

Cabinet Report



Listening Learning Leading

Report of Head of Planning

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To: CABINET

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Culham Science Centre supplementary planning document

Recommendations

Cabinet is asked

- a) to endorse the proposed changes to the Culham Science Centre Supplementary Planning Document as set out in appendix A, and
- b) to adopt the Supplementary Planning Document for Culham Science Centre

Purpose of Report

1. To inform cabinet of the outcome of the consultation on the draft Culham Science Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and, having regard for that consultation, to propose changes to the SPD in accordance with those set out in appendix A
2. To recommend that, subject to the suggested changes, the document be adopted by cabinet as a Supplementary Planning Document to be used in the determination of planning applications

Corporate Objectives

3. Building the local economy: The SPD will play a vital role in supporting a growth in high value jobs at Culham Science Centre. This is closely linked to the objectives and aspirations of Science Vale Oxford and the City Deal.

Background

The purpose of the SPD

4. This Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) is to support policy CSEM3 of the Core Strategy, and 'saved' policies RUR 3 and RUR 5 of the Local Plan 2011.
5. Policy CSEM3 shows the Council's support for the delivery of an additional 1000 jobs at Culham Science Centre. The Council's support is for continued high quality and high value employment at the Science Centre. This recognises the special circumstance of the Green Belt location of this identified site and its contribution to the wider ambitions for growth in Science Vale within the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan and the Oxfordshire City Deal. CSEM3 commits the Council to work in partnership with the UKAEA to produce a masterplan to show how this will be achieved.
6. SPD are part of the overall development plan for an area; they are not policy documents in themselves but are to add detail to adopted policies, especially about how the policy will be delivered.

Preparation of this SPD

7. South Oxfordshire District Council has been a long time in negotiation with the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) over the creation of additional guidance for development at Culham Science Centre. The SPD is a document that outlines the current conditions at Culham Science Centre and identifies where development might be acceptable in the future. The SPD is a framework for planning decisions, and it sets a baseline assessment of landscape, transport, ecological and contamination impact against which proposals can be measured.
8. This SPD was committed to in the Core Strategy adopted in 2012. The Science Centre was identified as a site in the Green Belt where development is acceptable in principle, but additional work was required to understand its impact. The SPD is the result of that further work.
9. The creation of the SPD also provided the opportunity for additional community involvement beyond that undertaken through the formation of the Core Strategy. We took the time to consider the opinions and comments of local people and other relevant stakeholders and have suggested some changes to the document as a result of these. The consultation report on the Culham Science Centre SPD is attached at appendix B.
10. In order to produce the SPD several studies were undertaken to evaluate the current situation of the Science Centre. A landscape study and a traffic survey were commissioned to understand the current impact of the scale of the Science Centre on its surroundings and the amount of traffic that travels to and from it. Recent ecological and contamination surveys that supported planning applications were also used to inform the SPD.
11. The landscape study concluded that the Science Centre, as a whole, does create significant local visual containment restricting views north from the A415 road. The study identified the north-eastern, eastern and southern outlying areas of the site as key areas to keep open as these form the landscape setting of the site. The western part of the site, however, is well screened by a mature line of trees. There are also views of the Science Centre (especially the large J1 building) from the wider landscape

including from the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The SPD incorporates these issues; it aims to reduce the wider impact of development by ultimately redeveloping the J1 building and replacing it with something with as little impact as possible. Elsewhere development will be managed in a way so that it would have no more impact on the openness of the Green Belt than has already occurred. There is also commitment to conserve, and enhance where possible, the setting of the listed park and garden of Nuneham Courtenay.

12. The framework transport assessment, undertaken in September 2013, recorded the number of traffic movements at peak periods and also assessed the sustainable travel plan at the Science Centre. This information will be used to measure the transport impact of the growth in employment as planning applications are considered. The transport work to support the Core Strategy included an analysis of increase in employment at Culham Science Centre, and the associated transport movements, and this concluded that there would be no significant strategic improvements required. Localised improvements and contributions will be sought in connection with applications as appropriate and this is described in the SPD.
13. The Core Strategy and the SPD make clear that any development at the Science Centre, including that at the gateway, will need to comply with the national tests for the value and purpose of the Green Belt. Notwithstanding this the Science Centre has been identified in the Local Plan 2006-2011 and the Core Strategy as a Major Development Site in the Green Belt and this identification includes the gateway area at the front of the site. This identification is supported by the Core Strategy Inspector (para. 116 – 117). Although the policies in the Local Plan and Core Strategy are not entirely consistent with each other, and a clear and coherent vision for the area is absent, the gateway area is included within the site on the Core Strategy policies map and we do not therefore propose to remove it from the SPD.
14. This SPD would provide additional detail and guidance in support of the provisions of Policy CSEM3 of the Core Strategy. A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) was also completed alongside the SPD. The SA assessed environmental issues, economic implications and social impacts of creating and SPD to help guide development at Culham Science Centre.

The South Oxfordshire District Council consultation

15. We undertook a consultation to understand the opinions of local people and other relevant stakeholders. The consultation ran for eight weeks from 19 May to 14 July 2014; it received a total of 31 comments from 22 parties: 7 individuals, 1 group of residents, 2 Parish Councils and 12 statutory organisations.
16. General support was given to employment growth at the Science Centre and there were some other queries about the purpose of the SPD; a full record of comments and officer responses can be seen at appendix B. There were two main concerns from a number of respondents, including Clifton Hampden and Burcot Parish Council, Sutton Courtenay Parish Council and the residents directly opposite the Science Centre, in a group of houses known as Fullamoor. These concerns were:
 - (a) Increased traffic; and,
 - (b) potential development in the gateway area.

Responses to the issues raised and proposed changes to the SPD

17. As mentioned above, transport issues are key to the Core Strategy and these were discussed as part of its examination. The Inspector noted in his report (paras 107 – 109) that Oxfordshire County Council's strategy for the "self-limiting" of traffic on and around the junctions already over capacity, such as that at Clifton Hampden, was sound and might encourage people to 'shift transport modes' away from the car and instead to the train for example.
18. The Inspector also concluded (para 109) that there was no firm evidence that any strategic transport infrastructure was required to facilitate the delivery of policy CSEM3 and that it is sufficient to seek contributions in conjunction with relevant planning applications.
19. The landscape study suggests that there could be some scope for development in the gateway area. The guiding principles in the SPD are to retain and reinforce tree planting wherever possible including at the gateway, in combination with an appropriate and improved entrance. Any development, however, would need to be clearly justified in terms of its massing, scale and design. These factors can be assessed at the time of application. Any applications that were to be made for development at the gateway would be assessed using the landscape assessment as supporting evidence.
20. In response to the local concerns about potential development in the gateway area we propose the following changes:
 - (a) Anything that can be confused for a development proposal should be removed from the SPD; in particular the indicative diagram of development – figure MF8 – should be deleted.
 - (b) Additional references will be made to the fact that aspirations for development at the gateway area will need to comply with policies for development in the Green Belt.
 - (c) To reinforce the fact that factors such design, access and amenity will be considered for any application "all the policies of the development plan" will be cited in the early text of the SPD.
21. Some confusion about the role of different plans was evident from the responses to the consultation. It is proposed that we include an additional paragraph in the SPD to illustrate the dynamic nature of planning and that work will continue with relevant partners to assess transport and identified relevant mitigation measures. This paragraph will reference the Local Economic Partnership and the Strategic Economic plan to link to the specific road proposals in that plan. It is also proposed that we include an additional reference to policies of the wider development plan early on in the SPD.
22. The potential for development outside the front of the current entrance to the Science Centre drew particular objection from Clifton Hampden and Burcot Parish Council and the local residents at Fullamoor. Their concerns were for adverse impacts to landscape, the Green Belt and to the rural nature of the area. Calls have been made to remove this area from the SPD and to include a presumption against its development.

The adoption of the SPD

23. The adoption of planning documents is governed by the Planning and Compulsory purchase Act (2004) and its associated regulations. In order to adopt the document as an SPD, this will need to be agreed at Cabinet and we will need to publish a statement of adoption. This statement will include a brief description of how we consulted and whom, the table of the main issues and responses to them and the date of adoption.

Options

24. The creation of an SPD is committed to in the Core Strategy and the document presented fulfils that commitment. The draft SPD, together with the suggested amendments, represent planning officers' recommendation for an adopted planning document. This has been negotiated with UKAEA and included consultation with the community and other relevant stakeholders over a long period. No options other than adopting the SPD are considered in this report.

Financial Implications

25. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

26. The adoption of supplementary planning documents is governed by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) and its associated regulations (2012) paragraph 14. In order to adopt the document as an SPD, this will need to be agreed at cabinet and we will need to publish a statement of adoption. This statement will include a brief description of how we consulted and whom, the table of the main issues and responses to them and the date of adoption, as outlined in paragraph 35 of the regulations. Paragraph 35 also provides for a challenge period of three months after the adoption of the SPD.

Risks

27. The SPD creates a framework for planning decisions at the Culham Science Centre; this can form the basis for future development at the Centre to support aspirations for Science Vale Oxford and the City Deal. The importance of the Science Centre to South Oxfordshire's economy is recognised through the SPD as is its sensitive location in the Green Belt. Without the SPD these two particularly important issues would not get fully recognised.

Other implications

28. None. The SPD is supported by a Sustainability Appraisal where implications to the environment, society and the economy were assessed. This and the draft document were consulted upon and this included the local community, and a number of relevant stakeholders including the Environment Agency, Natural England and English Heritage.

Conclusion

29. The concerns from the local community can be addressed with the proposed changes to the SPD. There are no justified planning reasons to increase transport

requirements, or to restrict development potential in the gateway area, to a greater extent than is already included in the SPD and proposed amendments.

30. It is important to acknowledge that, although the SPD is to support a policy of the adopted Core Strategy, time is moving on. The Core Strategy is due to be reviewed and eventually replaced by the Local Plan 2031. As part of the emerging plan making process we will again collect and assess a range of data including transport and landscape for the whole district. Should this data show that mitigation is now required in and around Clifton Hampden this will be reflected in the Local Plan 2031.
31. It is recommended that Cabinet agree to the adoption of the Supplementary Planning Document, subject to the proposed changes outlined in appendix B, so it can be used in the determination of planning applications at Culham Science Centre.

Background Papers

Appendix A – Culham Science Centre schedule of significant changes
Appendix B – Consultation report

Due to their size the appendices to the SPD, and the Sustainability Appraisal, are not attached to this report. These may be found on the council's website under planning policy or a copy may be obtained directly from Peter Canavan in planning policy.