

<b>APPLICATION NO.</b>	<a href="#">P17/S4193/FUL</a>
<b>APPLICATION TYPE</b>	FULL APPLICATION
<b>REGISTERED</b>	27.11.2017
<b>PARISH</b>	CULHAM
<b>WARD MEMBER(S)</b>	Sue Lawson
<b>APPLICANT</b>	Mr Dan Bowerman
<b>SITE</b>	UKAEA, Culham Science Centre near Clifton Hampden, OX14 3DB
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	Erection of a 3,789m <sup>2</sup> Class D2 Non Residential Training Centre with associated parking. (As amplified by Aboricultural Method Statement June 2018 received 18 June 2018)
<b>OFFICER</b>	Paul Bowers

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The application has been referred to planning committee as the views of the Culham Parish Council differ from the officer's recommendation of approval.
- 1.2 Culham Science Centre (CSC) is part of Science Vale. It is the leading UK centre for fusion research and technology and is of international importance. The site also hosts a number of related businesses.

CSC is owned and operated by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), and is one of the largest employment centres within the South Oxfordshire district, providing employment for some 2,000 people.

- 1.2 The Eastern part of the CSC is occupied by buildings and infrastructure connected with the Joint European Torus (JET) project. This project was conceived as the largest project in the co-ordinated fusion programme of the European Atomic Energy Community. The programme's long-term objective is the creation of safe, environmentally sound, prototype fusion reactors.

Temporary planning permissions for the JET buildings were granted between 1978 and 1992, with the main operational buildings being granted permission and constructed early in that period. The JET permissions were granted on a temporary basis because of CSC's location within the Oxford Green Belt.

In February 2014, permission was granted to retain the JET general purpose buildings on a permanent basis. The JET buildings extend to approximately 37,000 square metres.

- 1.3 The application site area is located on the western edge of the of CSC on an area of amenity grass land. A plan identifying the site can be found at **Appendix 1** to this report.

Immediately to the south of the site is an area of land that is the subject of an extant outline planning permission for a building of up to 9000 sqm of Class B1 development.

2.0 **PROPOSAL**

2.1 The application seeks full planning permission from the council to erect a three storey building comprising 3789 square metres of floor area to create a Training Centre for the Oxford Advanced Skills (OAS).

2.2 The facility will provide training for 17 to 21 year olds, with first years training 5 days a week and second and third years training one day a week and working in industry the remainder of the week.

A full set of plans and all representations are available to view on the council's website. A selection of plans can be found at [Appendix 2](#).

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

3.1 **Culham Parish Council –**

- 1) The construction is on a Green Belt designated area of land and therefore in conflict with government policy,
- 2) The traffic assessment concerning the number of vehicles/vehicle movements is not viable.

**Clifton Hampden Parish Council** (adjoining parish)- No strong views

**Oxfordshire County Council Single Response** - No objection subject to the completion of a Section 106 agreement securing monies toward shuttle bus and the non implementation of extant planning permissions.

**Sport England** - No objection.

**Economic Development** – Support the application.

**Forestry Officer** - No objection on the receipt of tree protection details and subject to a landscape condition.

**Countryside Officer** – No objection but request a condition for a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan.

**Didcot Garden Town Team** – Concerns about the design of the building.

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 [P16/S1753/O](#) – Outline Planning Permission on 19th July 2016  
Erection of up to 9,000 sq metres of Class B1 (office / research) development. (As amplified by Arboricultural Development Report dated April 2016).

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**  
**National Planning Policy Framework Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)**

**South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (SOCS) Policies**

CSEM1 - Supporting a successful economy

CSEN2 - Green Belt protection

CSM1 - Transport

CSEM3 - Culham Science Centre

CSM2 - Transport Assessments and Travel Plans

CSQ3 - Design

CSB1 - Conservation and improvement of biodiversity

**South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP 2011) policies;**

C8 - Adverse affect on protected species

D1 - Principles of good design

G2 - Protect district from adverse development

GB4 - Openness of Green Belt maintained

RUR3 - Culham Science Centre

T1 - Safe, convenient and adequate highway network for all users

T2 - Unloading, turning and parking for all highway users

**South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016 (SODG 2016)**

**6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The main issues to consider in relation to this proposal are;

- **Economic development.**
- **Impact on the Green Belt.**
- **Impact on the wider highway network.**
- **Impact on protected species.**
- **Impact on trees.**
- **Impact on the visual amenities of the site and the landscape.**
- **Loss of sports pitches.**

**6.2 Economic development.**

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system (para 19). The emphasis of the NPPF is to build a strong and competitive economy, para 20 states that this should be achieved by local planning authorities planning proactively to meet the development needs of business and support an economy fit for the 21st century.

6.3 There has been a change in the planning policy approach at Culham Science Centre between the Local Plan and the Core Strategy. The Local Plan policies restricted redevelopment at Culham under Policy RUR4 (which is no longer a saved policy). However Core Strategy Policy CSEM3 supports the redevelopment and intensification of Culham Science Centre for research and science based businesses. Proposals for redevelopment and the intensification of uses with the creation of about 1000 new jobs is supported under Policy CSEM3.

6.4 Recognition of this is set out in the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (Section 6) which identifies South Oxfordshire as being in the economically buoyant Thames Valley area which lies between Reading and Oxford, both centres for high technology, science and research industries. The southern part of the district sites within Science Vale and is the location of a particularly high density of science and technology activities centred around Harwell, Culham Science Centre and Milton Park.

6.5 Pursuant to adopted Core Policy CSEM3, the Authority has worked with the Council to produce a draft Masterplan for the CSC with the intention that following consultation, it will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD has been agreed with Officers but not approved as SPD and as such has limited weight in the determination of the application.

The draft masterplan limits new buildings on the western edge of the site generally to no more than 3 industrial/office scale storeys. In the centre of the site the tallest

buildings are 5 industrial scale storeys. Generally, new buildings in that area will not exceed the height of the tallest existing buildings.

With regard to the design of new buildings, the vision for CSC depends on its continued importance as a centre for research and development but also the quality of its buildings and infrastructure. To attract scientists from around the world a contemporary approach to design and materials is envisaged.”

- 6.6 The council’s Economic Development Officer supports this proposal as it accords with the council’s strategic objective of building the local economy and the associated corporate priority of supporting business growth in appropriate locations across the district. The site is also a major employment location within South Oxfordshire.

The OAS training centre will enable Oxfordshire businesses to offer high quality and tailored training programmes and apprenticeships in a range of advanced engineer skills. Once built, the centre will produce 120-160 highly skilled technicians who will enter the local workforce each year. The centre will help local businesses to attract, retain and train local skilled staff. As the centre is a collaboration between the UK Atomic Energy Authority, the Science and Technology Facilities Council Oxfordshire County Council and local employers.

This centre will provide significant investment in the local economy, both in terms of the construction of the centre, but also in terms of the additional and sustained job creation it will bring to the area (15 new ongoing jobs and 120 apprentices a year) and associated flow of spend in the local economy. The job creation is important to support the projected population increase in the district.

6.7 **Impact on the Green Belt.**

*Policy context -*

The advice given all relates back to the issue of the Green Belt. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. This is set out in Section 9 of the advice from Central Government in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The advice contained within the NPPF is filtered down on a more local level within a districts development plan specifically SOCS policy CSEN2 and SOLP policy GB4.

Paragraph 80 of the NPPF sets out the five purposes of the green belt;

- to check the unrestricted urban sprawl of large built up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

In addition, there is a presumption against inappropriate development. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt.

Paragraph 87 states that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Paragraph 88 states that the when local authorities are considering planning applications substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. It goes

on to say that ‘very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations

Paragraph 89 advises that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate development in the Green Belt **except** for the following purposes;

- Agriculture and forestry.
- Appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, for cemeteries and other uses of land which preserve the openness of the green belt and don’t conflict with the purposes of including land in it.
- The extension alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
- The replacement of a building where it is in the same use as the existing and is not materially larger.
- Limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan or;
- Limited infilling or partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land) whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.

6.8 The assessment of the impact to the Green Belt is therefore a stepped process in that a proposal needs to be considered in terms of whether the development is inappropriate and then whether it harms the openness of the Green Belt. If a development conflicts with either then consideration has to be given as to whether there are any ‘very special circumstances’ that would outweigh this harm.

6.9 *Is the development inappropriate?*

The proposal involves the erection of a building which does not benefit from one the exceptions to building in the Green Belt. It is therefore inappropriate development and by definition is harmful.

6.10 *Does the development harm openness?*

The existing area of the site is open and will be replaced by a three storey building. This will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the openness of the site and the Green Belt.

6.11 *Are there ‘very special circumstances’?*

Policy RUR3 of the Local Plan identifies the area of this site where limited infill at the site will be permitted. This policy also sets out the requirements for infill development at the site. This site is outside of the area identified for infill development.

Policy RUR4 of the Local Plan is not a saved policy, therefore any proposal for the redevelopment and intensification of the site falls to be considered under Core Strategy Policy CSEM3. Policy CSEM3 is supportive of the redevelopment and intensification of Culham Science Centre for research and science based business. Proposals for the redevelopment and the intensification of uses with the creation of about 1000 new jobs will be supported. A Masterplan will be developed and agreed to facilitate this growth. Therefore, as the development will fall outside the area defined in Policy RUR3 of the

Local Plan and in the absence of an adopted Masterplan, very special circumstances should be justified.

Core Strategy Policy CSEM3 does support the intensification and redevelopment of the site and includes the development of a Masterplan to help facilitate this growth. Although not adopted the master plan carries some weight in the determination of this application albeit limited.

I consider there are very special circumstances on this site which set it aside from other sites within the Green Belt. There is a clear thrust from Central Government embedded in the advice contained within the NPPF and within the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy that seeks to support the local economy. In relation to this site there is the national and international importance of the work that is carried out on this site which I have given weight to.

This site is part of Science Vale and is being promoted as a global centre for enterprise and innovation. This supports ambitions for Oxfordshire to be a world class destination for high technology, knowledge-based companies. This site has some unique selling points in that it offers specific power supplies for large scale projects, high security due to the JET project and its inclusion as part of Science Vale. This, in my view, supplements the very special circumstances that exist.

I have also given weight to the thrust of the NPPF which sets out the drive to build a strong, competitive economy and achieve economic growth. In addition, there has been a change in the policy approach to this site between the Local Plan and Core Strategy with the latter being supportive of growth and redevelopment at the site.

The area of the campus where this application is proposed sits between the neighbouring site, Culham Number 1 and the area of the campus where new development at Culham is permitted (through policy RUR3)

In addition, the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2033 policy STRAT6 does support development at the science centre and proposes to inset the campus in Green Belt. Although 2033 plan carries limited weight at this stage, this shows a clear direction of travel and the council's intentions for the site.

The use of this building by the OAS and the training it provides will help to support the activities at CSC and the wider local economy. I give this significant weight.

In addition to the fact that outline permission has been granted for a building to the south and the level of screening provided by the trees to the west and the backdrop against which this development would be seen from the Green Belt, I conclude that what harm is caused by virtue of its inappropriateness and to the openness of the Green Belt is outweighed by the significant benefits it will bring that constitute very special circumstances.

In the context of the Green Belt, I conclude that the development is acceptable.

#### 6.12 Impact on the wider highway network

With respect to highway safety matters the advice from Central Government set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is as follows:

*Development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of the development are severe.*

The term severe is locally interpreted as situations, which have a high impact, likely to result in loss of life, or a higher possibility of occurrence with a lower impact.

- 6.13 The site is situated in a relatively unsustainable location with limited opportunities to walk, cycle or use public transport. There does not appear to be any substantial proposals to enhance sustainable modes either on or off site. This is particularly pertinent given the localised congestion in the vicinity of Culham Science Centre.
- 6.14 Access to the proposed training centre will be taken via a ghosted right turn lane junction on the A415 that provides the main access to the CSC. This existing access arrangement includes two exit lanes on the minor (site access) arm to facilitate traffic movements to and from the site. The A415 is de-restricted along the frontage of the site.

The gated access road into CSC from the A415 is proposed to serve the training centre, as indicated in Appendix A of the Transport Statement (TS). This existing access arrangement is considered acceptable to serve the proposed training centre. It is noted that a new access to serve the training centre is to be created to the north of the red-line area. This access and connecting routes will be designed in accordance with County Council design standards; such a design approach is considered acceptable as these highway works will be undertaken on private land.

- 6.15 Within the previous transport submission there were several transport issues that had been identified by OCC that required clarification and additional information for assessment. A revised Transport Statement (TS) report dated 10th July 2018 (BSP ref 03-0081 Revision B) with accompanying appendices A to C has been prepared to address these issues:

#### Traffic Generation & Impact

TS paragraphs 5.1 to 5.8 confirm the revised trip rate generation figures. These revised trip rates have been calculated using appropriate TRICS traffic data alongside existing traffic survey data collected by CSC and calculating an average trip rate between the two sets of traffic data. Due to the unique nature of CSC in terms of land use and its location, calculating trips rates in this manner, for this development proposal, is considered reasonable.

It has been confirmed within the revised TS that the peak hour trips for the training centre building, once it is operating at capacity (2025), is 87 two-way movements in the AM peak hour and 18 in the PM peak hour. It is recognised by CSC (TS paragraphs 5.9 to 5.14) that the new training centre building will generate new peak hour vehicular traffic through a sensitive part of the highway network, over the Culham Bridges and adjacent Abingdon Road, Tollgate Road and Appleford Road. To address / mitigate this concern CSC has agreed to provide the following:

1. Extant planning permission (ref P16/S1753/O) for an office (B1) development of approximately 9,000m<sup>2</sup> in floor area has not yet been implemented. To enable the training centre to come forward without having a detrimental impact on the highway network, OCC has agreed in principle that the vehicular trips generated by the proposed training centre can be offset against the trips that would be generated by P16/S1753/O. It has been agreed by OCC that P16/S1753/O has the potential to generate up to 199 and 211 in the AM and PM peak hours. These offset trip rate figures are presented in Table 3 of the submitted TS.

2. To ensure that P16/S1753/O is not implemented once the training centre application has been approved / implemented, CSC has agreed not to implement P16/S1753/O until OCC has secured full funding towards the Thames River Crossing scheme between Didcot and CSC. This CSC commitment will be secured within the s106 Agreement to accompany this planning application.
3. It is recognised by OCC and CSC that the location of the science centre has limited access to public transport services. Whilst Culham train station is located nearby to CSC, the train services that operate and stop at this station are infrequent throughout the day and serve limited destinations. In terms of bus services none currently operate that serve the site. To begin to address this issue, CSC has agreed to fund a shuttle bus service between Abingdon and CSC during the peak hours of the working week (Monday to Friday) for a period of up to 5 years. A contribution of £250,000 (index linked) is to be secured as part of the s106 Agreement for this development proposal to enable OCC to procure this bus service.
4. TS paragraph 5.14 states that in the early stages of the shuttle bus operation, vehicular traffic associated with the overall CSC site could be reduced during the peak hours, possibly by 40 trips, assuming the shuttle bus vehicle has a 30-seat capacity. Such a reduction could justify the trip generation figures presented in Table 3 being revised to 152 in the AM peak hour and 233 trips during the PM peak hour. While such revised vehicle movements are possible this will need to be supported with evidence from monitoring the shuttle bus service once it is in operation (part of Travel Plan). Once this patronage usage data has been collected and analysed, OCC would be content to review the traffic generation figures in Table 3 for future planning applications.

#### 6.16 Parking Provision

The proposed car parking provision for the training centre is shown in Appendix A of the revised TS. 106 car parking spaces for staff and apprentices, including 3 disabled parking spaces are proposed. 11 existing spaces on site will be lost at the site entrance location, but will be replaced elsewhere within CSC. In addition, 8 car parking spaces (including 2 disabled) are proposed to be provided for visitors off the main spine road within CSC. Overall, the car parking spaces proposed is 114.

It is acknowledged that once the training centre is operating at full capacity there will be 320 apprentices on site (but not until 2025) with 10 to 15 staff on site per day. The centre will be aimed primarily at first year apprentices of the 16-18 age group who may not all own a car or be able to drive. On this basis, alongside the bus service contribution that is to be secured and a Travel Plan, the level of on-site car parking for this proposal is now considered acceptable.

Cycle parking is to be provided in the form of 15 Sheffield Stands (30 cycle spaces) with changing and shower facilities provided on site. This figure is based upon existing journeys undertaken by CSC staff with some rounding up as most new apprentices are expected not to own a car. This level of cycle parking is now considered appropriate from the information that has been submitted. It is considered essential that the use of the proposed 30 cycle spaces is monitored as part of a Travel Plan for this proposal and any increase in demand is catered for within an agreed period time within this document. Such facilities are shown to be sheltered on Ridge drawing 5003396 0003 Rev C which is acceptable.



6.17 Travel Plan

For this development proposal and the overall CSC site, it is important to encourage all staff, apprentices etc. to use alternative modes of transport rather than a private car. Promoting the use of public transport and walking to the site is not considered feasible now due to the limited public transport options and the rural location of the CSC. To address these issues a Travel Plan is required to accompany this proposal. Paragraph 2.3.2 of the TS states that an updated Travel Plan has been included within the planning application submission; however, this appears not to be the case.

A Travel Plan is needed for this development proposal to ensure the training centre sets targets / objectives to reduce car travel to / from the site while managing the car parking allocation of future apprentices and associated staff. Due to the location of the site and the absence of bus services operating in the area, it has been agreed by CSC that a financial contribution of £250,000 (index linked) is to be provided to OCC to procure a peak hour shuttle bus service between Abingdon and CSC.

The preparation of this Travel Plan document is to be conditioned and is to be approved by the Local Planning Authority and the County Council prior to the training centre's first use. This document will need to be updated within 3 months of its first use to ensure appropriate data can be collected on the travel patterns of the apprentices attending the centre.

A Travel Plan Co-ordinator will be required to monitor the travel patterns of the apprentices and will need to work with County Council officers to undertake this travel plan work. The monitoring period of this plan will be set at 5 years. To ensure this document is monitored, a County Council travel plan monitoring fee of £2,040 (index linked) will be required.

- 6.18 In summary, the mitigation proposed as part of the accompanying Section 106 agreement in terms of not implementing the extant outline planning permission for a B1 office building and the financial sum of £250,000 to fund a shuttle bus is sufficient to ensure that this development does not result in severe harm to the public highway network.

6.19 **Impact on protected species.**

The site is generally of low ecological value being dominated by close mown amenity grassland, the most valuable features are associated with the tree belt on the western site boundary.

The proposals would involve the loss of much of the current amenity grassland but the retention of the western tree belt. No protected species would be impacted by the proposed development.

Policy CSB1 of the SOCS requires development proposals to show that they can deliver a net gain in biodiversity value if possible but as a minimum to ensure that the development does not result in a net loss. The applicant has not submitted any evidence to demonstrate that the proposals could comply with CSB1 however, given the low value of the existing habitats it should be possible to include biodiversity enhancements within the scheme to avoid a significant net loss.

In conjunction with a landscaping scheme which is intrinsically linked to the biodiversity enhancement plan conditions relating to both are proposed as part of this recommendation which requires a landscaping details to be submitted along with a bio diversity enhancement plan.

6.20 **Impact on trees.**

The trees growing along the western boundary form a prominent feature of the site and the surrounding area. Policy CSEN1 of SOCS and Policy C9 seeks to protect landscape features.

The proposed building is located far enough away from the tree line to avoid causing any damage. A small section of the car park and vehicle turning head are just inside the root protection areas of T55 and T38 as shown on the plans, however subject to suitable tree protection measures being taken it is not anticipated that it will cause significant long term damage to the trees.

During the course of the application tree protection details were submitted and now form part of the application. They meet the Forestry Officer's requirements and on this basis, there is no objection to the development on tree grounds.

6.21 **Loss of sports pitches.**

The building will be located on land that is used for recreation and contains sports pitches.

Sports England have been consulted as a statutory consultee. Sport England will oppose proposals which would lead to the loss of or prejudice the use of a sports field. There are however specific exceptions to this.

South Oxfordshire District Council has a playing pitch strategy. Paragraph 3.120 of the reports refers to "one adult pitch" at Culham Science Centre. It is assumed that this is the large full sized 11 aside pitch north of the car park that is proposed to be retained. The 5 aside pitch to be lost by the development, which is informal in nature is not taken into account by the report as a "pitch" in the accounting for pitches in the District. In any event the strategy confirms that there is a surplus of sports pitches in the District on this basis the consultants who produced the strategy concluded that there is no demand for new facilities on sites of current usage.

On this basis Sports England conclude that the proposed development meets the exception that states;

*A robust and up-to-date assessment has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of Sport England, that there is an excess of playing field provision in the catchment, which will remain the case should the development be permitted, and the site has no special significance to the interests of sport.*

Therefore there is no objection to the loss of the land that will be affected by the development.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

7.1 Planning permission should be granted because the development provides significant local and national economic benefits on a site of national importance which contribute to very special circumstances to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. The impact to the highway network is offset by the accompanying Section 106 agreement by way of the non-implementation of an extant planning permission and financial contribution to a shuttle bus. The ecological and landscape impacts are acceptable in conjunction with the proposed conditions. The proposal accords with development plan policies.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 To authorise the head of planning to grant planning permission subject to:

- I. The completion of a S106 agreement securing the non-implementation of an extant planning permission and financial contribution to a shuttle bus; and
- II. The following conditions:
  1. Commencement three years - full planning permission.
  2. Approved plans.
  3. Materials as on plan.
  4. New vehicular access.
  5. Turning area and car parking.
  6. Cyclists shower/changing facilities.
  7. Construction traffic management.
  8. Travel plans.
  9. Surface water drainage.
  10. Landscaping (including access road and hard standings).
  11. Biodiversity enhancement plan to be submitted.

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