

<b>APPLICATION NO.</b>	<a href="#">P21/S1388/FUL</a>
<b>APPLICATION TYPE</b>	FULL APPLICATION
<b>REGISTERED</b>	22.3.2021
<b>PARISH</b>	CULHAM
<b>WARD MEMBER(S)</b>	Sam Casey-Rerhaye
<b>APPLICANT</b>	UKAEA
<b>SITE</b>	Culham Science Centre, Clifton Hampden, OX14 3DB
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	Construction of two parking hubs (as amplified by drainage strategy received 1 July 2021, Written Scheme of Investigation and Archaeological Evaluation dated June 2021 and September 2021 and amended by additional drainage information received 9 August 2021 and amplified by Ecological Information submitted on the 13 September 2021)
<b>OFFICER</b>	Paul Bowers

**1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSAL**

1.1 This report sets out your officer’s recommendation that the application should be granted planning permission having regard to the relevant material planning considerations and the development plan.

1.2 The application is referred to Planning Committee as views of the Culham Parish Council differ from your officer’s recommendation of approval.

1.3 Culham Science Centre (CSC) is situated approximately 2.75 miles to the east of Abingdon, 4.5 miles north of Didcot and 5.5 miles south of Oxford.

A plan identifying the site can be found at [Appendix 1](#).

1.4 The CSC now forms a key part of Science Vale and the Oxfordshire 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.

1.5 The application site which is edged red on the plan in [Appendix 1](#) and within the CSC boundary, comprises two areas referred to in the application as the eastern and western sites.

The eastern site extends to some 0.77 hectares and is bounded by a tree belt and vegetation to the south, with a group of mature trees situated to the immediate west of the site that separates the site from a car park by the main entrance of CSC.

The western site extends to some 1.04 hectares and is bounded by a linear tree belt to the west, with security fence beyond and perimeter access track which provides vehicular access to a secondary security gate on the western edge of the CSC. A secondary perimeter fence divides the access track from the adjacent Culham No.1 site to the west.

- 1.6 The application seeks full planning permission to create two new parking hubs in the form of multi-storey car parks.

It is proposed that both car parks will be built in phases.

Phase 1 providing 154 car parking spaces and 8 motorbike spaces and Phase 2 providing 294 additional car parking spaces for each hub.

Once both hubs are complete the total number of spaces will 896.

- 1.7 Phase 1 will consist of surface level parking only, but with the foundations designed and installed allowing the upper decked levels to be constructed at a later date as required for future developments in the CSC campus.

The surface level car parking will provide parking for the STEP (Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production) and UKAEA offices, which is currently subject of a reserved matters application following the granting of an extant outline planning permission (ref: P16/S1753/O).

- 1.8 Phase 2 will comprise the construction of the additional decks (2 decks with 294 spaces in total on each parking hub) taking the total height of the car parks to approximately 9 metres.

- 1.9 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.

## 2.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

- 2.1 **Culham Parish Council** – Object to the development on the following grounds;

- The structures are large and high and will be visible from the road and around the area.
- The structures will be visible from Wittenham Clumps and the AONB.
- The development will generate congestion and greenhouse gases.
- The development will encourage car usage.

**Clifton Hampden Parish Council** (Adjoining parish) – No response received

**Countryside Officer** – Some concerns about the calculations but accepts that this can be offset by an appropriately worded planning condition.

**Drainage** – No objection.

**Forestry Officer** – No objection subject to a landscaping condition.

**Oxfordshire County Council Single Response** –

Highways – No objection subject to conditions.

Drainage – No objection subject to conditions

Archaeologist – No objection based on the additional investigations that been undertaken.

## 3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 None.

4.0 **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

4.1 N/A

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 **Development Plan Policies**

**South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (SOLP) Policies:**

DES1 - Delivering High Quality Development

DES10 - Carbon Reduction

DES2 - Enhancing Local Character

DES3 - Design and Access Statements

DES6 - Residential Amenity

DES7 - Efficient Use of Resources

ENV1 - Landscape and Countryside

ENV3 - Biodiversity

ENV4 - Watercourses

ENV6 – Historic environment

ENV9 – Archaeology and scheduled monuments

ENV12 – Pollution-impact of development on human health, the natural environment and/or local amenity

EP4 - Flood Risk

INF4 - Water Resources

STRAT1 - The Overall Strategy

STRAT8 - Culham Science Centre

TRANS5 - Consideration of Development Proposals

5.2 **Neighbourhood Plan**

The Neighbourhood Plan area was formally designated on 18 September 2020. 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 in due course. At this stage the plan has no weight in the determination of planning applications.

5.3 **Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents**

South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016 (SODG 2016)

Developer Contributions SPD

5.4 **National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance**

5.5 **Other Relevant Legislation**

Human Rights Act 1998

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

Equality Act 2010

In determining this planning application the Council has regard to its equalities obligations including its obligations under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 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.

Development which is not in accordance with an up-to-date development plan should be refused unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In the case of this application South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (SOLP) comprises the development plan and the policies within it must be assessed in relation to the material considerations relevant to this proposal.

6.2 The main planning considerations to consider in relation to this development are as follows;

- **The principle of development.**
- **Impact on the character of the area and the wider landscape.**
- **Impact on highway safety and parking.**
- **Impact on drainage.**
- **Impact on archaeology.**
- **Impact on ecology.**
- **Carbon reduction.**

6.3 **The principle of development.**

Policy STRAT8 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan relates specially and wholly to Culham Science Centre.

It states that proposals for the redevelopment and intensification of the Culham Science Centre will be supported where it does not have an unacceptable visual impact particularly on the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside and the registered parkland associated with Nuneham House.

The policy goes on to say that site will deliver a net increase in employment land, a net gain in biodiversity and confirms that the site is now removed from the Oxford Green Belt.

6.4 The policy demonstrates a clear and strong supportive position for CSC and for its redevelopment and intensification. It is directly relevant to this application which seeks to reorganise the parking provision on the site.

As such I am satisfied that the development is acceptable in principle.

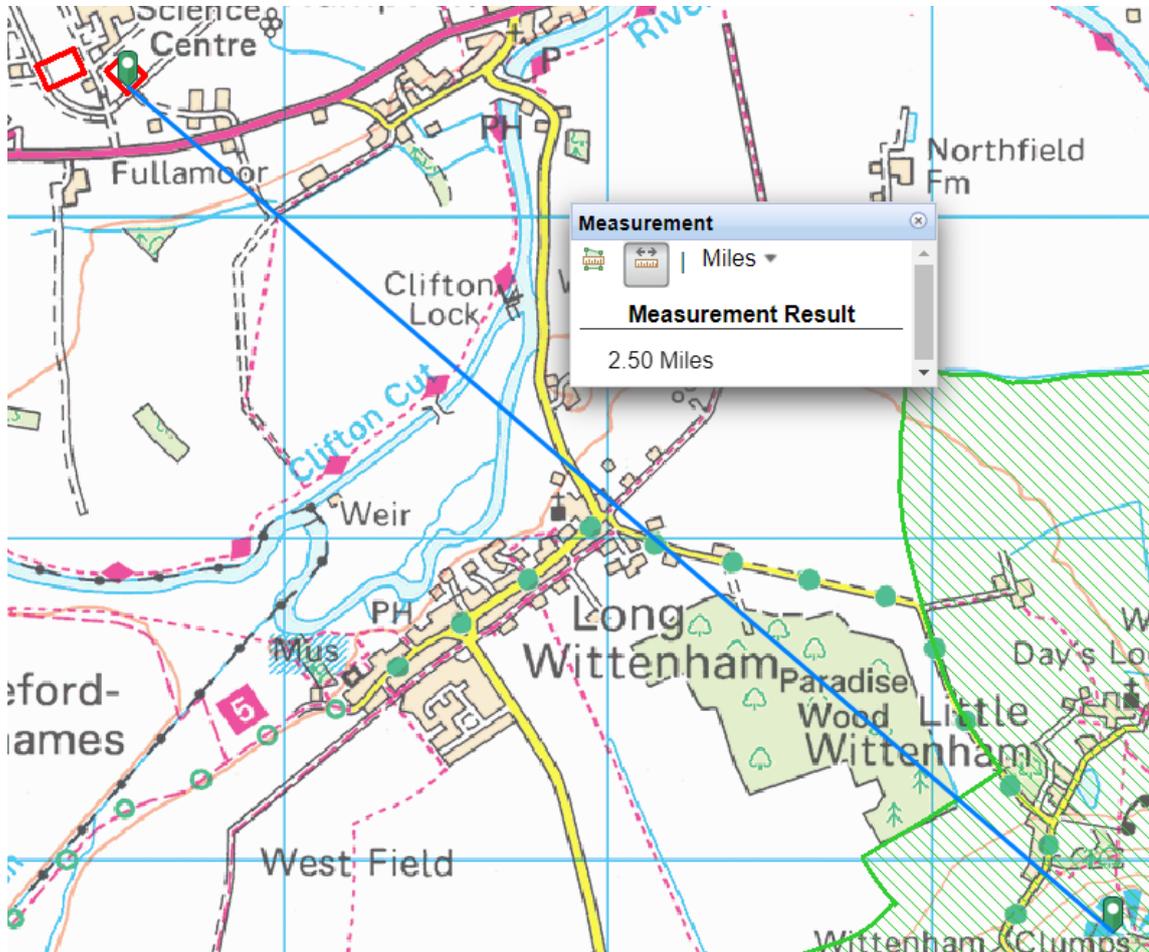
6.5 **Impact on the character of the area and the wider landscape.**

SOLP Policy ENV1 relates to landscape and countryside. The policy seeks to protect South Oxfordshire's landscape, countryside and rural areas from harmful development and states that development will only be permitted where it protects and where possible enhances features that contribute to the nature and quality of South Oxfordshire's landscape with particular emphasis on things like trees, habitats, landscapes, waterscapes, cultural heritage, topographical features, areas of cultural and historic value and important views.

The policy goes on to states that development which supports economic growth in rural areas will be supported provided it conserves and enhances the landscape, countryside and rural areas.

6.6 In considering this issue Policies DES1 and DES2 are also relevant in my view which seeks high quality development and enhancement of local character.

- 6.7 The Culham Parish Council have expressed concern that the position and height of the car park buildings will be prominent and affect views from the AONB and Wittenham Clumps.
- 6.8 The car parks are to be located at the southern end of the CSC site. The plan below shows CSC and the distance between it and Wittenham Clumps to the south east.



- 6.9 The distance between the two is 2.5 miles. The hatched green area is the nearest extent of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The height of the two buildings at their highest point is 9 metres. This is comparable to the height of a typical two storey house. The design and materials used will help to minimise their prominence but also make for a visually interesting functional building.

- 6.10 Whilst Wittenham Clumps is the most elevated position from which views might potentially be possible, the limited height of the structures, their position behind various amounts of natural screening both in short and long distances, together with the wider back drop of significantly larger buildings in the landscape, mitigates the limited visual impact that they will cause.
- 6.11 Within the site and the immediate local context of the entrance to the CSC the proposal will require the removal of 6 trees and part of a group of trees, shown as T1, T2, T3, G4, T41, T42 and T43.

The majority of these trees are either of poor quality or young trees so that their loss could be satisfactorily mitigated (T1, T2, T3, T41, T43). In relation to tree T42, this is a

mature beech tree that has been categorised in accordance with BS 5837 as having high arboricultural quality. The trees in G4 have been categorised as having moderate arboricultural quality. Therefore, significant planting will therefore be required to mitigate the loss of these trees. The proposed planting shows a large amount of planting that is acceptable and will provide satisfactory mitigation for the proposed tree loss. A planning condition is proposed that seeks to protect the trees shown to be retained.

6.12 Returning to Policy ENV1 it is the case that that this proposal supports economic growth by the virtue of the development serving an identified, strategically important site and that the development brings about enhanced planting. I am therefore satisfied that in the context of the wider landscape the impact will be acceptable and accord with policies ENV1, DES1 and DES2.

6.13 **Impact on highway safety and parking.**

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.

Policy TRANS5 of SOLP seeks to ensure that development does not harm highway safety and provides for sufficient parking and turning areas.

6.14 The two car parking hubs proposed are to be delivered in two phases.

Phase 1 will provide surface level parking with Phase 2 adding additional decks at a later date to the build.

Paragraph 5.7 of the Transport Statement (TS) and paragraph 7.7 of the submitted Planning Statement (PS), prepared by Carter Jonas, confirms that 308 car parking spaces are to be provided by Phase 1 of this proposal.

Within both of these documents it is confirmed that the number of car parking spaces proposed are for **permitted facilities** at CSC alongside a re-design / better management of the car parking that currently takes place on site.

6.15 The breakdown provided of the 308 spaces in summary is:

- Permitted STEP / UKAEA office building (P16/S1753/O), which is subject to reserved application P21/S0509/RM, is to be provided with 213 spaces within the parking hubs and mainly use these facilities.
- 33 existing staff car parking spaces are to be relocated into the parking hubs from the Main Gate to CSC.
- Space for approximately 45 on-street parking spaces along Main Street within CSC is to be removed with these car parking spaces being relocated into the proposed parking hubs.
- A further 17 on-street parking spaces along a section of Farm Way within CSC are also to be relocated into the proposed parking hubs.

6.16 It is confirmed in paragraph 7.11 of the PS that Phase 2 will accommodate the future parking requirements (294 spaces) of CSC in line with the emerging Movement

Strategy for the site. This strategy seeks to minimise on-site employee car parking movements by placing these facilities close to CSC's main entrance.

- 6.17 The proposed strategy, alongside the site wide Travel Plan for CSC, is to promote and encourage employees to use alternative travel modes to CSC. Such alternative travel modes include public transport, walking and cycling. In addition, the level of on-site car parking is to be consolidated and reduced where possible.
- 6.18 It is made clear in the application that there will be no additional employees arising for the proposed car parking hubs and there will be no additional commuter traffic movements on the network arising from this development proposal.
- 6.19 On the basis the proposed car parking hubs are located within CSC, are being provided to accommodate and manage existing on-site car parking provision and are not expected to generate any new peak hour traffic movements, the Highway Authority and your officers are satisfied that, in conjunction with conditions relating to a construction traffic management plan, this proposal is acceptable in highway safety and traffic generation / impact terms and accords with Policy TRANS5 of SOLP.

**6.20 Impact on drainage.**

Policy INF4 states that all development proposals must demonstrate that there is or will be adequate water supply, surface water, foul drainage and sewerage treatment capacity to serve the whole development.

- 6.21 The two sites are located in Flood Zone one – the lowest level of classification. The Oxfordshire County Council as lead flood authority requested additional information during the course of the application. This includes investigations, testing and ground investigations.
- 6.22 The County Drainage Engineers have considered this in detail and do not object to the development subject to a detailed planning condition that requires a drainage scheme to be submitted prior to the commencement of development and based on the flood risk and drainage statement the applicants have submitted in support of their application.

In conjunction with the condition the development will comply with Policy INF4 of SOLP.

**6.23 Impact on archaeology.**

Policy ENV9 of SOLP relates specifically to archaeology. It states that development must protect the site and setting of Scheduled Monuments or nationally important designated or undesignated archaeological remains.

Applicants will be expected to undertake an assessment of appropriate detail to determine whether the development site is known to, or is likely to, contain archaeological remains. Proposals must show the development proposals have had regard to any such remains.

Where the assessment indicates archaeological remains on site, and development could disturb or adversely affect archaeological remains and/or their setting, applicants will be expected to:

- i) submit an appropriate archaeological desk-based assessment; or
- ii) undertake a field evaluation (conducted by a suitably qualified archaeological organisation), where necessary.

- 6.24 The site is located in an area of considerable archaeological interest of Prehistoric and Roman settlement identified from cropmarks and geophysical survey. A dense area of cropmarks has been recorded from aerial photographs as part of the National Mapping Programme immediately south of the proposed site and extending into this application area. Although these are undated, they are likely to relate to an area of Prehistoric or Roman settlement based on their form. Other settlement sites have been recorded and plotted as part of this mapping programme in the immediate vicinity of the site.

A recent geophysical survey has identified a further settlement site 400m west of the proposed development. This is also undated but is likely to be Roman in date. An area of probable settlement has also been recorded from cropmarks to the north west of this proposed site. The geophysical survey adjacent to the airfield has demonstrated that this settlement site continues into the north-west corner of the former airfield. A considerable number of other archaeological sites have been recorded in the immediate vicinity of this proposed site.

- 6.25 Oxfordshire County Council's Archaeologist requested additional investigations to those already undertaken and reported in the application as originally submitted. The additional information submitted during the course of the application confirms that all trenches dug within the planning application area were archaeologically sterile. The report summarises that evidence of remodelling of the landscape, likely to be associated with the former use of the site as an airfield, was recorded, which may have resulted in archaeological remains being truncated and destroyed.
- 6.26 The County Archaeologist has confirmed that the evaluation has shown that no significant archaeological remains survive on this site. There are therefore no archaeological constraints to this proposal and consequently I am satisfied that the development accords with Policy ENV9 of SOLP.

6.27 **Impact on ecology.**

Policy ENV3 of SOLP relates to biodiversity. The policy seeks to ensure that development will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity and that development would provide a net gain in biodiversity where possible. The policy also requires applications to be supported by evidence to demonstrate a biodiversity net gain.

- 6.28 The Council's Ecologist has considered the details information that has been submitted in support of the application. They have some concerns about the way in which the biodiversity metric assessment has been undertaken and concludes that the development results in a 0.65 units loss. This would be in conflict with Policy ENV3.
- 6.29 However, Policy ENV3 does allow for development proposals which would result in a net loss of biodiversity where harm cannot be prevented or adequately mitigated, appropriate compensation measures to be sought, as a last resort, through planning conditions to offset the loss by contributing to appropriate biodiversity projects to achieve an overall net gain for biodiversity.
- 6.30 The Council's Ecologist has confirmed that they are happy to accept that approach in this case. Consequently, there is a condition proposed as part of the recommendation that ensures that before development cannot commence until confirmation in the form of a certificate confirming the agreement of an Offsetting Provider to deliver a Biodiversity Offsetting Scheme totalling a minimum of 0.65 biodiversity units has been submitted and approved by the Council.

In addition to ensure full compliance with Policy ENV3 conditions are also proposed that ensure that a Biodiversity Enhancement and Management Plan (BEMP) shall be submitted and approved in writing and in accordance with the details stated in the supporting Biodiversity Impact Assessment submitted with the application and details of external lighting.

**6.31 Carbon reduction.**

Policy DES10 requires that non-residential development to meet BREEAM excellent standard and if the proposal was in excess of 1000 square metres achieve at least a 40% reduction in carbon emissions compared with a code 2013 Building Regulations compliant base and that this reduction is to be secured through renewable energy and other low carbon technologies.

6.32 Policy TRANS5 also requires that development will provide facilities to support the take up of electric and/or low emission vehicles.

6.33 In relation to Policy DES10, the BREEAM Excellent standard is a high bar to achieve in relation to some development types. The Council has to consider each development on its own merits and whilst some buildings can achieve this standard, this has to be applied pragmatically and practically. This proposal is for two car park buildings which will not be insulated or heated buildings or occupied by people. They are open structures which do not require mechanical ventilation.

6.34 It would not be possible to practically achieve the standard required by the policy. Having regard to its functional design, the wider benefits of consolidated parking at the entrance to the Science Centre and weighing in the balance the strong support in the strategic policy for development on this site, I am of the view that, in this instance, there is justification for departing from the specific requirement of the policy in relation to BREEAM.

6.35 Policy TRANS5 does not specify a specific number or formula for the provision of the number electrical charging points in a development. The floor plans of the two car parks clearly indicate which spaces are for vehicle charging and they number 45 and are located at ground floor level.

6.36 There is clear scope to increase the number of points as and when demand dictates it. However, as a minimum for a development of this size and in order to demonstrate compliance with this particular aspect of Policy TRANS 5 a condition is proposed that secures the number of points shown on the plans.

**7.0 CONCLUSION**

7.1 This development provides two car parking hubs at the entrance to the site. It consolidates existing parking and accommodates parking allowed for in consented schemes.

Although 9 metres in height the impact of the buildings in wider views from sensitive receptors will be limited due to their position behind existing trees along the boundary of the secure fenced perimeter of the Science Centre.

The development supports the wider activities and intensification of the Culham Science Centre and, in conjunction with the attached conditions, the proposal accords with the development plan.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 **That Planning Permission is granted subject to the following conditions;**

**Standard conditions -**

**1 : Commencement three years - Full Planning Permission**

**2 : Approved plans**

**Prior to commencement conditions -**

**3: Construction Traffic Management**

**4 : Tree protection**

**5 : Surface water drainage details to be approved.**

**6: Biodiversity enhancement management plan to be approved.**

**7: Certificate confirming the agreement of an offsetting provider**

**Prior to occupation conditions –**

**8: Electrical charging points as per plans**

**9: External lighting scheme**

**Compliance conditions -**

**10: Materials as on plan**

**11: Wildlife protection as approved.**

**Author:** Mr. P Bowers

**E-mail:** [planning@southoxon.gov.uk](mailto:planning@southoxon.gov.uk)

**Contact No:** 01235 422600