terry Quinlan (Chair), John Woodford (Vice-Chair), Roger Cox, Terry Cox, Tony de Vere, Richard Farrell, Richard Gibson, Jenny Hannaby, Monica Lovatt, Jim Moley, Briony Newport, Jerry Patterson, Peter Saunders, Margaret Turner and Pam Westwood.

NON MEMBERS: Councillor Melinda Tilley

OFFICERS: Sarah Commins, Steve Culliford, Mike Gilbert and Rodger Hood.

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES: Tim Foxhall and Peter Mann

NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 36

DC.82 **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None

DC.83 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Margaret Turner declared a personal interest in item 7, the planning application on land west of Didcot (the site lay in both Didcot and Harwell), as she was a member of Harwell Parish Council and knew most of the public speakers (minute DC.88 refers).

DC.84 **URGENT BUSINESS AND CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair asked everyone present to ensure their mobile phones were switched off during the meeting.

He announced that he was suspending part of Standing Order 33 to allow members of the public longer to present their cases. He agreed to allocate a total of thirty minutes for the parish councils, a total of thirty minutes for the objectors, and a total of thirty minutes for the applicants to present their cases.

DC.85 **STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 32**

None

DC.86 **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 32**

None

DC.87 **STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 33**

It was noted that sixteen members of the public had each given notice that they wished to make statements at the meeting but two declined to do so.

Planning Applications

The Committee received and considered report 48/06 of the Deputy Director (Planning and Community Strategy), which detailed one application, the decision of which is recorded below.

DC.88 HAR/17774-X AND HAR/17774/1-X - MIXED USE URBAN EXTENSION OF APPROXIMATELY 3200 DWELLINGS, TOGETHER WITH OPEN SPACE, LEISURE, COMMUNITY, LOCAL SHOPS, SERVICES AND UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE - LAND WEST OF DIDCOT (GREAT WESTERN PARK)

(Councillor Margaret Turner declared a personal interest in this item and in accordance with Standing Order 34, she remained in the meeting during its consideration.)

Further to report 48/06, the Planning Officer updated the Committee:

- The principle of development at this site had been established through the development plan process
- The application site crossed the town/parish boundary between Didcot and Harwell and consequently crossed the boundary between South Oxfordshire and the Vale
- Duplicate applications were before the Committees of the two District Councils. These were outline applications with all matters reserved apart from access
- There had been an appeal against the Council's non-determination of one of the applications. The hearing was scheduled for 7 November 2006
- South Oxfordshire District Council's Planning Committee had considered the application on 19 July 2006 and had delegated authority to approve it, subject to the completion of a Section 106 agreement and other procedural matters
- Supplementary papers had been circulated to the Vale's Development Control Committee following South Oxfordshire's meeting. This included a diagram showing the master plan for the site
- Development was expected to be carried out over a ten-year period
- Oak Tree Health Centre in Didcot had requested to be involved in the discussions on the Section 106 agreement
- A further letter of objection had been received from Maralyn Bartell raising matters set out in the report
- The County Council, as the Structure Plan authority, had removed its holding objection subject to securing the package of benefits as part of the Section 106 agreement
- The County Council, as highways authority, believed that the development on its own could not justify funding a Harwell by-pass - in addition, a further technical study would be needed
- The County Council had ring-fenced funds for improvements to the A34 Milton Interchange, a traffic light-controlled junction on the A4130 to access the northern part of the development, a traffic light junction on Wantage Road (B4493) to gain access to the northern and southern parts of the site, plus improvements to the junctions at Rowstock, Manor Bridge/A4130, and the Power Station junction
- The master plan layout design was considered to be an improvement over the previous design but further adjustments might be needed, including around Stephen Freeman Primary School
- Appendix 4 set out the draft heads of terms of the Section 106 Agreement
- Appendix 8 set out the reasons why 40% affordable housing could not be achieved on the site
- An additional condition was recommended stipulating that there must be no built development to the south of 155 Park Road, Didcot, except for small buildings related to the allotments or open space use of this land

The Planning Officer also read out a letter submitted by the Local Member, Councillor Richard Stone, who could not attend the meeting. Firstly, Councillor Stone objected to the development on this site and called for protection of the nearby villages. He asked that serious consideration was given to the road links necessary to accommodate this development both on and off site. The A34 was overloaded, its Milton Interchange needed attention. The highways in Harwell and Milton would also need attention. He asked that the highway works were timetabled to cause the minimum disruption and that they were carried out before development begun. The impact of the upgrading of Southampton port should also be taken into account as this would put additional heavy goods traffic onto the A34. He urged that the new development was integrated into the community and was provided with the necessary infrastructure such as schools, public community facilities and open space. Affordable housing should be as high a percentage as possible and should be mostly shared equity to promote pride and care. The surrounding villages should not be left isolated. They should have appropriate road planning, shops and transport links. A green belt was needed around the town to protect the surrounding villages. Co-ordinated thought was needed to future-proof the development - it should exceed current requirements and plan for needs in the future.

Tim Foxhall of Oxfordshire County Council was invited to address the Committee on the issue of highway improvements that could result from this development. The strategic plan showed one access to the site from the A4130 (a traffic light-controlled junction) and accesses to the northern and southern parts of the site from a traffic light-controlled junction on the B4493 Wantage Road, east of Zulu Farm. The access onto Portway was narrow and therefore would be restricted to pedestrians, cyclists and buses only. Access to a limited number of dwellings would be permitted off Park Road, Didcot. A spine road would travel through the site and would be speed limited to 20mph and would act as a bus route. The requirement for a perimeter road outside the site had been withdrawn.

Mr Foxhall reported that the developer had been required to undertake a transport assessment and provide a model to form the basis of its transport plans. This predicted 2,600 and 2,500 traffic movements from the site each day at the morning and evening peak times respectively in the year 2012. The County Council had used a different model to undertake its predictions but the results of the two assessments correlated well. A routing agreement would be in place for construction traffic, predicted at 500 movements per day at peak construction. This would mean a 24% increase in traffic on the A4130. Improvements to the Milton Interchange would be required prior to construction work at the site. He also highlighted the public transport improvements and contributions towards the highways infrastructure, as set out in the report. The impacts of these changes would be monitored and further changes might be necessary. He reported that the County Council had agreed to allocate £1.23 million of the highways contribution towards a Harwell by-pass. A feasibility study would need to be undertaken first. The diversion of this contribution to fund alternative highway works would only be done with the agreement of both the County and District Councils after ten years.

The Chair then invited the public to make their statements to the meeting. Representatives from Parish Councils spoke first.

Mr Hayter of Harwell Parish Council questioned how he could be expected to evaluate the impact of such a large amount of housing proposed for the area. To the year 2026, he reminded the Committee that 7,300 dwellings were proposed at Didcot. He questioned the validity of the traffic model which only looked at the present traffic levels. He pointed out that the proposed Harwell by-pass ran from the B4493 to the A417. He suggested that as the perimeter road idea had been shelved, the Harwell by-pass should be extended further to the Milton Interchange. He reported that Harwell's own traffic survey in the village showed different figures from those referred to by the reported traffic studies. More public transport was needed to dissuade people from using their cars. He queried the absence of a burial

ground at the site. He expressed concerns at the risk of worsening air quality in the area and understood that there were plans to make the A34 a regional route. He asked whether this would bring any funding for improvements.

Mr de Wilde of Upton Parish Council expressed concern at the increased pressure on the supporting infrastructure. He questioned the intentions of the access onto Park Road, which was already congested. The local transport infrastructure had worsened, as had been illustrated by the recent closure of the Upton to Chilton road and the impact this had on surrounding villages. He believed the two traffic surveys undertaken had produced spurious results. Nothing was being done to cure the existing problems. Solutions were needed before the new development took place. He urged the Council not to rely on the developer's promises.

Miss Totterdell of West Hagbourne Parish Council pointed out that the Council had ignored the proposed ten-fold increase in the size of the village. There would be an adverse environmental impact if no burial ground was allocated as Hagbourne's cemetery would be inadequate. She urged that this should become a beacon development, addressing global warming issues with a high percentage of homes using renewable energy. There was much complacency at the traffic impact on the surrounding villages. It was already too dangerous to walk through the village. She asked that when an accident occurred on the surrounding road network, lorries should avoid travelling through Hagbourne and Harwell villages. She believed that traffic calming was not the answer, an objective assessment was needed. She welcomed the Harwell by-pass but asked that it was renamed to the Harwell and Hagbourne relief road. Construction of the relief road must take place in the first phase of the new development. She called for strategic gaps between Didcot and the surrounding villages to be maintained.

Dr Emery of East Hagbourne Parish Council supported the points made by other Parish Councils and thanked the District Council for its work on this application. However, he expressed disappointment at the level of consultation, particularly by the developers. He had strong concerns about the planned infrastructure and traffic improvements and called for an emphasis on road improvements. He questioned the traffic model used and predicted that increased traffic levels would threaten the quality of life of local residents. He was concerned at the planned access to the site from Park Road. Highway improvements in Harwell and the Hagbournes were needed before the development commenced. The rural gaps between the town and East Hagbourne on the southern boundary of the site must be maintained. He was also concerned at the distribution of schools and the lack of a burial ground. He urged the Committee to reject the application as far too many important issues were being deferred.

Mr Scharf of Drayton Parish Council asked that more attention was paid to reducing and minimising the traffic impact. The impact would be felt in Drayton. The provision of road surfaces that resulted in less noise and reduced speed limits on the A34 should be used but would only balance out the harm caused by the additional traffic.

The Chair then invited the objectors to make their statements.

Dr Hughes, of the Keep Harwell Rural Campaign and representative of fourteen local parishes on the Didcot Integrated Transport Strategy Steering Group, addressed the meeting. He questioned how the Committee could proceed with the application. The western boundary had been breached from the boundary set out in the Local Plan policy. This encroached upon Harwell and left pockets of undeveloped land. He suggested the developers should work harder to avoid this. The traffic model had failed to mention the effect on Wantage Road. Traffic calming would not reduce the traffic unless there was a viable alternative. The proposed Harwell by-pass was only a partial by-pass, ending at the A417 and there were no other feasible options. There were ineffective measures and untested comments in the proposal and he urged Members to think hard about these.

Paul Samuels spoke on behalf of the Campaign for a Sustainable Didcot, a residents' group. He questioned why the application was recommended for approval under delegated authority when there were too many loose ends. The Section 106 agreement had been drafted behind closed doors with no consultation on its contents. He asked that the details of the agreement should be subject to public consultation. He endorsed the call for more homes to use renewable energy sources and water efficient systems. These should be designed and built into the new development. He believed that the traffic assumption was incorrect; the development was likely to generate traffic levels similar to Wantage. This would impact on Harwell.

Mr Rouse objected to the principle of development of this site. Resultant congestion would be felt in all directions. The proposed improvements to Milton Interchange would not solve the problems and construction traffic would make it worse. He urged that the application was refused and that other options for the A4130 were investigated.

Andrew Jones believed that the new development should have more houses to the north of the site and that there should be a developer's contribution towards a secondary school, preferably sited to the north of the town. He asked that a pedestrian crossing was installed on Foxhall Road and that ancient hedgerows and pathways on the development site were protected. He also asked the Committee to resist the highest buildings being located on the ridge where they would have greatest visual impact. There would also be a need to introduce mitigation measures for residents on the new development to protect them from the A34 road noise. He supported claims for the design of the new dwellings to incorporate renewable energy and water efficient systems and called for the subway under the railway from the A4130 to Milton Park to be re-opened to allow pedestrian and cycle traffic through.

Karen Leahy objected to the application raising many points. She questioned the development's viability, the level of affordable housing, and the poor mitigation measures for the traffic impact. She objected to school children being put at risk in having to cross roads to get to school, the poor ecological surveys, the development being located on the wrong site, and the loss of amenity and countryside. She urged Members to vote against it.

County Councillor Terry Joslin had yet to meet anyone who supported this proposed development. The protection zone would be lost. No mention had been made of archaeological investigations at the site. He urged the Committee to oppose the application. Approving the application would create a split, unsustainable town lasting for many years.

The Chair then invited the applicants to make their statements.

Ivor Beamon, of one of the applicant companies, believed that the application supported the Local Plan. All parties had been consulted; the outcome was a balanced Section 106 package. The developers' consortium would be seeking further subsidy from the Housing Corporation for affordable housing on the site. The impact on surrounding communities had been considered, both during construction and once the development was complete.

Nick Laister, on behalf of the applicants, responded to some of the points raised by objectors. The applicants had agreed to part fund a Harwell by-pass. The traffic model used by the applicants had been tested by the County Council and the data had proved to be robust. The applicants would work with the local villages to introduce traffic measures to make them less desirable to travel through. Buffers would be maintained to protect the surrounding villages. To the south of the site there would be no built development, only open space or allotments. To the west of the site, the changes to the boundary had been introduced on the recommendation of the design consultants. Shifting the boundary to the east would have reduced the area available for the district centre. The setting of Down Farmhouse and its

orchard would be protected. The access onto Park Road would be for a limited number of dwellings and there would be a bus gate and pedestrian and cycle access also. Consultation had taken place with local Parish Councils both in 2002 and 2005. As many of the existing footpaths as possible would be retained. The drainage of the site had been designed to have no adverse impact on the surrounding communities. The drainage strategy had been agreed by the Environment Agency.

The Chair then called a fifteen minute adjournment. On re-convening at 9.00pm, he invited the Local Member to address the Committee.

Councillor Margaret Turner, the Local Member, believed that more information was needed before a decision could be taken. The location of the development was poor but the principle had been established so now efforts had to be targeted at getting the best from the development. Minimal impact on the local communities was needed. However, she believed that the plans before the Committee had not achieved this. She believed that a higher percentage of affordable housing was needed and more of it should be shared equity housing. She considered that the transport proposals were unsatisfactory. Villages such as Harwell and Milton would be subject to rat running as the proposed improvements to Milton Interchange were inadequate. Proposals for cyclists and pedestrians were just 'words'. Redirecting cyclists to bring them out on the White Hart corner in Harwell was very dangerous. She urged the Committee not to delegate this application for approval, effectively rubber stamping a shell of a huge application.

The Committee then debated the application. In answer to questions from Members, the Planning Officer reported that the boundary on the master plan would supersede the boundary in the Local Plan policy. The highest buildings on the site would be located near the neighbourhood and district centres; at the edges of the site, building heights would be lower.

Members noted that the effectiveness of the proposed transport measures would be monitored and amended, if necessary. However, the County Council's officers did not believe the development would severely impact on the surrounding areas. The developers would contribute towards the provision of a Harwell by-pass. The Didcot Integrated Transport Strategy would contribute also. Some concern was expressed at the already congested A4130 from Didcot to Milton Interchange. This needed to be overcome. Members felt that more work would be required to secure the necessary highway improvements and a Harwell by-pass.

The Committee considered that the officers must secure the re-opening of the railway underpass between the A4130 and Milton Park to allow pedestrian and cycling access. The County Council highways officer agreed to press for the subway to be opened up for public use. It was noted that noise from the A34, A4130 and the railway would be mitigated by measures suggested by Environmental Health Officers.

Some Members expressed disappointment at the cut in the affordable housing percentage for the site. Others believed that a good development could be achieved through good design and the building of more energy efficient homes. It was also suggested that there should be recycling facilities such as bottle banks, buried to reduce noise. Members also expressed concern at the lack of a cemetery in the master plan.

It was suggested that this application could not solve all of the existing problems. The principle of the development being to the west of the town had been established. The Committee had to get the best out of the development. Many loose ends existed but this was the best the Committee could achieve at this outline application stage.

As this was an outline application, all matters apart from access would be reserved for the detailed application(s). Appended to the report were the heads of terms of the draft Section 106 agreement. Any variation of these would have to be approved by the Committee. As this was the biggest planning application brought before this Committee, some Members requested that it was brought back to the Committee for consideration once solutions had been drafted for the outstanding issues. The Committee did not support this. As a fall back position, it was suggested that the delegation should include the Committee's Opposition Spokesman and the two Local Members. The Committee was in support of extending the delegation as suggested. If discussions resulted in unsolved issues, the application should be referred back to the Committee for consideration.

It was proposed by the Chair and

RESOLVED

- (a) *that authority to approve application HAR/17774-X be delegated to the Chair and/or Vice-Chair and Opposition Spokesman of the Development Control Committee, together with the two Local Members, subject to the conditions set out in the report and two additional conditions regarding the submission of amended plans and requiring no development to be built south of no.155 Park Road, Didcot on a line to be shown in the planning permission, with the exception of facilities for allotments or public open space (by nine votes to six); and*
- (b) *that had the decision still rested with the Council, authority to approve application HAR/17774/1-X would have been delegated to the Chair and/or Vice-Chair and Opposition Spokesman of the Development Control Committee, together with the two Local Members, subject to the conditions set out in the report and two additional conditions regarding the submission of amended plans and requiring no development to be built south of no.155 Park Road, Didcot on a line to be shown in the planning permission, with the exception of facilities for allotments or public open space (by nine votes to five with one abstention).*

Exempt Information Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972

None

The meeting rose at 10.15 pm