

APPLICATION NO.	P15/V0125/EZ
APPLICATION TYPE	ENTERPRISE ZONE
REGISTERED	22.1.2015
PARISH	HARWELL
WARD MEMBER(S)	Reg Waite Janet Shelley
APPLICANT	The Harwell Science & Innovation Campus GP
SITE	Land at Library Avenue Harwell Campus Didcot, OX11 0RA
PROPOSAL	Erection of a high-tech terrace building for employment use (Use Class B1).
AMENDMENTS	None
GRID REFERENCE	447719/186778
OFFICER	Stuart Walker

SUMMARY

This application is referred to committee as six letters of objection have been received.

The application is seeking full planning permission for the erection of a new building for class B1 use with associated access, car parking and landscape works.

The main issues are summarised below:

- The principle of the proposed development within this location is supported and encouraged by planning policy and therefore is considered acceptable.
- The proposed layout and design of the development within its employment land use context is acceptable.
- The impact of the proposal on the North Wessex Downs AONB landscape is acceptable given the context of the surrounding area.
- No adverse implications for flood risk, foul and surface water drainage have been identified.
- The impact on highway safety and parking provision is acceptable.
- There are no adverse implications for ecology or archaeology.

The proposal is considered to amount to sustainable development and is recommended for grant of planning permission, subject to conditions.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The application site comprises 0.99 hectares and sits within the Harwell Oxford campus, approximately 600m west of the A4185. Science Vale UK was nationally designated as an Enterprise Zone in 2011. It is an area of designated economic growth focussing on becoming a global hotspot for innovation. It is already home to many scientific, research and development and high technology firms. Harwell campus is one of the central parts of the Enterprise Zone. The growth of this nationally important campus is a priority for this council.
- 1.2 The site currently appears to be un-manicured land that has been used informally for bus and overflow car parking. It is bounded to the north and west by the existing buildings within the adjacent licensed site. To the south of the site is the existing bus station with a multi-occupancy office building alongside. To the east it is bounded by

the existing Library Building (now offices, following conversion in 2003) and its associated car park. The site is accessed via the mini roundabout at the end of Library Avenue which connects to the A4185 via Eighth Street and Fermi Avenue. The site falls within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

1.3 A location plan is **attached** at appendix 1.

2.0 **PROPOSAL**

2.1 The proposal seeks to develop a building intended to provide a series of flexible work spaces with shared ancillary areas, falling within Class B1 of the Use Class Order, together with vehicle and pedestrian access, servicing, staff and car parking, with a soft landscaped setting.

2.2 The building is positioned centrally within the site, with the main frontage entrance feature addressing the access from Library Avenue and arranged with the shared ancillary facilities immediately inside. The general layout of the building comprises a series of flexible work spaces arranged either side of a spine corridor. The new building has a gross internal floor area of 2,686 sq. m split between seven units each serviced via level access doors within the side elevations of the building. The footprint of the building measures approximately 73m long x 43.5m deep and 6m to underside of internal haunch with a further 2.5m approximately to the ridge.

2.3 The building is modern in design using dark grey glazing with horizontal composite cladding and vertically built up cladding composed to create a clear articulated rhythm of subtly varying textures and neutral colours. The main entrance has been designed with a combination of glazing reinforced by a projecting canopy, to clearly emphasise it as the prominent entrance and provides a focal point clearly visible from the approach to the building.

2.4 Site access and circulation wraps around the building, to provide safe and efficient access and egress from all parts of the development. The service yard is designed to provide adequate manoeuvring space to satisfy the servicing and unloading requirements of the delivery vans expected to use the site. A total of 103 car parking spaces are proposed with 10 cycle spaces.

2.5 The application has been screened against the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (amendment) Regulations 2015 and is considered not to constitute EIA development.

2.6 Extracts from the application drawings are **attached** at Appendix 2.

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

3.1 Below is a summary of the responses received to both the original plans and the amendments. A full copy of all the comments made can be viewed online at www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk.

Harwell Parish Council	No objection, but asks that cycle storage be provided near both main doors rather than at one corner of the building, and that a foot/cycle path be provided to the road to the north of the site.
Neighbours	Six letters of objection have been received. The concerns raised may be

	<p>summarised as follows:</p> <p>Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Harwell Oxford Campus is supposed to be a leading innovator and showcase for cutting edge scientific research and development - yet this bland building is proposed to comply with basic building regulations in terms of energy efficiency and low carbon - absolutely no effort or commitment has been made by the client team to achieve a highly sustainable building in terms of energy use, renewable technologies, low carbon designs and low environmental impact. At the very least BREEAM Excellent accreditation should be part of the conditions to allow this proposal to proceed.• New buildings on the campus should be showcase's not bland, unsustainable trade park offerings. <p>Highways and parking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a shortfall of parking on the campus. The application includes a significant portion of what is currently used as a set of overflow parking spaces to the west of the Library Avenue roundabout by staff of various organisations on Library Avenue and Eighth Street (and further away). The application also includes a significant portion of land currently used by Stagecoach Oxfordshire to change drivers and park buses overnight. The proposed development will remove significant levels of car and bus parking for current users of adjacent properties.• Alternate transport options should be provided first and made attractive for permanent site residents/staff to use, before reducing / elimination of parking spaces.• Development must not proceed
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	<p>until alternative overflow parking is provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the Campus is serious about encouraging the use of public transport, as required by Policy E7 of the Local Plan, the first step is to ensure that developments do not make bus travel less convenient for the large number of people who already use the bus. The proposed development should therefore incorporate a link between the north of the Bus Station and the roundabout on Library Avenue, to allow the Bus Station to remain in use once the new bus loop is implemented. • The plan to enter the new development from the existing small roundabout on Library Avenue is flawed - It is already suffering from damage due to traffic wear and the nature of the units proposed in the development will result in more than just car movements but will have large vans/lorries delivering /visiting regularly. <p>Amenity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This new development which is proposed to be circa 8M high (externally) is in close proximity to an adjoining office block and will effectively close off that end of the site with loss of views and daylight.
Oxfordshire County Council One Voice	<p>No objection</p> <p><i>Highways</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No objection, subject to conditions. <p><i>Archaeology</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No objection, subject to conditions. <p><i>Cllr Lilly</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No objection.
Landscape Officer	<p>No objection, but there is limited proposed planting to help integrate the building into the adjacent area and to mitigate the planting and trees lost. The proposed layout is very vehicle focused, with the building sat within an island of</p>

	<p>parking. There is no proposed planting on the northern side of the site, to create a backdrop to the parking and also to create a new planted structure for the building to sit in on the sites northern boundary. There is also no replacement planting on the southern site boundary to soften the proposed building and create a boundary to the site. Birch is the only proposed tree species, this is of insufficient size to create a tree substantial enough to help screen and break down the mass of the building and to mitigate for the loss of existing vegetation.</p>
<p>Countryside Officer</p>	<p>No objection. There are no significant ecological constraints associated with this site and the one tree with any bat roost potential is to be retained.</p>

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 None relevant to this site.

5.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE

5.1 Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 policies

- E7 - Harwell Science and Innovation Campus
- E10 - Key Business Sites
- DC1 - Design
- DC5 - Access
- DC6 - Landscaping
- DC7 - Waste Collection and Recycling
- DC8 - The Provision of Infrastructure and Services
- DC9 - The Impact of Development on Neighbouring Uses
- DC10 - The Effect of Neighbouring or Previous Uses on New Development
- NE6 - The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

5.2 The emerging Local Plan 2031, Part 1, Core Policies

The draft local plan part 1 is not currently adopted policy and this emerging policy and its supporting text has limited weight as per paragraph 216 of the NPPF. Greater regard therefore is to be given to the NPPF in line with paragraph 14 and where relevant, the saved policies (listed above) within the existing local plan. The following core policies are relevant to this proposal:

- 1 – Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- 3 – Settlement hierarchy
- 6 – Meeting business and employment needs
- 7 – Providing supporting infrastructure and services
- 15 – Spatial strategy for the South East Vale Sub-Area
- 29 – Change of use of existing employment land and premises
- 33 – Promoting sustainable transport and accessibility
- 35 – Promoting public transport, cycling and walking
- 36 – Electronic communications
- 37 – Design and local distinctiveness
- 38 – Design strategies for strategic and major development sites
- 40 – Sustainable design and construction

- 41 – Renewable energy
- 42 – Flood risk
- 43 – Natural resources
- 44 – Landscape
- 45 – Green Infrastructure
- 46 – Conservation and improvement of biodiversity

5.3 Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)

- Design Guide – March 2015
The following sections of the Design Guide are relevant to this application:-

Responding to Site and Setting

- *Character Study (DG6) and Site appraisal (DG9)*

Establishing the Structure

- *Existing natural resources, sustainability and ecology (DG10-13, 19, 101)*
- *Landscape and SUDS (DG14, 16-18, 20)*
- *Movement Framework and street hierarchy (DG21-24)*
- *Urban Structure (blocks, frontages, nodes etc) (DG27-28, 30)*
- *Parking and servicing (DG94 & 95)*

Layout

- *Streets and Spaces (DG31-43)*
- *Parking (DG44-50)*

Built Form

- *Scale, form, massing and position (DG51 & 52)*
- *Boundary treatments (DG55)*
- *Building Design and materials (DG56, 57, 97, 98, 102)*
- *Amenity (DG63)*
- *Refuse and services (DG100)*

- Flood Maps and Flood Risk – July 2006
- Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan, April 2012

5.4 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – March 2012

5.5 Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) – March 2014

5.6 Other Relevant Legislation

- Written statement by Secretary of State on sustainable drainage systems (18 Dec 2014)
- Written statement by the Secretary of State on car parking (25 March 2015)
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990
- Community & Infrastructure Levy Legislation
- Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010
- Localism Act (including New Homes Bonus)

5.7 Human Rights Act

The provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 have been taken into account in the processing of the application and the preparation of this report.

5.8 Equalities

In determining this planning application the Council has regard to its equalities

obligations including its obligations under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 The relevant planning considerations in the determination of this application are:

1. Principle of the development
2. Design
3. Amenity
4. Landscaping and visual Impact
5. Flood risk and surface / foul drainage
6. Traffic, parking and highway Safety
7. Ecology and Biodiversity
8. Archaeology

6.2 The principle of development

Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Section 70 (2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides that the local planning authority shall have regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations.

6.3 The development plan currently comprises the saved policies of Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011. Paragraph 215 of the NPPF provides that due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

6.4 Other material planning considerations include national planning guidance within the NPPF and NPPG and the emerging Vale of White Horse Local Plan: Part 1-Strategic Sites and Policies and its supporting evidence base.

6.5 The site is a designated employment site under policy E7 in the existing Local Plan 2011. This is a saved policy in the emerging Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and the intention is to review this policy when work begins on Local Plan 2031 Part 2. As part of work to inform the emerging local plan, policy E7 was assessed against the NPPF for consistency. The policy was found to be fully consistent.

6.6 The policy takes a permissive stance to new commercial development at the campus that the designation of the Enterprise Zone reinforces. Consequently, it is clear that the principle of the erection of a new B1 building on this site is encouraged and therefore acceptable.

6.7 Design

The NPPF provides that planning decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment (paragraph 60). It gives considerable weight to good design and acknowledges it is a key component of sustainable development. A number of local plan policies seek to ensure high quality developments and to protect the amenities of neighbouring properties (Policies DC1, DC6, and DC9). In March 2015 the council adopted its design guide, which aims to raise the standard of design across the district.

6.8 The site lies within the context of the central area of the campus which is now well established with a series of similar uses. The character of this area is somewhat varied, with buildings that are largely typical examples of their use and age in terms of form and materials. More recent buildings have a design character of crisp, modern

structures, comprising a range of carefully detailed silver metal cladding types, interspersed with functionally regular glazed openings. The proposed building is seeking to complement this and, whilst not of exemplar design, the design approach is reflective of its use, functionality and not dissimilar to other buildings within the area. The proposed building will add to the compliment of existing buildings that can be of benefit to the site and surrounding area.

- 6.9 The building is designed as a single block with a main covered entrance point, in accordance with principles DG94 and DG98. Other entrances within the building front onto forecourts to make a positive contribution to surveillance and legibility. What is not as successful with the proposed layout is the large provision of the servicing and large parking forecourt surrounding the building. This is considered to be a very hard urban feature with limited scope for planting to assimilate the building into its immediate surroundings. However, the site is visually contained within its perimeter block, and the lack of soft landscaping is not sufficiently harmful to warrant refusal. In addition, a condition will be attached to revisit the soft landscaping approach to revisit and take every opportunity to introduce as much soft landscaping as possible.
- 6.10 Concern has been raised over the building's sustainability credentials and that the building does not achieve the BRE's environmental assessment method (BREEAM) rating of 'excellent' encouraged by principle DG101 of the design guide. However, whilst it would be desirable to achieve this rating, officers consider it would not be a justifiable reason to withhold permission on the basis that it does not. The building will be required to meet current building regulations in relation to energy efficiency, and when balanced against the need to deliver economic development, this is acceptable. Overall, the design and layout of the proposal is acceptable.
- 6.11 **Amenity**
Adopted local plan policy DC9 seeks to prevent development that would result in a loss of privacy, daylight or sunlight for neighbouring properties or that would cause dominance or visual intrusion for neighbouring properties and the wider environment. Protecting amenity is a core principle of the NPPF.
- 6.12 The proposed development would not have any harmful impact on the amenity of adjacent commercial buildings in terms of noise and disturbance, overshadowing, over-dominance or loss of privacy and security to warrant refusal of the application on such grounds. Officers consider the proposal is thus acceptable in amenity terms.
- 6.13 **Landscaping and Visual Impact**
The NPPF seeks to enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (paragraph 109).
- 6.14 The site is, in visual terms, relatively self-contained surrounded by other uses and so wider and longer views from within and out of the North Wessex Downs AONB will not be harmed. With further complementary landscaping (covered by condition), the impact of the proposal on the character of the immediate area will be acceptable.
- 6.15 **Flood Risk and Surface/Foul Drainage**
The NPPF provides that development should not increase flood risk elsewhere and should be appropriately flood resilient and resistant (paragraph 103). It states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst other things, preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution (Paragraph 109).

- 6.16 The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment, and development drainage strategy. The site is located within flood zone 1 and is considered large enough to deal with surface water without causing surface water runoff to the highway or onto neighbouring properties. The drainage will include SUDS with foul and waste water connecting into the mains network and can be controlled through planning conditions. The proposal is therefore acceptable in respect of flood risk and drainage.
- 6.17 **Traffic, Parking and Highway Safety**
Adopted local plan policy DC5 requires safe access for developments and that the road network can accommodate the traffic arising from the development safely. The NPPF (Paragraph 32) requires plans and decision to take account of whether:-
- the opportunities for sustainable transport modes have been taken up depending on the nature and location of the site, to reduce the need for major transport infrastructure;
 - safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people; and
 - improvements can be undertaken within the transport network that cost effectively limit the significant impacts of the development.
- 6.18 Paragraph 32 of the NPPF goes on to state: *“Development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe.”*
- 6.19 The application is supported by a transport statement. The site will be accessed directly off Library Avenue which is acceptable. The site access and internal roadway will be 6 metres wide and are shown to lead to well laid out car parking providing a total of 103 spaces (one space per 30m² as per adopted parking standards). Covered and lit cycle storage is also to be provided for 10 cycles. The turning and manoeuvring and parking areas within the site are acceptable and any changes can be controlled by condition.
- 6.20 Local concern has been expressed that the proposal would result in the loss of informal overflow car parking and will ultimately lead to cars being parked elsewhere on the campus to the detriment of other users. The applicant has confirmed the parking is unauthorised and no formal arrangement has been agreed to use this site for overflow car parking. The county engineer has raised no objection to the proposal on parking or traffic congestion grounds, and whilst officers understand the objections raised, they do not amount to a justifiable reason for refusal when weighed against the economic benefits of the scheme and the fact that the over flow car parking is unauthorised and there is no planning permission for the site to be used as a car park.
- 6.21 In respect of public transport, the development site is well located with respect to the main bus stop (‘bus station’) at Harwell campus. However, the proposal does not offer a direct footpath to this bus stop facility and the county highways engineer considers the development may well close down the informal walking route that currently exists across the southern end of this land, which benefits many current Harwell employees. It is therefore proposed that a condition is imposed on any permission given to ensure such a link is maintained / formally provided, especially as there is a strategic priority to increase the frequency of services and their use.
- 6.22 In addition, part of the development site currently acts as an overnight bus depot for buses serving the south-western part of Oxfordshire. The county engineer has confirmed alternative arrangements will be required to ensure the continued operation of this vital bus network, until a new permanent arrangement can be made. It is considered this can be secured through a planning condition.

6.23 Overall, the proposal will have no material impact on highway safety or the local network. The proposal therefore complies with policy DC5.

6.24 **Ecology and Biodiversity**

Paragraph 117 of the NPPF refers to the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, whilst Paragraph 118 sets out the basis for determination of planning applications. Paragraph 118 states that “...if significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused...”

6.25 The application is accompanied by an Ecological survey report, which states the site comprised principally poor semi-improved grassland, with scattered trees, introduced shrubs and ornamental planting and was considered to be of little ecological value. The countryside officer confirms there are no significant ecological constraints associated with this site and the one tree with any bat roost potential is to be retained and raises no objection to the proposal. As such the proposal is considered to accord with the NPPF.

6.26 **Archaeology**

Policy HE10 of the adopted Local Plan states that development will not be permitted if it would cause damage to the site or setting of nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not.

6.27 The applicant has undertaken a geophysical survey of the application. This has not revealed any significant archaeological features although it has revealed some archaeological features including medieval ditches, a middle Iron Age farmstead and Bronze Age activity. The County Archaeologist has no objections to the development subject to requiring a further written scheme of investigation prior to commencement of development to ensure the proper recording of any finds. Subject to these conditions, the proposal accords with adopted local plan policy HE10 and the NPPF.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

7.1 The principle of new commercial development at Harwell Campus is supported by the provisions of the Vale of White Local Plan, in particular Policy E7. The proposal is not considered to be harmful to the landscape character of the area, highway safety, flood risk, or to amenity of adjoining buildings. Subject to the recommended conditions, the application accords with local and national planning policy and should be approved.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 **To grant planning permission subject to the following conditions:**

1. **Time limit - Full Application.**
2. **Approved plans.**
3. **Materials in accordance with application.**
4. **Access, parking and turning in accordance with approved plan.**
5. **Landscaping scheme to be submitted and approved.**
6. **Prior to the commencement of the development, a fully designed scheme utilising a sustainable drainage system for the surface water drainage of the development shall be submitted and, once approved, the scheme shall be implemented prior to the first occupational of the building to which the scheme relates.**
7. **In conjunction with the Harwell Campus site management function, the applicant shall facilitate the provision of an equivalent area for bus parking on the same basis as the current arrangement, on the wider**

Harwell campus site, for a minimum of two years from the date of granting planning approval.

8. No building shall be occupied until a walking route from the roundabout at the south-eastern edge of the site to the bus station and associated parking area has been designed, submitted for approval and constructed. The walking route shall either be provided to the south of the red line, or alongside the proposed access road (with minor adjustment) and the parking spaces to the south of the red line.
9. Unless otherwise agreed in writing, the applicant shall commit to achieving a significantly higher bus use target for the new employees than the target quoted in the Harwell Campus framework travel plan, to be supported by additional actions, such as disseminating real-time information to electronic devices within the new building, and the prominent display of paper timetables and ticketing information, details of which shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority and shall be installed prior to first occupation.

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