



Stansfeld Park planning application ref 16/02618/FUL

(Demolition of redundant former outdoor education centre buildings; construction of a new science education centre and innovation centre with parking, access and landscape enhancement)

Response from *Friends of Stansfeld*

In principle the Friends of Stansfeld supports this application, subject to conditions. As a group our objectives have been to ensure the site continues to provide an education facility, especially for young people, and to protect the woodland as a valuable ecological space. The application by Oxford Trust should achieve the first aim, and goes a long way towards achieving the second at least in the short term. Changes to the Woodland Management Plan are, however, requested.

There are two documents where we have serious criticism: The Transport Assessment (TA) is deficient in many respects and the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) contains statements about views which are simply wrong.

Impact of building

Height of Innovation Centre

The LVIA considers six views. The description of Viewpoint 6 (from Stansfield Close) contains the phrases *'there are very glimpsed views from the road and probably from the rear windows of those houses backing onto the site. These views will be more open in winter ... The views currently include the existing buildings. The proposed buildings will effectively sit on the same footprint as the existing and be of a similar height. So there will be little additional visual impact. it is anticipated that the visual effects on this viewpoint will be Negligible Adverse'*. The statements about Viewpoint 5 (from St Ebbe's Close) make similar points.

We note that the proposed buildings will sit on a similar footprint to the current buildings. But we disagree that there will be little additional visual impact because **the proposed building, nearest the southern boundary, will not be 'of a similar height' to the existing building**. The existing building on the southern side is one-storey high whereas the Innovation Centre is two. The part of the current building that is two-storey is set further back. It is not known how much higher the IC will be than the existing one storey building because the height of the latter has not been provided.

Furthermore, even if one accepts it is valid to compare the IC with the existing two storey building, it is the case that the IC will be much higher. The eaves height of the proposed two storey IC building is 7.13m at the point closest to the southern boundary, and the ridge height is 10.822m, compared with 6.38m for the existing (further back) two storey building.

It is disappointing that no drawings and photo montages have been provided to compare the before and after heights. Without this information it is difficult to make a judgement about how significant the visual effect of the IC will be on neighbouring properties.

We do not think the application should be accepted until those parts of the LVIA which deal with Views 5 and 6 are revised to describe accurately the impact of the IC, including the provision of before and after drawings and photo mock-ups so Planning can make a better informed decision.

The build would have been less obtrusive on near neighbours if the two story IC block had been build where the education block is, and vice versa.

Impact on near neighbours

Planning Statement 7.9 states “*there will be no adverse impacts on the amenities of the occupiers of adjacent properties*” but on the other hand we note DAS 4.3.5 states under ‘cons’ there will be ‘*potential overlooking issues with neighbouring properties*’.

We are aware that some neighbours have expressed concerns about overlooking, late evening noise from decking areas and night time light from IC windows. The IC is potentially a 24x7 operation so neighbours’ concerns are understandable.

We wish to see a planning condition imposed to address these concerns by, for example,

- Specifying the hours of use of the decking areas (The Oxford Trust has indicated that it will do this)
- The use of automatic blinds on upper windows, if necessary
- Review, with residents, decking positioning and screening
- A process to ensure residents’ concerns are taken into account into the future, as the operation develops.

Ecology and woodland matters

We have high hopes that the plans of Oxford Trust will result in a woodland, ponds and meadow area which is ecologically diverse - more so than now. The development will result in the loss of part of the SLINC, mainly because of the building of the car park. That is disappointing. But we accept that the green roof over the education centre goes a small way towards compensation for this loss. More significant, in terms of compensation for the loss of part of the SLINC, will be the promised programme to create a more diverse flora environment (especially in anticipation of the loss of many of the ash trees), appropriate stewardship of the ponds and sensitive overall management. We consider, however, the **Woodland Management Plan is rather vague – particularly in terms of how biodiversity will be increased**. Perhaps this is not surprising given that the Woodland Management Plan uses a template from the Forestry Commission. In our view this is not sufficient.

We note the visual appeal of the oval car park, but we do regret that this is at the expense of a more compact rectangular shape. We query what the impact of the car park and the associated loss of meadowland will have on the aquatic life of ponds 1 and 2 (as numbered in the Great Crested Newt survey document). We would like to be reassured that water run-off from the car park, traffic fumes and noise, the presence of nearby seating, and the change from grassland to car park, will not be injurious to the Great Crested Newt population.

We request the following planning conditions are imposed:

- The Woodland Management Plan should be developed, to show how and when bio-diversity will be improved.

- The Woodland Management Plan should state, to the satisfaction of Oxford City Council's Ecology Officer, the work which will be carried out prior to building occupancy, without which occupancy should not be allowed.
- A report, by a suitably qualified person, should be submitted showing that the proposed car park will not have a detrimental effect on the Great Crested Newt population. Perhaps the Natural England licence provides such assurance (we are not qualified to judge).

Traffic

The Transport Assessment (TA) and Travel Plan (TP) whilst rightly seeking to minimise the traffic impact of this development are significantly deficient in a number of ways. In particular, the Planning Statement 7.7 and TA 5.7 state *'the volume of traffic associated with the proposed development will not have a material impact on the local or wider road network'*. We dispute this statement, as explained below.

Objectives of the plan

The overall objective of the Travel Plan as expressed in para 6.1 is to reduce travel by *single occupancy* vehicles. We would prefer that the overarching objective is to reduce travel by cars and vans, whatever their occupancy. That would imply a reduction in single occupancy, but would also support the objective of reducing the total number of journeys.

Traffic routes

The documents refer in several places to agreed routes to work for drivers (which we understand to be from Old Road, accessed from the Slade or Windmill Road). TA 2.30 says parking will be revoked if agreed routes are not used. TA2.33 says 'measures' will be introduced to discourage visitors from parking beyond controlled parking zones. TA 2.41 says visitors will be directed to egress the site using Old Road and Windmill Road/The Slade. TA 2.41 says 'reports of increased traffic using other minor roads will lead to instructions re-issued to parking pass holders'.

But, in TP 3.3 it is stated that vehicles accessing the site from the Eastern Ring Road will travel through Beaumont Road in Quarry: *'the ring road can be accessed from Beaumont Road. ... thereby providing easy access to all locations outside Oxford'*. Other routes to the site also pass through residential roads, such as Warton Road and Margaret Road. Old Road, from Windmill Road to the junction with Quarry Road is also residential, and for much of this length it is effectively a one way road due to parked cars. Old Road gets blocked during peak hours, and with the parked cars on one side of the road, drivers have to wait. Buses can be held up in Old Road at peak times which leads to bus times being unreliable. It is also noticeable there are times when large vehicles drive along with one wheel on the pavement.

Undoubtedly, residential roads will be affected. The idea of having preferred routes is reasonable at first sight, though not to those living on 'preferred routes'. It is unrealistic to think that drivers will keep to them and **it is unrealistic that residents will be able to monitor this.**

Traffic volumes

TP 6.9 shows a predicted modal split for staff and visitors as follows:

Sole occupancy vehicle	63%
Car/van passenger	3%
Public transport	12%
Cycle	7%
Walk	15%
Total	100%

There is a slight error here. The table omits to count the number of drivers who are carrying passengers. This figure must be less than 3%, however, so we might assume 65% of staff and visitors access the site by motor vehicle.

The Transport Assessment provides an estimate of the number of peak hour (8am – 9am) car movements on Quarry Road. It estimates that there will be an additional 28 movements (in plus out) compared with the time when the site was used by Birmingham Education Authority (estimated in TA3.8 as 11 movements in the peak morning hour). It is misleading to make this comparison because there has been traffic growth in the intervening time. A more accurate and realistic comparison would be with today. The Transport Assessment estimates this as 39 movements in the peak hour (TA 3.12). We note this figure excludes visitors and centre staff, some of whom will arrive during the peak period. As stated in the section above on traffic flows it is difficult to say which routes drivers will take, and thus how much additional traffic will be placed on specific roads. Figure 1 shows our attempt to make an estimate, with 2/3 of the additional traffic coming from the north and 1/3 from the south.

To estimate the impact of an additional 39 vehicle movements along Quarry Road it is necessary to know the level of current traffic movements. To this end we carried out a survey on Wednesday 2 November. Figure 2 shows the number of traffic movements in the peak period of 8.00 to 9.00. This shows that **the proposed development will result in an estimated 10% increase in movements on Quarry Road. This is not 'negligible'.**

In addition to the above, there will be an increase in minibus and coach movements for school drop offs. Although some schools will be local and able to walk, it is planned to attract groups from 400 schools over the county. This will result in number of movements from large vehicles that are not particularly well suited to the road. Even if not dropping off during rush hour, coaches create a significant block in the road. This is not addressed in the Travel Plan.

Parking

We recognise that some parking on site is necessary, and that Oxford Trust wishes to manage demand for parking spaces through a charge and book mechanism. This is welcomed although the amount of space on-site taken up for private vehicles is substantial. We would have preferred less, as we made clear from the onset of discussions with Oxford Trust. But we also recognise that the provision of on-site car parking spaces is a balance. Too few spaces would lead to excessive parking elsewhere.

The assessment of 39 movements (34 in and 5 out) is based on the capacity of the car park (35 spaces for IC personnel). In addition to this number there are those who will travel to the area by car and park either in Quarry or Wood Farm (where there is no CPZ) or at the Park & Ride. How many cars will this be? As stated above, it is estimated that 65% of staff and visitors will come by car. **But nowhere in the planning application papers is there a statement of how many staff will work at the site.** This is a serious omission. We have been informed that about 200 - 250 staff will work at the IC. Plus there will be others working at the site. If we take a figure of 250 this equates to 162 vehicles, excluding visitors. There are 35 Parking spaces available for staff, **so 127 vehicles must park elsewhere.** The Travel Plan states that drivers will be encouraged to use the P&R and discouraged from parking in residential areas (TA 2.33). However, the response to a question at the consultation meeting of 13 October says *'it is an issue the city council has to deal with alongside Highways'*. This is avoidance of a significant issue. The pressure to park in residential streets will be reduced if an **attractive and regular means of moving staff from the P&R is introduced.** The Travel Plan makes scant reference to this.

There are some resident-only parking restrictions in place, but these are not applicable in the evenings or weekends. An assessment of this would have been useful.

Public transport

Information on bus stops and bus services is not correct (TA 4.1 and TP 4.12). For example there is no bus stop on Quarry Road (actually, there is a stop but no bus!). And, as the documents point out, the 900 service from the park and ride to Churchill hospital is under review. It has recently reduced to a 30 minute service – not a very good option for access to the Stansfeld site. Bus service 4 does provide a reasonable means of accessing the site by public transport from the city centre. Bus route 10 also is an option, and stops nearer the centre, but journey times are long. Both services have stops which are some distance from the centre, especially with the relocation of Route 4. TA 4.10 and TP 4.13 concludes there is a 'good' provision of bus service within walking distance of the site. This is very arguable. 'Adequate' might be a more accurate description.

TA 4.12 and TP 4.15 discuss the Thornhill Park & Ride. We are pleased to note that the P&R will be promoted as the preferred solution to parking. We agree that the 900 is not an ideal service and note that, anyway, it is under review. We agree with the statement that Oxford Trust in discussions with bus operators should *'seek any opportunity to improve the service to make the site more accessible'*. One can only conclude from this paragraph that the **current arrangements for accessing the site from the P&R are not satisfactory.** Use of pedal and electric bikes (TA 4.13) is part, but only part, of the solution.

Walking and cycling

TA 4.3 to 4.7 recognises that walking and cycling should be attractive to many who work at the centre. In particular cycling will, or at least should, be a major transport mode although TP 6.9 suggests only 7% will access the site by bike. How might this percentage be increased? Is any information available about journey origins? Can cycle routes be improved?

Access to the site on foot could be improved in two ways. First, a separate route which does not include walking along the access road should be safer. We note Oxford Trust has stated they will consider this. Second, crossing Quarry Road on foot at its junction with Old Road is hazardous.

Initiatives

TP 6.11 presents a five year target for reducing the percentage split of single occupancy vehicles compared with other modes. The target is to reduce the predicted 63:37 split in year one to 58:42 in year five. **This is not at all ambitious.**

We welcome role of travel coordinator (TP 5.2). Would like the coordinator to have two additional tasks 'consider new or improved initiatives to reduce car movements' and 'provide a liaison point with the local community for transport issues'.

The initiatives as described in TP 7 are welcome but nothing is written about:

- Bike schemes to facilitate movement between the site and other employment sites such as the Old Road campus.
- Ways to move staff between Thornhill P&R and the site. The possibility of a minibus was mentioned at the public consultation meeting on 13 October (see notes of meeting).
- Travel to and from OT's city centre site. We note the Planning Statement (4.10) says the Trust will 'facilitate an active management plan to link the two centres together'. An electric bike scheme was mentioned at the public consultation meeting on 13 October (see notes of meeting).
- Ways of reducing the need for staff to bring a car to work because it is needed for day time journeys (eg provide a pool car).

Summary

In summary, the Travel Plan contains several useful initiatives, and clearly shows a commitment to reducing car dependency for travel to work. However the overall sense is that it is written to downplay, even dismiss, the travel impact of the site. We have tried to argue this is wrong. Oxford Trust is not alone, of course, in adding to road congestion. Developments such as the Old Road campus and the hospitals have a much greater impact and the serious cumulative impact is the responsibility of the County Council. **But the Travel Plan is deficient and must be improved.**

Planning conditions

To help address the traffic issues discussed above, several planning conditions should be imposed:

1. Amend the Travel Plan to:
 - Have much more ambitious 5 year targets to reduce single occupancy / car movements.
 - Have a plan for movement of personnel to and from the Thornhill P&R.
 - Include mechanisms to support inter-site movements (Churchill, New Road), such as pool cars and bikes.
 - Have practical mechanisms to stop staff parking in residential streets.
 - Address evening and weekend parking.
2. Oxford Trust should make a payment to Oxfordshire County Council towards an investigation into implementing a CPZ in Quarry. We note there are already funds to do this in Wood Farm.

3. There should be a commitment to work with Oxfordshire County Council to implement measures to alleviate Old Road congestion and improve pedestrian safety across the Quarry Road / Old Road junction.
4. Oxford Trust should make a contribution to an improved bus service. For example No. 4 might stop at the Crown and Thistle in Titup Hall Road.
5. Consider placing an upper limit on the number of personnel working at the site unless modal split targets are achieved.

Figure 1: Main routes (estimated). Cars 0800 – 0900



Figure 2

Traffic movements surveyed 0800 to 0900 Wed 2 November 2016

