

<b>APPLICATION NO.</b>	<a href="#">P19/S2198/FUL</a>
<b>APPLICATION TYPE</b>	FULL APPLICATION
<b>REGISTERED</b>	11.7.2019
<b>PARISH</b>	CLIFTON HAMPDEN
<b>WARD MEMBER(S)</b>	Sam Casey-Rerhaye
<b>APPLICANT</b>	Mrs Caroline Livingstone
<b>SITE</b>	Land north of Middle Way Culham Science Centre near Clifton Hampden, OX14 3DB
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	Erection of a Class B1 R&D Employment Building with associated decked car parking and landscaping. (As amplified by Biodiversity Calculator received 7 August 2019 and Addendum to Planning Statement - September 2019 accompanying email from agent received 27 September 2019 and amended by drawings and revised Arboricultural information received 22 October movement of the plant, reduction in the hard standing and retention of Tree T12).
<b>OFFICER</b>	Paul Bowers

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The following report sets out the officer’s recommendation to approve the development and the justification as to how that recommendation has been reached.

The recommendation at the conclusion of this report is in two parts. To delegate the grant of planning permission subject to the proposed conditions and subject to;

1. The successful completion of a Section 106 agreement and;
2. The referral of the application to the Secretary of State and receipt of their confirmation that the application is not called in.

1.2 Culham Science Centre (CSC) is part of Science Vale and within the Oxford Green Belt and is owned by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA). 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

A plan showing the location of the site can be found at **Appendix 1** to this report. It is a green field site although has previously accommodated a boiler house which was demolished in 2014.

1.3 CSC’s origins lay in its former use a naval airfield. In 1959, the Authority began to look for a site for a completely new laboratory for plasma physics and nuclear fusion research. The site needed to be within easy reach of the Authority’s existing facilities at Harwell and Aldermaston and close to Oxford University. The old naval airfield at Culham came nearest to meeting those requirements and on 29 January 1960, the Authority secured planning permission from Oxfordshire County Council for the development of the site as a *research establishment with access*

1.4 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.

2.0 **PROPOSAL**

2.1 The application seeks full planning permission from the council for a building located at the northern end of the site along with a decked car park.

2.2 The National Fusion Technology Platform (NFTP) building is formed of three inter related projects. Hydrogen-3 Advanced Technology (H3AT) which will research how to process and store tritium and helps with the Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) development, the Fusion Technology Facility (FTF) is for developing thermal hydraulic tests for components under fusion conditions and the Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production (STEP) office accommodation for the development of their research.

2.3 Reduced copies of the plans accompanying the application are attached as **Appendix 2** to this report. All the plans and representations can be viewed on the council's website [www.southoxon.gov.uk](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk) under the planning application reference number.

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

3.1 **Clifton Hampden Parish Council** – Object for the following reasons;

- Do not agree with the 'very special circumstances' put forward by the applicant.
- The 'very special circumstances' do not cover the proposed decked car park.
- It has not been justified why the NFTP project cannot be accommodated in existing buildings.
- Concern about the traffic movements associated with the new development and impact on the highway network.

**Culham Parish Council** (Adjoining parish) - Object for the following reasons;

- Fully supports the comments of Clifton Hampden Parish Council.

**Neighbour responses** – 2 x letters of objection covering the following main planning issues;

- The proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- The facility could be built anywhere within Science Vale and does not have to be built at CSC.
- Concern about the highway impacts of the development.

**National Grid Plant Protection** – Advice given to the applicant regarding the proximity of above and below ground electricity supply.

**Oxfordshire County Council Single Response** – No objection in terms of the impact on the highway network provided that a section 106 is entered in to offsetting the vehicle movements from the development against the non-implementation of an extant outline permission for B1 use on the site and payments in relation to public transport provision and travel plan monitoring and subject to planning conditions.

**SODC Economic Development** - The proposed application could contribute positively to the economic development of the district and the growth of Science Vale.

**SODC Countryside Officer** – No objection subject to a condition seeking confirmation that the applicants have entered in to a biodiversity offsetting scheme and paying the sum of £16,880.

**SODC Forestry Officer** - No objection to the proposed development, subject to the f conditions.

#### 4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

##### 4.1 [P19/S0355/FUL](#) - Approved (02/08/2019)

Extension to existing RACE building with associated car parking spaces.

##### [P19/S0898/PEJ](#) - Other Outcome (17/06/2019)

Erection of a research and development building with associated car parking.

#### 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**

CS1 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development

CSB1 - Conservation and improvement of biodiversity

CSEM1 - Supporting a successful economy

CSEM3 - Culham Science Centre

CSEM4 - Supporting economic development

CSEN1 - Landscape protection

CSEN2 - Green Belt protection

CSQ3 - Design

CSR3 - Community facilities and rural transport

CSS1 - The Overall Strategy

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

C9 - Loss of landscape features

D1 - Principles of good design

D2 - Safe and secure parking for vehicles and cycles

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)**

- 5.2 Paragraph 48 of the NPPF allows for weight to be given to relevant policies in emerging plans, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise, and only subject to the stage of preparation of the plan, the extent of unresolved objections and the degree of consistency of the relevant emerging policies with the NPPF.

##### **Emerging Clifton Hampden Neighbourhood Plan**

Clifton Hampden Parish Council is working on creating a neighbourhood plan. Clifton Hampden Neighbourhood Area was formally designated on 26 September 2014. The parish council has started the process of gathering evidence and engaging with the local community. This is to give the plan a direction and draft policies that will form the neighbourhood plan. At this stage the plan can be given no weight in the determination of planning applications.

### **Emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan**

On 10 October 2019 the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government issued a Holding Direction on the Council in relation to the emerging Local Plan 2034. The holding direction has been made under the provisions of Section 21A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This means that the emerging plan has 'no effect whilst the direction is in force', this is set out in section 21A(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The emerging Local Plan has no weight at this stage.

## **6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Section 70 (2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides that the local planning authority shall have regard to the provisions of the Development Plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations.

In the case of this application, the most relevant parts of the Development Plan are the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy 2027 (SOCS) which was adopted in December 2012, the saved policies of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP).

The main issues to consider in relation to this proposal and against development plan policies are as follows;

- **The principle of development.**
- **Impact on the Green Belt.**
- **Impacts on the highway network.**
- **Impact on the character and appearance of the area and landscape.**
- **Impact on trees.**
- **Impact on protected species.**
- **Other issues.**

## **6.2 The principle of 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. The emphasis of the NPPF is to build a strong and competitive economy and 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.

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.

6.3 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 sits 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.

- 6.4 In respect of development on this developed site within the Green Belt, the development plan has changed significantly. With the adoption of the Core Strategy, NPPF and the preparation of a draft masterplan for the Culham Science Centre. These changes have seen a shift in policy approach to this site between the Local Plan and the Core Strategy Policy CSEM3. This policy supports the redevelopment and intensification of the site and the creation of about 1000 new jobs.
- 6.5 Pursuant to adopted Core Policy CSEM3, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) 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.
- 6.6 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.

In light of all of this I am of the view that there would be no objection in principle of the new buildings as it supports the aims of the Core Strategy.

**6.7 Impact on the Green Belt.**

The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.

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. policies within the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011.

Paragraph 134 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. Paragraph 143 states that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

- 6.8 Paragraph 144 states that 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 145 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;

- a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- e) limited infilling in villages;
- f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and
- g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
  - not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or
  - not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

- 6.9 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.

- 6.10 *Is the proposal inappropriate development?*

The development will result in new buildings in the Green Belt. They are not listed in paragraph 145 as an exception and therefore I conclude that the proposal is inappropriate and by definition harmful to the Green Belt.

- 6.11 *Does the development harm the openness of the Green Belt?*

The buildings enclose a significant area of open space and will in my view result in a materially harmful impact to the openness of the Green Belt.

6.12 *Are there any 'very special circumstances'?*

In this case I must consider whether there are any very special circumstances to justify and outweigh the harm caused by the NFTP building and the decked car park by virtue of both being inappropriate development and having some impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

6.13 The applicants have put forward their case for very special circumstances and these are;

*1. Locational Requirement –*

Fusion has the potential to change our world. It offers the promise of safe, low-carbon electricity with virtually limitless fuels. It is recognised internationally as one of the most transformative and world changing technologies available to mankind. In terms of meeting the climate emergency – Fusion is a key element and in Oxfordshire, and specifically at Culham Science Centre, we are fortunate to be leading the world in this technology.

There are six prime challenges to realising Fusion electricity. There are key players in each of these elsewhere in the world, but Culham Science Centre is the only location with expertise in all six areas. The challenges are: very hot gas or 'Plasma' Science; Materials Science; Innovative Engineering; Fuel Handling; Plasma Exhaust; and Robotic Maintenance.

The facilities at Culham which support these areas, in addition to JET and the Mega Amp Spherical Tokamak (MAST), are the Materials Research Facility (MRF), the Materials De-Tritiation Facility (MDF), the Remote Applications in Controlled Environment facility (RACE) and various research groups in tokamak science, fusion technology and advanced engineering.

6.14 *2. The CSC's international significance as a centre of excellence for science and technology.*

This expertise has been built up by operating the JET and MAST facilities whose related engineering has enabled a growing strength in Robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

RACE continues to expand – over 150 engineers are now working (often closely with UK industry) on a wide range of robotics and AI projects. The majority of the work is in fusion areas but also in nuclear fission (most notably decommissioning), other projects (e.g. the European Spallation Source in Sweden) and autonomous vehicles (development and testing). Expansion has been so rapid, an extension to the existing building has recently been approved under application P19/S0355/FUL.

JET will eventually be superseded by the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), which is currently under construction at Cadarache in the south of France (currently due to start some early stage operations in 2025 building up to full operations by 2030).

ITER's eventual successor will be a Demonstration Fusion Power Plant (DEMO) as identified in the European Fusion Roadmap. The realisation of DEMO in the 2030s will require a sustained long-term collaborative effort between research and industry that is currently in its early stages. UKAEA's long term strategic goal is to become a key design centre for DEMO, creating high quality technology jobs and maintaining the long history of world class design and innovation in the Oxfordshire area.

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 £200M under discussion) for UKAEA to undertake the design of the UK's own compact fusion power plant design. This will necessitate further close collaboration with UK industry and academia.

Recent extra Government investment in UKAEA (£86M for H3AT and FTF, initial £20M for STEP and £10M for a brand-new apprentice training centre, OAS due to be opened in September 2019) 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.

### 3. *The Site's Location in Science Vale Oxford*

Culham is an established part of the southern Oxfordshire cluster of education, science and technology, known as Science Vale.

The UKAEA is a partner in Science Vale and as such is committed to working together with the other partners, including South Oxfordshire District Council and the County Council, to help to promote and develop south Central Oxfordshire as an internationally recognised location for enterprise and innovation in science and technology. Locating the NFTP facility at Culham will support these aims and is consistent with the objectives of Core Strategy Policy CSEM1, which are “to provide an environment that positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth”, which it will do *inter alia* by “providing a framework for innovation and enterprise through encouraging knowledge transfer, emerging technologies and innovative business development.”

#### 6.15 4. *Core Strategy Policy CSEM3*

The proposed new building to house the NFTP facility complies fully with Core Strategy Policy CSEM3. Policy CSEM3 is a permissive policy which supports a ‘whole site’ approach and the redevelopment and intensification of the CSC. The policy also supports redevelopment and intensification of uses that will create about 1,000 new jobs. Having a development plan commitment to create 1,000 new jobs on a site in the Green Belt is unusual and adds to the ‘very special circumstances’ case in support of this proposal.

#### 6.16 5. *The decked car park*

OCC require car parking at a level which is appropriate to the size and use of the development. It is argued that the car park meets those requirements and takes in to account the parking required for the approved RACE extension. The impact on openness of providing the car parking across a wider area to accommodate the required number of spaces as opposed to a single decked solution is the same.

6.17 I have considered all of the above points when arriving at my own conclusion. I have also considered the points put forward by the Clifton Hampden Parish Council who do not agree that there are very special circumstances to justify the harm. The parish council do not believe the building has to be located at this site, that the NFTP could be located in existing buildings on the site and that the decked car park is not justified.

- 6.18 I am satisfied that this site is appropriate for this development in the context of the links and specialism that exist at CSC. In short, I believe it makes sense to locate the project here rather than elsewhere in the Science Vale outside of the Green Belt.

There is a wider, long term benefit that is derived from the work to be carried out in the building. That is a particularly strong argument in its own right in my opinion.

The SOCS as adopted planning policy has committed the council to supporting the creation of 1000 new jobs and this development will contribute toward that commitment.

The building has been specifically designed for the needs of the projects and work that will take place inside. This cannot be adequately provided for within the existing built form at CSC.

The development will provide for a financial contribution toward the new shuttle bus service which has wider environmental benefits and increase the likelihood of employees using the service and reducing the use of the private car at peak times on the already stretched highway network.

The decked car park occupies an area that has already been approved as a car park for the extended Race building to the west of the application site. In order to meet OCC parking requirements, the development must provide parking on site. To my mind it makes sense to provide a decked solution within a single building rather than use a larger area of land to be filled with parked cars. I agree that the overall impact on openness would be neutral.

- 6.19 In conclusion, I have balanced the harm against the very special circumstances that have been put forward and in my view the harm to the Green Belt both in terms of openness and by being inappropriate development is clearly outweighed by the unique very special circumstances of this site and development.

6.20 **Impacts on the 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.

- 6.21 A Transport Statement (TS) report has been prepared by BSP Consulting dated 21st June 2019 to support the development proposal and has been assessed on its merits.

6.22 Access Arrangements

Access to the NFTP building is to be via the main access to CSC. This existing access arrangement includes two exit lanes on the minor (site access) arm to facilitate traffic movements to and from the site with a ghost right turn lane on the A415. The A415 is de-restricted along the frontage of the site. The appropriate Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) sightlines of 4.5 metres x 215 metres are available in each direction at the junction that serves CSC.

6.23 Traffic Generation and impact

It has been confirmed within the TS that the NFTP building will have a gross floor area of 7,158m<sup>2</sup> and will have capacity for 300 members of staff, although such staff numbers will increase gradually over a 4-year period from 75 members of staff in 2022 to 300 from 2025 onwards (Section 4 of TS, Table 1).

Section 5 of the TS confirms that the estimated peak hour trips for the NFTP building, once it is operating at capacity (2025), is 90 two-way movements in the AM peak hour and 51 in the PM peak hour. It is recognised by CSC that this development proposal (and recent other planning approvals at CSC) will generate new peak hour vehicular traffic through a sensitive part of the highway network, over the Culham Bridges and adjacent Abingdon Road, Tollage Road and Appleford Road. To address / mitigate this concern CSC has agreed 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 this proposal to come forward without having a detrimental impact on the highway network, OCC has agreed in principle that the vehicular trips generated by this proposal (and the recent Oxford Advanced Skills Training Centre and RACE extension) 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 Appendix B of the submitted TS.

2. To ensure that P16/S1753/O is not implemented in full once the NFTP building has been approved / implemented, CSC has agreed not to fully implement its B1 development. This will involve each development proposal offsetting appropriate traffic movements from each proposal 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 address this issue, CSC has agreed to fund a shuttle bus service between Abingdon-on-Thames and CSC during the peak hours of the working week (Monday to Friday) via a s106 financial contribution to OCC. For this application, 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 and operate a new bus service (starting in September 2019) to serve CSC.

6.24 Parking Provision

Within the submitted Planning Statement prepared by Carter Jonas, dated July 2019, and the TS, it is confirmed that this development proposal will be provided with a decked car parking area to accommodate 337 parking spaces. These spaces will consist of 6 visitor spaces, 2 disabled spaces and 2 electrical charging bays in front of the NFTP building with the remaining 239 spaces within the decked structure to the northwest of the NFTP building. Of the remaining 108 car parking spaces in the decked structure, 48 are to be dedicated to the recently approved RACE extension with the remaining 60 spaces being made available to the remainder of the site.

Such on-site parking levels are considered acceptable due to the nature of this proposal and its location.

30 cycle parking spaces are shown on McBains Limited drawings UKA01-MCB-SI-XX-DR-A-0101/D5-P1 and UKA01-MCB-SI-XX-DR-A-0102/D5-P6. The principle of such facilities is acceptable, however with the planned sustainable transport infrastructure coming forward in the local area it is likely cyclist numbers associated with CSC will increase. Therefore, the Highway Authority has recommended that 40 cycle parking spaces are provided instead of the 30 proposed. Such facilities should also be secure and sheltered, which does not appear to be the case having reviewed the submitted site layout drawings. This provision can be secured through a planning condition.

It is noted within the submitted Design and Access Statement that the NTFP building is have showers and changing facilities on the ground floor. Such facilities are considered essential to promote walking and cycling to work.

#### 6.25 Travel Plan

Overall the submitted Travel Plan (TP) document is considered acceptable for this development proposal. This document will require updating 3 months prior to NTFP building's first use alongside a review of the site wide actions proposed on page 5 of the TP. This requirement is recommended to be secured by a planning condition. It is noted within the submitted TP (page 5) that several site-wide transport actions are identified to be completed, including installing pedestrian links to the existing on-site network. As part of this travel plan work it is recommended that CSC undertakes a site-wide review of pedestrian and cycle infrastructure alongside the current transport work that is being undertaken to ensure there are high quality and convenient for non-motorised users throughout the site. This review can be incorporated into the update requested above.

A travel plan monitoring fee of £2040 is required for this development

- 6.26 In order to secure the offsetting of the additional movements and the travel plan monitoring a Section 106 Agreement is necessary.

In addition, OCC require a financial contribution of £250,000 to the CSC shuttle bus service which has recently been created and financed by other sums of money that have come from development at CSC.

#### 6.27 **Impact on the character and appearance of the area and landscape.**

Policy CSEN1 of SOCS states that the district's distinct landscape character and key features will be protected against inappropriate development and where possible enhanced. Where development is acceptable in principle, measures will be sought to integrate it into the landscape character of the area.

- 6.28 The proposal proposed two buildings will be located at the northern end of the CSC means and will be visible from public vantage points.

- 6.29 The buildings will be seen however in the context of the recently added and soon to be extended RACE building to the west and with the back drop of the existing buildings and largest building located centrally within CSC.

The modern design is reflective of the approach for the RACE building but distinct enough to sit apart in terms of form and detailing. In my view this represents the addition of good design to the wider CSC site which sits comfortably with the existing buildings but also acts as a focal building to the edge of the CSC and from views within the site.

- 6.30 There will be an impact on the wider landscape. A landscaping scheme will assist in mitigating the impact to an extent, but these are sizable additions, however I am satisfied that when seen in the wider context of the CSC there will not be a materially harmful impact to the landscape or the character of the site itself.

**6.31 Impact on trees.**

Policy CSEN1 of SOCS seeks to protect the district's landscape character and key features.

Policy C9 states that any development that would cause the loss of landscape features will not be permitted where those features make an important contribution to the local scene.

- 6.32 The applicant has submitted an amended arboricultural impact assessment (AIA) (Date June 2019 Revised October 2019).

The tree retention plan within the submitted AIA shows the retention of category A (high quality) sycamore tree shown as T12. The submitted site plans have now been amended to show this tree as being retained. The proposed building where adjacent to T12 has not been relocated.

At 3.2.2 of the AIA the following works are proposed to T12: Reduce lateral extent of western crown to 5.0 m from main stem to provide clearance to the proposed building. This equates to reducing the canopy spread towards the building back by approximately 4m. Following the proposed pruning the retained canopy would be approximately 1m from the edge of the proposed building, this is clearly unsustainable, with the reduction works to the canopy of T12 are likely to reduce the tree's amenity value considerably. This would not allow any space for any future growth from the tree following the works.

Some of the hard surfacing within the root protection area (RPA) of the tree has been reduced. The foundations for the building are still located within the RPA of the tree.

- 6.33 As the proposed location for the building in relation to the tree is unsustainable and unrealistic, it would be better management to remove T12 and provide suitable replacement planting to mitigate its loss. There is adequate space surrounding the building where tree planting could be implemented. A landscaping plan could be submitted to show details of replacement trees, that could be secured by a pre-commencement condition.

A landscaping plan has been submitted that shows tree planting to the North of the proposed development site. However, limited details have been provided on the specific species and size of trees and this information will be required as part of a landscaping scheme.

6.34 **Impact on protected species.**

Policy CSB1 seeks to ensure that there is a no net loss for biodiversity as a result of new developments and seeks to achieve a net gain. The NPPF supports this stance and at Paragraph 109 calls for developments to minimise the impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains where possible contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline of biodiversity.

6.35 The application is supported by an extended phase 1 habitat survey and biodiversity impact calculator assessment.

Protected species are not a constraint to the development. The habitats on site are not considered to be a constraint to the development, being common and widespread, although the majority of habitat will be lost to development.

The supporting biodiversity impact calculator assessment has concluded that the development, accounting for areas of minor landscape planting, will result in a net loss of 2.11 biodiversity units. Although habitat creation on the wider site has been proposed as a possible way to reduce this net loss and seek compliance with Policy CSB1 of the SOCS, no details of any habitat creation or maintenance has been submitted to support this application.

6.36 In the absence of a habitat creation and long-term management plan, the Council's Ecologist considers that an offsetting payment is a suitable recourse to ensure compliance with Policy CSB1 of the SOCS.

Due to the common and widespread nature of the habitats being lost on site, the cost per unit would be put at the lowest point - £8,000.00 per unit. As such, to secure a no net loss of biodiversity units by creating 2.11 biodiversity units of habitat elsewhere, a minimum offsetting payment of £16,880.00 will be required to be made to a local biodiversity offset provider.

Planning conditions are proposed which seek to ensure that the applicant provides evidence of receipt of payment to an offsetting provider before the development can commence and also that a landscaping scheme is provided for approval. The development will then comply with Policy CSB1.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

7.1 The development proposes a new building in the Green Belt to support a larger project with international significance. The site is in the Green Belt and the proposal would be harmful to openness however there are very special circumstances in this case which outweigh the harm. There will be an impact on the landscape, but the development will be seen in the context of the wider CSC buildings and the newly built and soon to be extended RACE building to the west. There will be a loss of trees and wildlife, but this can be mitigated by the attached conditions. The increase in traffic movements associated with the development will be offset by securing the non-implementation of an existing permission for B1 office use ensuring that there is no increased pressure on the local highway network over and above what has already been accepted. New funding is also being secured toward the shuttle bus service to the site. The development supports the objectives of creating new jobs on the site and supporting the wider local economy.

Subject to the completion of the Section 106 agreement to ensure the mitigation of vehicle movements and the monies towards public transport and travel plan monitoring

and confirmation from the secretary of state that they do not wish to call the application in your officers recommend that the application is approved.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 **That the decision to grant planning permission is delegated to the Head of Planning subject to the completion of a Section 106 agreement and confirmation from the Secretary of State that they do not wish to call the application in.**

**And subject to the following conditions;**

- 1 : Commencement three years - Full Planning Permission**
- 2 : Approved plans**
- 3 : Materials as on plan**
- 4 : Turning Area & Car Parking**
- 5 : Cycle Parking Facilities**
- 6 : Cyclists Shower/Changing Facilities**
- 7 : Construction Traffic Management (details required)**
- 8 : Green Travel Plans**
- 9 : Wildlife Protection (mitigation as approved)**
- 10 : Landscaping scheme**
- 11 : Tree Protection**

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**Author:** Mr. P Bowers  
**E-mail :** [paul.bowers@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:paul.bowers@southandvale.gov.uk)  
**Contact No:** 01235 422600