

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Council



held on Wednesday 11 October 2023 at 7.00 pm
at The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Sally Povolotsky (Chair), Paul Barrow, Ron Batstone, Cheryl Briggs, Sue Caul, Robert Clegg, Mark Coleman, Andy Cooke, James Cox, Andy Crawford, Eric de la Harpe, Amos Duveen, Lucy Edwards, Neil Fawcett, Andy Foulsham, Katherine Foxhall, Hayleigh Gascoigne, Debby Hallett, Jenny Hannaby, Scott Houghton, Sarah James, Diana Lugova, Robert Maddison, Patrick O'Leary, Viral Patel, Helen Pighills, Mike Pighills, Jill Rayner, Judy Roberts, Val Shaw, Andrew Skinner, Emily Smith, Bethia Thomas, Max Thompson and Richard Webber

Officers: Patrick Arran, Head of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer, Emily Barry, Democratic Services Officer, Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager and Ore Idowu, Trainee Solicitor

27. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bentley, Dewhurst and Forder.

28. Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 12 July 2023 and agree that the Chair sign them as such.

29. Declarations of interest

None.

30. Urgent business and chair's announcements

The Chair of Council, Councillor Povolotsky, advised that, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972, she had agreed to take one item of urgent business at the meeting – to appoint a member to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's Scrutiny Panel.

The reason for urgency being that the one of the current appointees, Councillor Roberts, was no longer permitted to be a member of the Scrutiny Panel following her

appointment to Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet. The next scheduled meeting of the panel was scheduled for November prior to the next scheduled Council meeting.

Councillor Povolotsky advised that the item would be taken after agenda item 8.

Councillor Povolotsky referred to the wildfires, floods and earthquakes, humanitarian disasters, terrorism, war and disease outbreaks, which had occurred in the world since Council's last meeting and highlighted her view that, as elected representatives, members had a responsibility to make decisions to change the course of society, climate, nature recovery and create a safe and prosperous place to live for all residents and future generations. On behalf of Council, she offered her thoughts to those around the world caught up in acts of war, terrorism and conflict.

As Chair she had the privilege to represent the council at the High Sheriffs Ceremony of the Glove at Christ Church Chapel and Law Lecture at Oxford University, given by the Attorney General, including a debate between law and politics and the dwindling number of lawyers that enter the political sphere.

31. Public participation

Riki Therivel had submitted the following question to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council, but was unable to attend the meeting.

"Everyone agrees that a flood scheme is needed for Oxford. The proposed Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme comprises flood defences, raised bridges, etc., plus a highly destructive and expensive channel. Construction of the channel will destroy much of the irreplaceable Hinksey Meadow, delay millions of journeys on the A34 and lead to more traffic jams and possibly accidents, encircle South Hinksey for 3-5 years, and strongly reduce recreational access in the North and South Hinksey area during and after construction. The channel would provide less than 1% of the scheme's financial benefits. The scheme can proceed without the channel.

We attach our summary Compulsory Purchase Order objection, which gives further information on the points above.

Both Oxfordshire County Council and the University of Oxford oppose the CPO despite being project partners. North Hinksey and South Hinksey parish councils oppose the entire scheme because of the channel's impacts.

Given this, and the fact that most of the channel's negative impacts would fall on Vale residents, with only a couple of homes in the Vale protected by the channel, why is the Vale of White Horse District Council supporting the flood scheme at the Compulsory Purchase Order inquiry?

Could we suggest that the Vale withdraws its support for the scheme for the CPO inquiry?"

Councillor Thomas provided the following written response in advance of the meeting:

"Thank you for your question, and I'm glad that you recognise the need for a flood scheme for Oxford. Nobody wants to see a repeat of the devastating floods of 2007.

To have your home flooded is a miserable, upsetting and costly experience. The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme offers enhanced flood protection to almost 1000 homes, many of them in South Hinksey which is in our district.

The purpose of lowering the floodplain is to provide more capacity for floodwater, drawing it away from homes and businesses. Without the lowering of the floodplain

my understanding is that the protection offered by the rest of the scheme is less certain. It will be for the Environment Agency to make the case for the design of the scheme at the CPO inquiry which starts next month, and for the inspector to assess it on its merits.

I do appreciate that there will be some disruption while the scheme is under construction. The Environment Agency has listened to concerns of South Hinksey residents and will locate its compound as far as possible from the village, with a protective earth bund to limit the impact. I know they are aiming to move as much material as possible by rail, although that will require planning permission and other consents to be in place so it cannot be guaranteed.

The Environment Agency has also listened to concerns about the impact on the grassland at Hinksey Meadow, and they have redesigned the route of the lowered floodplain accordingly. The so-called "channel" will look and behave like a natural stream, with grazing pasture and wetland alongside it. There will be new planting of hedgerows, trees and woodland. Recreational access to the area of the scheme will be maintained during and after its construction, though clearly, we should expect some disruption for a time.

This council will continue to make the case for minimising the visual and environmental impacts of the scheme and maximising its long term benefits. We all want this scheme to be the best it can be.

The scheme will bring substantial benefit to many residents of the Vale and the city of Oxford by reducing flood risk to homes and businesses. That's why it has the continued support of this council".

32. Petitions

None.

33. Electoral Review of Vale of White Horse District Council - submission on council size

Council considered the report of the head of legal and democratic which invited consideration and approval of a Council Size Submission document to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as part of its electoral review of Vale of White Horse District Council.

The report set out the reason for the review - being the electoral inequality across a number of the district wards in the Vale. The first part of the review is for the Boundary Commission to consider how many members, the council size, Vale of White Horse District Council should have. Vale of White Horse District Council was invited to submit its views regarding this on a template document by 4 November. Following a decision on the council size by the Boundary Commission the review would then consider the warding patterns including the number of wards, the names of the wards and the number of members to represent those wards.

Councillor Lugova advised Council that, at its meeting on 13 September, the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee considered an officer draft which recommended no change to the council size of 38 members. However, following consideration of the issues the committee resolved to recommend that Council agree a revised submission document proposing an increase to 41 members. The committee felt that a small increase in the size of the council better reflected the

recent and anticipated population growth, the increased workload on current members arising from this growth, the additional community representative role arising from requests to join community groups and the new member champion appointments and the desire to ensure the role of councillor remains attractive to a wide section of the community, particular those in work. The committee also agreed that a slight increase in council size could allow for two member wards in some of the larger rural district wards therefore retaining community cohesion.

A revised council submission document was attached to the report which reflected a proposed council size of 41 and incorporated evidence and argument to support it.

Councillor Lugova thanked officers for the work put into the document and members of the committee for their consideration of the issue.

RESOLVED: to

1. approve the draft Council Size Submission set out in Appendix A to the report of the head of legal and democratic to the Council meeting held on 11 October 2023 which recommended an increase in the size of the council from 38 to 41.
2. Authorise the head of legal and democratic, in consultation with the Leader of the council, to finalise the Council Size Submission document for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

34. Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Council considered the appointment of a substitute member to the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: to appoint Councillor Batstone as a substitute member on the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

35. Urgent item - Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel Appointment

Council considered the appointment of a member to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED: to appoint Councillor Hallett to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel.

36. Report of the leader of the council

Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council, provided an update on a number of matters. The text of her address is available on the council's [website](#).

37. Questions on notice

A. Question from Councillor Rayner to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the Council

Rural bus services should be the lifeblood of our community. Yet the growing community of Kingston Bagpuize has a completely inadequate bus service to Abingdon, our nearest town. Buses only run every two hours and only before 5.00pm.

Public transport is essential for commuters, young people accessing education and training, for socialising in the evenings and supporting the local economy. It is also an equalities issue; older people, those who are unable to drive or afford a car, can struggle to visit the GP, dentists and do their shopping.

This council has previously stated our commitment to public transport and active travel, to reduce air pollution, parking problems and improve health, yet we seem to have limited power to make this a reality.

While this may be the case, could the Leader explain what is being done by other authorities and private bus companies to improve bus services between Kingston Bagpuize and Abingdon? And what more can be done, perhaps with the county council, to help our village secure a bus service that is fit for purpose?

Response

Oxfordshire County Council is the Local Highway Authority, and works closely with local bus operators. Public transport services are deregulated and therefore operate on the basis of which services are profitable. The recent adoption of an Enhanced Partnership has helped further the joint working on buses, seeking to regain bus patronage to pre-pandemic levels, as well as increase bus ridership in the future. The Government has introduced a £2 fare cap scheme, which applies to the S6 and number 15 buses that currently operate in Kingston Bagpuize.

Kingston Bagpuize is a growing community, with a Local Plan housing site to the east of the village. Demand for journeys to Abingdon and other locations is likely to grow with the new homes. The outline planning permissions for the housing development includes transport mitigation to provide additional bus stops and improve the regularity of the number 15 bus to and from Abingdon. So we can hope to see improved bus provision for Kingston Bagpuize arising from the new development.

Ahead of the new homes being delivered and the bus service being improved, local initiatives could help bridge the gap, such as car sharing with scheduled trips or events, and community transport. Community transport can target those who are unable to travel without support, and I understand that "Helping Hands 4 Villages" offers help with transport and befriending in the Southmoor, Kingston Bagpuize, Longworth & Hinton Waldrist areas. For further information and support I am sure your local county member for Kingston Bagpuize will be happy to oblige.

B. Question from Councillor Smith to Councillor Coleman, Cabinet member for environmental services and waste

There is growing concern in my ward about the number of single use disposable vapes that are littering our streets and public spaces. People who want to ensure their used vapes are disposed of safely are not always sure of which bin to use and there is next to no information about returning used vapes to retailers.

What impact has the prevalence of single use vapes had on Vale services, and what is the council already doing to address this?

Response

Thank you for your question, it refers to a lot of technical information and because of this, I have relied heavily on the expertise of officers to answer it.

To clarify, single use vape pens are non-rechargeable electronic devices that typically come ready-filled with e-liquid, which may contain nicotine. These disposable pens

contain a wide range of materials that often make them very difficult to recycle, and unfortunately many residents are unaware of the correct disposal of these products.

If consumers dispose of these items in the general waste, or recycling bins, this can potentially release hazardous chemicals into the environment, and, worryingly, incorrect battery disposal can cause fires, and health and safety risks in waste trucks and treatment processing plants.

There is always a potential for this to impact on our services. While Biffa have not yet raised this as a litter issue, they are more concerned by the risk to waste collection vehicles. Although it is not possible to be 100% sure, a fire on a waste truck early this year was thought to be started by batteries in the waste stream.

To prevent this, they should be disposed of at a household recycling centre or at the shop where they bought the device. We should encourage people to use this route of disposal as vapes are classed as waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE); residents who are disposing of vapes should put them in a carrier bag next to the bin for the small electrical collection. This information is on our website, and a part of our communication's campaigns. There are other possibilities that may be pursued by the council's waste team in the future if further problems are identified.

Supplementary question and response

In response to a supplementary question regarding the promotion of the safe return of vapes by and number returned to retailers, Councillor Coleman replied that that the council did not have details of the number of disposable vapes being returned to retailers for recycling but that the take back rate was low.

C. Question from Councillor de la Harpe to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council

Given that the Prime Minister has recently made announcements that it is his government's intent to roll back climate emergency initiatives and commitments, thereby making his target of hitting net zero by 2050 even less achievable, can the cabinet member assure residents that we remain committed to our climate emergency goals, explain how we might mitigate this new risk to our plans, and write to the Prime Minister to express our utter disappointment in his actions?

Response

The Vale of White Horse has a target to reach net zero for the district by 2045 with a 75% reduction by 2030. Progress towards achieving these target dates will be determined by actions that can be taken within our district by the Vale and a wide variety of stakeholders and will be significantly influenced by Government targets and legislation. Our ability to meet our net zero target date and the ability of the Government to reach the national target of net zero by 2050 will be impacted by the recent announcements from the Prime Minister in relation to the Governments climate initiatives. Some of the key changes announced in Prime Ministers speech include:

- Moving back the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by five years, so all sales of new cars from 2035 will be zero emission.
- Delaying the ban on installing oil and Liquid Petroleum Gas boilers, and new coal heating, for off-gas-grid homes to 2035, instead of phasing them out from 2026.

- Setting an exemption to the phase out of fossil fuel boilers, including gas, in 2035, so that households who will most struggle to make the switch to heat pumps or other low-carbon alternatives won't have to do so.
- Scrapping policies to force landlords to upgrade the energy efficiency of their properties, but instead continue to encourage households to do so where they can.

The Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan sets out carbon budgets for the County that are broken down by district. Some of the key milestones on that route map were based on the Government targets which have now been pushed back, including the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles in 2030, bans on gas boilers in future years and energy efficiency measures in rented properties.

The scrapping or pushing back of targets for areas such as transport and decarbonising existing housing which are two of the largest emitters of CO2 are problematic for the Vale as these are areas in which we have few powers to make direct changes, relying instead on national legislation and targets and the actions of partners. To decarbonise the Vale, we need a mix of push factors which force change as well as behavioural change amongst our residents.

The picture is however nuanced, as alongside scrapping and pushing back targets the speech also announced a number of new incentives, such as changes to the Boiler Upgrade Grant which will help to incentivise households to replace fossil fuel boilers, helping in the drive to decarbonise domestic properties.

The Vale remains committed to its targets for reaching net zero but, like all local authorities is currently trying to understand the implications of the government announcements and to look at how best to respond to these changes to ensure we remain able to meet our targets.

D. Question from Councillor Edwards to Councillor Pighills, Cabinet member for community health and wellbeing

Recently the dental practice in Faringdon has closed its doors to all NHS patients. This has caused great concern as it is the only practice in Faringdon and serves the residents of the town and many of the outlying villages in the Western Vale.

Could you clarify what influence the council could have in these circumstances and what if anything we can do to help improve the level of service in Faringdon and the rest of the district?

Response

We are aware of the problems facing residents regarding reduced access to NHS dental services, including the highlighted issue in Faringdon. Sadly, this is not just a local issue but something we are seeing across the country, with the increasing appearance of 'dental deserts' due to the chronic underfunding of NHS Dental Services.

Locally, the NHS/Integrated Care Board (ICB) has provided a formal response on this matter which explains the progress to address this issue. In summary this indicates.

- the ICB has recently implemented a Flexible Commissioning scheme to provide extra capacity at practices to support patients who have faced challenges accessing NHS dental care, particularly those who have not attended a service in recent years. In Vale, Wantage House Dental Practice in Wantage and Wootton Dental Care in Abingdon both take part in this scheme.

- the ICB is working on plans to commission additional NHS dental activity from 2024-25 to replace capacity which has been lost.
- the ICB are looking at other innovative solutions to encourage dentists to stay within the NHS.

While encouraging, these solutions will not provide the services we need for some time, and I will, in my capacity as Chair, continue to raise this at future Health Improvement Board meetings and also with the Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council, who is the district council representative for Oxfordshire on the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) so that we continue to seek further action and monitor progress being made regarding this matter for our communities.

E. Question from Councillor Cooke to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council

Thames Water have now published their latest plans for the proposed mega-reservoir in the Vale. They appear to have ignored the many strong points raised that challenged the proposal and have increased the size of the reservoir from one hundred megatonnes to a hundred and fifty megatonnes of water.

The huge scale, massive disruption and lengthy timelines of the project mean that not a drop of water will be seen from the reservoir in a generation. Solutions that could be put in place rapidly, cheaply, and with minimal disruption, such as the National Water Grid, appear to have been sidelined.

The one positive in it is that they claim to be increasing work on cutting leaks. Thames Water currently loses the equivalent of the entire capacity of Farmoor reservoir every fortnight across their network.

Can the Leader tell us which meetings we will be able to have with Thames Water and what pressure will we be placing on them to listen and respond to our questions and respond to the issues, and whether we are able to speak directly to the new Leader of the Environment Agency to ensure that they are aware of the very strong objections from our residents?

Response

Thank you for your question. As members know, this council strongly opposes the proposed reservoir, confirmed in a unanimous vote at our meeting of 8 December 2021.

We have continued to oppose this proposal, however, national Government have taken the decision out of local hands. This is deemed a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and, if it continues, the final decision will be taken by the Secretary of State in around four to five years' time.

We expect there to be further formal consultations in the summer of 2024 and again in 2025, with a public examination in 2027. We will of course respond to the consultations and expect to take part in the examination process.

Meanwhile, we have already had regular meetings with Thames Water and there is no reason why they should not continue. In those meetings we have pushed hard for them to speed up and strengthen measures to reduce leaks. They have also engaged with us on technical matters of the reservoir design and engineering.

Thames Water have recently published their detailed responses to comments made on their draft Water Resource Management Plan 2024. This includes 12 pages in response to comments submitted by the Vale. After this material was published, I wrote to them to express my strong desire for them to listen more seriously to

residents' views in local communities. They have replied, giving some assurances, and this correspondence is published on the council website.

You asked about the Environment Agency. We can also ask to speak to their new chief executive. His influence over the proposal for the Reservoir is limited.

The current process for considering Thames Water's proposals is via RAPID, an alliance of regulators which includes the Environment Agency but also Ofwat and the Drinking Water Inspectorate. We have submitted our views to RAPID at every opportunity and we will carry on doing that.

I'm determined that we will keep on speaking up for our residents, making the council's position clear and challenging the proposal at every stage.

Supplementary question and response

In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Thomas provided an assurance that she would seek to speak to the new chief executive of the Environment Agency regarding the council's position on the proposed reservoir.

F. Question from Councillor Katherine Foxhall to Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of the council and Cabinet member for climate action and the environment.

In response to an Environmental Information Request, submitted in my role as Nature Recovery Champion, Thames Water have shared data showing every single one of the sewage treatment works and storm overflows in the Vale (except Botley syphon at zero), has already exceeded the total 2021-2022 discharges. At the Wantage works, which discharges directly into the Letcombe Brook chalk stream north of Grove, we have already seen more than 250 hours released this year, five times the total recorded for the whole of 2022. In Drayton, which discharges into the Ginge Brook chalk stream, there had been 969 hours by 5 August, already nearly double the total for 2022. At Shrivenham, there has been 467 hours of discharge, already four times the entire total for 2022.

Disappointingly, Thames Water have also confirmed that they are only considering Abingdon, Kingston Bagpuize, and Wantage as "high priority" sites in the Vale as defined in the Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan, which requires improvement to 75% of storm overflows discharging into or near 'high priority sites' by 2035. This would leave, for example, the Shrivenham outfall to continue to discharge directly into the Tuckmill Brook, immediately upstream of the Tuckmill Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest (which Vale owns and is managed by volunteers) for another decade. It will also provide no protection to the Ginge Brook, which receives horrifying amounts of raw sewage from the Drayton works.

Does the Leader agree that Thames Water's current performance, its investment strategy, and its long-term commitment to reduce the impact of sewage releases in the Vale are woefully inadequate? And is the council able to do more to ensure that precious local habitats such as Tuckmill Meadows and Ginge Brook, as well as the entire Thames Catchment in the Vale, can receive some protection?

Response

Seeing the data highlighted in the question and other related news publications, it is difficult to recognise Thames Water's current performance, investment strategy and its long-term commitments as anything but inadequate.

As you know I have been to a number of parish council meetings recently where you have reported the data you have described here. Our residents have been visibly shocked and angered that this is happening in their villages and so have I – this is not acceptable.

As a council we will continue to highlight the issues and lobby both Thames Water and the Government for changes and an increase in the levels of investment in wastewater infrastructure required to deal with the ever-increasing population of the Vale.

As a district council we can;

- Explore options to introduce new/enhanced policies within the developing Joint Local Plan.
- Continue to work with Thames Water on the surface water reduction scheme, which seeks to reduce the amount of surface water that enters the wastewater system. This includes identified projects at Cattle Market and Portway car parks.
- Work with the Catchment Partnerships to deliver enhancements to the river systems, reducing the level of polluting inputs and delivering physical improvements to the river systems. The Vale actively supports the Letcombe Brook Project and the Ock Catchment Partnership
- Continue to work closely with bodies such as Natural England and the Environment Agency to set and enforce agreed measures to protect Sites of Scientific Interest and other local habitats.
- Lobby Government to improve the protection for our river systems and for changes to Local Planning Authority powers to allow us to refuse new development proposals unless the wastewater infrastructure is provided to support them.

38. Motions on notice

(1) Councillor Foxhall moved, and Councillor Crawford seconded, the motion as set out on the agenda at item 11(1)

Following debate and being put to the vote the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED:

That Council's Pay Policy Statement approved on 15 February 2023, ensures that all directly employed staff receive at least the Real Living Wage as annually defined by the Living Wage Foundation. The Real Living Wage is currently £10.90 an hour and will be updated on 24 October of this year.

The payment of at least the Real Living Wage to our employees is one way of ensuring that all our suppliers and residents are aware that we recognise the importance of the Real Living Wage in helping to reduce in-work poverty.

However, Council is currently unable to become accredited as a Real Living Wage employer as it does not have a clear commitment, or plan in place, to ensure that all the contracts it awards to third parties require that those companies are committed to paying, as a minimum, the Real Living Wage.

All our major contracts are joint arrangements between Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Councils.

Whilst Council recognises that it cannot simply change existing contracts, requiring payment of at least the Real Living Wage is something we are able to address in future procurements and contracts.

To demonstrate its commitment to the Real Living Wage and secure accreditation as a Real Living Wage employer, Council confirms its belief that:

- no Council employee, or employee of its third party contractors, should be employed on less than the Real Living Wage.

Council therefore asks:

- 1 The Chief Executive to continue to engage with Unison, as the Council's recognised trade union, to ensure that this position is maintained going forward in respect of all employees.
- 2 The Chief Executive to prepare a report for Cabinet, outlining the steps that are required for our Council to secure accreditation as a Real Living Wage accredited employer.
- 3 The Chief Executive to include, within this report, proposals to implement a requirement on all future contracted providers to pay at least the Real Living Wage to all their staff throughout the duration of the contract, identifying any likely costs associated with this.
- 4 Cabinet to consider the report when prepared and, should its recommendations be approved by both South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse, authorise the Chief Executive to work with colleagues to implement its recommendations as soon as practicable.
- 5 The Chief Executive to bring to the attention of all existing third parties who currently provide services directly on behalf of the Council, our view that all employers should, as a minimum, pay the Real Living Wage to their staff and seek an update on their companies' position in relation to this matter.
- 6 The Chief Executive to update Council on progress towards its Accreditation as a Real Living Wage Employer when the next Annual Pay Policy Statement is brought before it.

(2) Councillor Edwards moved, and Councillor Cox seconded, the motion as set out on the agenda at item 11(2)

Following debate and being put to the vote the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED:

That Council notes that:

- A poll from Plan International reveals that over a quarter (28%) of girls aged 14-21 in the UK are struggling to afford period products, and nearly 1-in-5 (19%) report being unable to afford period products at all since the start of 2022.
- An ActionAid 2022 survey showed that of those who have struggled to afford menstrual products in the last six months, 75% said they had prioritised spending money on food, 49% had prioritised gas/electric, and 31% prioritised fuel.
- Women, girls and others who menstruate are at risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) if they do not have access to clean period products.
- There is significant evidence of the widespread adverse impact of periods on attendance in education and at work.

- Vulnerable people, such as asylum seekers, those fleeing domestic abuse and homeless people, can experience additional difficulty accessing sanitary products.

Council resolves to:

1. Work with local charities and community groups with the aim of making period products freely available in the Beacon, Abbey House and other buildings we own or operate, and to provide information at those locations on the options residents have available to them when accessing period products, including sustainable reusable options.
2. Encourage those in control of other public buildings in the district, such as GLL and the County Council, to consider doing the same.
3. Ask the Leader to write to the relevant Minister requesting them to introduce a legal right for people in England to access a choice of free period products, provide public health funding to help upper tier local authorities provide menstrual products in the public facing buildings under their control, and to give further consideration to how free period products can be made available to all those who might face barriers to accessing them.

The meeting closed at 7:50pm

Chair:

Date:

OX 002N/1b

Summary

Riki Therivel and Tim O'Hara

October 2023

We oppose the compulsory purchases orders (CPOs) for the land between Seacourt Nature Park and Old Abingdon Road that the Environment Agency (EA) propose to use for part of a flood channel. Our primary reason is that there is no compelling public interest for the CPOs, because this part of the flood channel (the 'channel component'), adds little benefit but excessive costs for the public.

Detailed evidence regarding these cost and benefits will be covered by other objectors, but we focus on costs generated by the removal of construction material via the A34.

Additionally, we argue that the EA's proposed replacement land for land subject to CPOs at Seacourt Nature Park is not 'equally advantageous' to the public, and therefore different exchange land should be provided.

Public Interest

The EA have modelled an alternative to their proposed flood scheme that omits the channel component, but is in all other respects the same. The modelling shows that this alternative brings only slightly less benefit in terms of flood protection, and this is partially offset by greater financial costs. For example the EA's benefit cost analysis (BCA) shows that the proposed scheme brings net benefits (value of flood damages avoided minus cost of construction) worth £1391.8 million, but only a net £11.1 million (0.8%) of this is attributable to the channel component.

Although the EA opposes the no-channel alternative, there seems to be no evidence-based or peer-reviewed reason why it could not be adopted.

A CPO should only be made where there is a compelling case in the public interest. In this instance the CPOs are only needed in order to provide the channel component, yet the scheme could go ahead without it. Therefore the test of compelling public interest should **not** be represented by the net benefits of the scheme as a whole, but rather by the **marginal benefits of the channel component less its extra costs.**

According to the EA, the channel component brings a net flood protection benefit worth £11.1 million, although there are grounds to believe that financial cost of providing the channel are understated, and its financial benefits overstated.

However even if the channel component had net financial benefits, other costs accrue solely because of the channel component. These are: time costs of £10-35 million borne by users of the A34, social costs incurred by loss of access to parts of the work area during and after construction, disruption to residents of South Hinksey village, and environmental costs around loss of rare grassland, reduced biodiversity, mature trees, etc. These latter points are not reflected in the EA's BCA, but are factors which in a broader and objective assessment should outweigh the claimed £11.1 million net benefits.

On this basis, and even before considering the need for CPOs, it is hard to see any justification for the channel component.

However, the channel component requires the **forced acquisition of private property** via CPO. Therefore it must not merely provide a net public benefit, but rather command a **compelling** public interest. Given the facts we cannot see that this exists, and ask that the CPOs are not confirmed.

Traffic at South Hinksey

The EA proposes to move 360,000m³ of material excavated to form the channel, mostly from South Hinksey onto the A34. This represents about 50,000 HGV movements at South Hinksey over 3-5 years. The EA proposes to reduce traffic speeds from 70mph to 40mph around South Hinksey to make this safer.

However the length of the slip roads at South Hinksey is totally, woefully short of anything safe, even when merging with slower traffic. Slip roads comprise a 'nose' which is full width and used for acceleration, followed by a 'taper' which narrows to zero. The nose lengths at South Hinksey are, respectively, 0% and 3% of the modern standard for slip roads, and the taper lengths 57% and 68%. The National Highways standards for slip roads do not account for a high proportion of fully-laden HGVs. A US study suggests that, to allow such HGVs to reach a 40mph merge speed, a slip road of 400m would be needed: the slip roads at South Hinksey are 73.5m and 92m long. Southbound HGVs would be joining 40mph traffic going less than 10mph, and northbound HGVs would be going 10-15mph. It is difficult to imagine 25,000 HGVs getting onto the busy A34 under these conditions without a large increase in traffic jams and at least some accidents. Accidents with HGVs are three times as likely to end in fatalities than other accidents.

Traffic safety would be further compromised by the short distance between the South Hinksey exits and the Hinksey Hill interchange. Before and after junctions, vehicles weave their way to or away from the junction. The National Highways standard for weaving distance is 1-2km: at South Hinksey there is only 600m weaving distance, with drivers additionally having to contend with slow-moving HGVs in the left lane. To achieve a safe merging of HGVs onto the A34 would require the slip roads to be lengthened by 300m, but this would further shorten the southbound weaving section. Given this, we do not believe that it is physically possible to make exiting HGVs at South Hinksey safe.

National Highways is content to deal with safety issues through a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), but seem to be relying on the scheme's environmental statement to inform the development of this CEMP. The environmental statement does not include the information discussed above. Until its full transport impacts are considered and the scheme can be shown to be safe, and without HGVs backing up at South Hinksey, we believe that **the prospect of the scheme going ahead is unclear.**

Reducing the A34 speed limit from 70mph to 40mph for 2.4 miles - the main mitigation measure proposed by the EA - would put significant cumulative costs on motorists. The government uses reductions in travel time to justify the construction of new roads, so increases in travel time should also be considered in decision-making, especially given that the A34 is one of the most important UK corridors for freight. Depending on their timing, speed reductions at South Hinksey would affect 36-90 million journeys, costing drivers £10-35 million in wasted time. This does not include time spent in additional traffic jams or the cost of additional accidents. It represents 95-315% of all the benefits that the channel is expected to bring over 100 years. This has not been costed in any economic analysis for the scheme.

Jewson's Field

The Acquisition of Land Act 1981 requires exchange land to be provided for the compulsory purchase of any common land. The exchange land must be no smaller and "equally advantageous" to the public. Government guidance states that "land which is already... used by the public, even informally, for recreation, cannot usually be given as exchange land, since this would reduce the amount of such land, which would be disadvantageous to the persons concerned". The Oxleas Wood legal judgement supports this, adding that "land in private ownership but over which the public already enjoyed extensive public rights of way affording roughly equivalent recreational access" would not be equally advantageous.

In exchange for 11,635m² of land taken from Seacourt Nature Park, the EA proposes to provide 11,032m² of exchange land at Jewson's Field plus about 740m² at Hinksey Meadow. Our interest is in Jewson's Field.

Jewson's Field has been regularly used by the public, without hindrance, for 20+ years. This is confirmed by the EA's own surveys, our questionnaire surveys of local residents in 2016 and 2023, and a video. These show that the whole of Jewson's Field has been regularly used during this time informally by the public for walking, camping, bird feeding etc.

The EA suggests that the fence around Jewson's Field is 'broken' and that access to the field could easily be revoked by repairing the fence. A site visit would confirm that there is no fencing around 50+m on the western side of the field; there is an unlocked pedestrian gate on the eastern end; and the fence is breached in other areas. The field's regular use over 20+ years has made public access essentially permissive. Jewson's have made no attempt to improve the fencing, even in the knowledge that it has been proposed as exchange land. It would also be difficult to show that Jewson's Field could be significantly 'improved' for public recreation.

We do not oppose the use of Seacourt Nature Park for the OFAS, but believe that "providing" Jewson's Field as exchange land would be clearly disadvantageous to local residents, and thus in contravention of the Acquisition of Land Act 1981. It would be like taking a slice of my cake, and then saying that another slice of cake that I am already holding can replace the first slice. The EA should provide different exchange land.