

Supplementary Papers



Listening Learning Leading

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FOR THE MEETING OF

Scrutiny Committee

held on Tuesday 2 July 2019 at 6.30 pm
in the Meeting Room 1, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, OX14 4SB

Open to the public including the press

5. South Oxfordshire Emerging Local Plan (Pages 2 - 6)

To consider additional correspondence on the local plan.



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24 June 2019

Update on UKAEA's activities at Culham

BACKGROUND

CSC combines world-class publicly funded research into fusion power; commercial technology organisations and Culham Innovation Centre, to create a powerhouse of high technology innovation and enterprise in South Oxfordshire. CSC is an established part of the southern Oxfordshire cluster of education, science and technology, now known as Science Vale, and has established a broad high technology business base. The UKAEA is a partner in Science Vale and as such is committed to working together with the other partners, including the Oxfordshire authorities and Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), to help to promote and develop the Science Vale area as an internationally recognised location for enterprise and innovation in science and technology.

EMPLOYMENT

The CSC forms a key part of Science Vale and the Knowledge Spine and is one of the largest employment centres in the County (covering approximately 80 hectares). Employment levels at CSC have been stable and in excess of 2,000 for many years and, in recent years, with a growing community of commercial science and technology enterprises and the broadening of the UKAEA's portfolio, have started to rise. CSC currently supports over 2,400 jobs and has policy support for 50% growth in the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy under policy CSEM3 (and in the emerging Local Plan, under proposed policy STRAT8).

The growth seen at CSC builds on its stature as the world's leading fusion energy research centre. These are the words of the (former) science minister Sam Gymiah MP on a speech at Culham in October 2018.

*"There are a number of sectors where Britain is poised to lead the world. **Firstly in the sector of fusion technology.** This is the safest, cleanest more sustainable form of energy and no-one in the world has the expertise that we have here".*

The present Science Minister, Chris Skidmore MP, visited in January 2019 and said

“The work of UKAEA here at Culham will help make British fusion power a reality – this kind of national endeavour is a great example of the vision we need to pursue to deliver the 2.4% R&D target.”

for more information see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fusion-an-example-of-government-science-ambitions-says-minister>

For planning purposes, the UKAEA is assuming that, notwithstanding the eventual closure of JET (which is still some years away), the broadening and burgeoning range of UKAEA technology, materials and engineering work will maintain historic levels of employment in nuclear fusion-related activity and that the growth will come from commercial occupiers, either new occupiers or the expansion of existing organisations.

JET, EURATOM and BREXIT

JET remains the largest European fusion device and is expected to operate until well into the next decade, running alongside MAST-U, the UK’s leading fusion experiment. JET and MAST-U will also make a major contribution to the development of ITER. UKAEA, with MAST, MRF, MDF, RACE and other projects will continue to make a major contribution, internationally, to the development and realisation of fusion energy in ways which are expected to grow and develop activity at CSC.

Funding for the operation of JET **until the end of 2020** was been secured in March 2019, **irrespective of the uncertainty around the UK’s future relationship with Europe** - see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/future-of-jet-secured-with-new-european-contract>

From 2021 onwards, it is expected that a close “association” between the UK and Euratom (the EU programme that funds JET) will enable JET to continue operating to 2024 at least. An extension to the existing planning arrangements will be sought this year.

In a personal letter to all UKAEA staff members in March, Science Minister Chris Skidmore stated :

“UKAEA’s wider work, has a bright future post-Brexit. UKAEA is the best place in the world for fusion research, and I am going to make sure this only becomes even more true over the next few years.”

On a future association with Euratom, he also wrote :

“You will of course know that the Government’s preferred outcome through all of this activity is to seek an association to the Euratom Research and Training Programme, through which continuity across all collaborative nuclear research activities, including JET and ITER would be secured. But please be reassured that the Government has put in place robust contingency plans, developed in full consultation with UKAEA, should this not prove realistic.”

In the Spring Statement of 13 March 2019, the Chancellor added:

“...I will guarantee our commitment to the UK’s funding for the JET nuclear fusion reactor, whatever happens with Brexit...”

NUCLEAR SECTOR DEAL AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

In addition, CSC is well positioned to be a hub for innovative engineering companies who wish to collocate with this leading national laboratory, which will be one of the centres for the delivery of economic growth anticipated from the **Nuclear Sector Deal** made as part of the **Industrial Strategy** White Paper. Indeed, this development will contribute directly to three themes of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund – Clean & Flexible Energy, Robotics & AI and Driverless Vehicles, as well as playing a key role in the Nuclear Sector Deal:

“The government and the sector also recognise there is a huge opportunity from nuclear fusion technologies to build on the UK’s existing scientific strengths in that area and ensure UK expertise leads the way in pioneering research that has genuine global impact. Therefore, the government is providing £86 million to set up a national fusion technology platform at the UK Atomic Energy Authority’s Science Centre at Culham in Oxfordshire. The new investment will reinforce the UK’s world-leading fusion R&D capability, underline our commitment to international collaboration and allow UK firms to compete for up to £1 billion of international contracts for fusion technologies, including for the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), which will continue efforts to develop a clean, safe and virtually limitless energy source. The government is also exploring with UKAEA the scope for further developing the Culham site as a hub for advanced nuclear technologies.”

(UK Government Nuclear Sector Deal, June 2018)

PUBLIC INVESTMENT

Recent investment in UKAEA include:

- £15M for the establishment of the Remote Applications in Challenging Environments (RACE) programme and facilities. Funded partly from the Oxford City Deal, this has already resulted in 150 jobs locally and has helped UK industry win contracts worth over £160m to supply remote handling equipment to facilities such as ITER in France and the European Spallation Source in Sweden. It has also helped to accelerate the growth of local SMEs including Oxbotica, a world class spin-out from Oxford University. In addition to the key support the RACE programmes and facilities provides to international fusion.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/race-to-host-10m-iter-test-facility>

RACE is also becoming a key part of the drive towards AV. In the last 12 months RACE has secured an additional £20m of funding, largely collaborative R&D with academia and industry.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukaea-robotics-role-in-oxfordshire-science-and-innovation-audit> and
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/race-driven-to-support-driverless-cars>

Expansion of RACE has been so rapid, an extension to the existing building has been funded by BEIS and is currently proceeding through the local planning process

- The establishment of the new Materials Research facility (MRF) as part of the £15m National Nuclear Users Forum partnership involving three Government laboratories, four university and a range of key industrial partners. Further investments of £10m to extend the facility over the coming years are planned. The UK Atomic Energy Authority already has an extant planning permission in this regard.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/breaking-ground-for-new-materials-facility>
- The upgrade of the UK fusion facility MAST, with a £57m investment over 7 years. MAST Upgrade will commence operations later in 2019 and is planned to run until early 2030's.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/21-million-investment-for-mast-upgrade>

MAST-U will further explore the science of more compact and efficient fusion devices but will also investigate innovative solutions to one of fusion's biggest technology challenges – exhausting high heat loads from the fusion fuel mixture. This is directly related to the design of future fusion power stations.

- The Government funded £12m Oxfordshire Advanced Skills (OAS) facility, which, eventually, will deliver over 160 advanced engineering apprenticeships a year for UKAEA, STFC and other high tech companies in Oxfordshire. Permission Ref. P17/S4193/FUL marks phase 2 of this project, opening with 96 apprentices in September 2019.
- New publicly (OXLEP) funded facilities alongside RACE (above) to house the growing cluster of Connected Autonomous Vehicle businesses and activity that is building around RACE
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/winners-of-51-million-government-competition-to-develop-world-leading-self-driving-car-testing-infrastructure-unveiled>
- Substantial further Government investment (£86M) will enable the construction and operation of two new facilities at Culham – the H3AT tritium research centre and FTF testing facilities. Due to be open in 2021, these will both enable UKAEA to work even more closely with UK industry, with an aspiration to secure a further €1bn of contracts from ITER (building on the €0.5bn already secured).
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/86-million-boost-for-uk-nuclear-fusion-programme>
and <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukaea-launches-national-fusion-technology-platform> .

Underpinning all this, the Government has:

Reinforced the importance of the work that UKAEA carries out at Culham Science Centre.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-role-in-fusion-following-eu-exit>

- Committed to contributing continued funding for the operation of JET, the major European fusion facility at CSC
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-commits-to-continue-funding-its-share-of-europes-flagship-uk-based-nuclear-fusion-research-facility>
- Announced recently that it is backing new commercial development at CSC
<https://www.businessinnovationmag.co.uk/booming-business-at-culham-means-expansion-for-science-centre/>

COMMERCIALISATION

To further build on the UK's clear lead in developing fusion a viable energy source, UK Government (in the 2018 Autumn statement) announced an initial £20M (with a further £200m¹ under discussion) for UKAEA to undertake the design of the UK's own compact fusion powerplant design – STEP (Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production). This will necessitate further close collaboration with UK industry and academia and has the potential to accelerate ground-breaking work on the development and commercialisation of fusion technologies. This will maintain UK leadership in nuclear fusion; and to support the Government's Clean Growth Grand Challenge.

STEP design activities will be undertaken by UKAEA at Culham and with the UK industrial supply chain and academic community. The STEP device itself would not be located at Culham, but elsewhere in the UK at a suitable nuclear licensed site.

SUMMARY

Recent extra Government investment in UKAEA (£86M for H3AT and FTF, initial £20M for STEP and £10M for OAS) clearly demonstrates a strong commitment to UKAEA and Culham from Government and a genuine belief in fusion – as a viable energy source in the next 30 years. These new facilities will continue to play an important role in delivering fusion for decades to come.

Recruitment is at all time high – UKAEA made 350 new job offers in 2018 and both the graduate and apprenticeship schemes are increasing in scale.

The Culham site is also home to ~50 hi-tech companies employing over 800 highly skilled staff. Occupancy is at 98% - demonstrating a clear need for new buildings for UKAEA to use and/or let to tenants. UKAEA has outline planning permission for new buildings totalling 9000 square metres and has now received approval for Government to work with commercial partners to further develop the site.

Government interest and investment in UKAEA and Culham is at unprecedented high levels not seen in decades. Far from a site winding down, Culham is expanding and has a long term future in meeting the real challenges of putting fusion on the grid in the future, as well as building a fusion technology / advanced engineering cluster in support of that ambition.



Prof Ian Chapman, FInstP
CEO, UKAEA

¹ The business case for a further £200M has been approved by the BEIS Investment Committee and signed off by ministers and is now being discussed with Treasury

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Dear Sirs

Town and Country Planning Act 1990
South Oxfordshire Local Plan Submission Version (2034)
Report to Scrutiny Committee: 2 July 2019

We act for Summix Limited in connection with the above matter and have been asked to comment upon the report prepared for the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 2 July 2019.

That report is concerned with the proposed revision of the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan to better reflect the intentions and aspirations of Councillors and, in turn, identifies four options to achieve this objective. Whilst the report identifies the suggested implications of these options, it is notable that it provides very little evaluation of the overall risk profile to the Council. We have, in this context, been asked to provide a short considered assessment of that risk to the Council.

It is important at the outset to note that the substantial housing allocations identified in the draft Local Plan are predicated and informed by the "ambitious" plan of the combined authorities (see page 95) for housing delivery within this part of Oxfordshire. It is this deliberate inflation of the housing numbers within South Oxfordshire which have predetermined the need for the provision of the identified housing sites and, in turn, the proposed significant Green Belt releases.

There is nothing wrong with this initiative if it is a fair reflection of the intention of the Council, but it also follows that any substantive movement now away from this previous strategy to effectively reduce the housing commitment and to protect the Green Belt will require the wholesale revision and redefinition of the Local Plan.

As it is reflected in your own Officers assessment this immediately ensures that Option One and Option Two as identified in the Report cannot be pursued. This is because the appointed Inspector does not have the capacity or authority to make fundamental changes (see paragraph 47) and, in turn, the scale of changes required would be too significant to be secured by modification (paragraph 76). The remaining options of withdrawal and revision or republication carry essentially the same consequences and risks and must be considered in further detail. These risks can be summarised as follows:

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Speculative applications

There is no prospect that the Council would be at risk of speculative applications for the foreseeable future. As is confirmed at paragraph 168 of the report, the Council can demonstrate a 9.8 year housing land supply against the 'standard methodology'. This is identified as a template mechanism and operating standard for the proper assessment of local housing need at paragraph 60 of the NPPF and is a clear safeguard for the Council.

That prevailing position also ensures that the potential risk of intervention by the Secretary of State is very unlikely within the next 3-4 years. This is because the Council has not and will not fail in the delivery of housing for the foreseeable future and there isn't any immediate and pressing need for further housing provision through the Local Plan.

It also follows that the claimed risk of Judicial Review is non-existent, as any decision to withdraw the Plan would be entirely within the reasonable judgement and control of the local planning authority.

Growth Deal

It is important to note that the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal has a broader remit than just South Oxfordshire and relates to the administration and planning function of six Oxfordshire Councils and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. It is also a central plank of Government housing policy and remains a significant part of the national housing growth initiative.

In this context, the prospect of withdrawal of the funding by Government in response to the decision by South Oxfordshire Council to reconsider and re-evaluate its position must, on any fair assessment, simply not be in prospect. This is particularly the case where the accurate assessment of unmet housing need in Oxford City has yet to be determined (paragraph 110), the joint planning strategy for Oxfordshire has yet to be identified (paragraphs 34 and 43) and the future alignment of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway (paragraph 122) remains unknown.

Housing Infrastructure Funding

It is important to note that the commitment made by the Government to HIF relates entirely to projects (paragraph 37) identified in the adopted Core Strategy. This ensures that the associated development projects can still come forward and secure the same funding within this established and adopted policy context.

It is also the case that the identified funding is all directed at highway improvement works needed to facilitate the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway as relates to the existing highway network within and around Didcot. Again, the prospect that this funding would be withdrawn to the prejudice of this programme is, to put it at its lowest level, remote as it would only operate to undermine the whole growth strategy for this part of Oxfordshire.

Conclusion

It is important to emphasise that the submitted Local Plan is ultimately intended to reflect the intention and aspiration of the Council and the clear implication of this is that the local authority should only submit a plan "*it considers to be sound*" (see the Inspector's letter provided with the Frampton's letter of 14th June 2019). If this isn't the case the whole Local Plan strategy is flawed and will have direct and significant implications for the future determination of planning applications that are submitted to the Council in accordance with the emerging and adopted Local Plan provisions.

In short, the emerging Local Plan is the start of a process in the development of a housing strategy for South Oxfordshire which will ultimately inform the submission and then the determination or a series of planning applications. If Councillors have a concern as to that initiative this is the moment to take action, as the end consequence of this process is that

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the Council will be presented with a series of substantial and controversial planning applications that you will be directed to approve by Officers in accordance with the adopted policy context. It is these approved applications which will attract Government funding and if they are not to be supported by Councillors it is better that this judgment is exercised now and at a point where alternative initiatives are still in the control of the authority.

We trust the above submissions are of assistance.

Yours faithfully

Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP

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