

9 October 2020

Dear Mr Neville,

Ref: <https://planningregister.cherwell.gov.uk/Planning/Display/20/02453/F>

Hornton Grounds Quarry Hornton: A fuel depot including ancillary offices, the installation of plant and hardstanding

We are writing to object to the application for a fuel depot in part of the disused former quarry adjoining Hornton Grounds farm. We believe the proposed site is wholly unsuitable for such a development: it would be irreparably harmful to the surrounding agricultural landscape, biodiversity, villages and road network and set a very worrying precedent in this part of the Ironstone Downs.

We note that a similar application from CERTAS – in fact, almost identical – was made for land at nearby Sugarswell Barns last year and assume that its refusal, last October, based on planning criteria, will carry weight with this case too: <https://planningregister.cherwell.gov.uk/Planning/Display/19/01202/F>

Our chief reasons for objecting are as follows:

- **Highways issues**

- Routes to and from the site via Banbury, Stratford and the M40

These narrow and circuitous roads are wholly unsuitable for such heavy traffic and the wear and tear, plus noise, cannot be sustainable from a planning perspective – as well as blighting the homes of local inhabitants, many of who have small cottages opening right onto the pavement and road.

The roads around and between Banbury and Stratford are quiet country roads that also provide access to picturesque villages in the Hornton area of natural beauty; not an area for that volume of HGV fuel tankers. Those roads are not designed for that volume of HGVs and will soon break up, requiring massive investment in future for the road substrate to be completely rebuilt.

We note the applicants suggest access to the M40 via Banbury but if you drive from their suggested site towards Banbury you have to negotiate the village of Wroxton with its very narrow and tight bends and then through the winding route to the traffic lights where they would have to turn right to get to Hennef Way that is already a major source of traffic pollution (data available), to get to the motorway. None of this route is designed for articulated HGV tankers! OCC Highways always seem to just evaluate the entrance/exit from the application and not the cumulative issues such a site would incur to the surrounding road system.

We don't quite understand the maths of the paragraph either. "Only 29 trips per day based on a week of five and a half days". But later it says "... larger articulated tanker trucks bringing fuel to the depot from Monday to Sunday". Isn't Monday to Sunday seven days a week - not five-and-a-half?

- Dangerous section of the A422

This section of road, roughly between the Indian Queen restaurant and Upton House, is a notorious accident black spot. This is partly exacerbated by the 'Ice' risk which is signposted at various points.

- Biker road of choice

Furthermore, the A422 is a popular motorcycle route for weekend 'bikers' and, sadly, not all of them obey sensible speed limits – far from it. The A422 is listed on Best Biking Roads (www.bestbikingroads.com) and rated '4 Star' for its drive characteristics and negligible police

presence. Hence, at weekends especially, they create a regular hazard on this stretch of road at the very points where lumbering tankers would be manoeuvring, day and night.

– Dangerous access junction

The turning from the A422 into this proposed depot site not only sits in this accident black spot section but it also has its own inherent further hazards: the apron of the access driveways (owned by the couple who run Hornton Grounds) currently leads to two sites - Building Stone and the farm. There is no 'Give Way' for the big lorries leaving the Building Stone site, endangering farm shop customers' cars and large farm traffic turning into and out of the farm driveway. Ramblers and dog walkers also use this space, almost every day, as a continuation of the D'Arcy Dalton Way.

– Limits for lorries accessing this entrance

In 2014, Oxfordshire County Council Highways team set limits of just 10 lorries per day entering the shared access to this proposed site from the A422. This was to safeguard villages on the route as well as to avoid congestion on this section of road. The application deems it acceptable to increase the figure for tankers and lorries to 158 per week, and that's not counting other staff vehicles and miscellaneous lorries.

– Pollution and mud

There would surely be a huge increase in pollution from the many diesel HGVs operating on roads and a site in the pristine countryside - and dust and mud produced by all the vehicle movements. This dust and mud would, of course, be deposited on the A422 highway.

We wonder if Warwickshire County Council will be consulted on these Highways issues as the A422 runs across the county boundary and will affect them too in terms of the constant caravan of tanker traffic to and from the proposed depot, traversing roads, notorious bottlenecks and rural residential areas ill-equipped to deal with them, like Kineton, Ettington and Pillerton Priors?

- **Community impact**

The scheme will do nothing to regenerate an under-used site for the benefit of the community and local commerce. Again, the opposite is true in terms of the potential harm and environmental impacts it would have, especially for its immediate neighbours at Hornton Grounds farm (where there is a thriving country retreat B&B business as well as livestock farm, livery yard and farm shop) and those living in nearby villages and homes along the routes to the site. The noise from fuelling tankers, day and night, with their reversing beepers, will be intolerable for these people and undermine their ability to continue their businesses as well as destroying domestic peace and quiet for three homes based on the farm and homes on Quarry road. The sound is also likely to carry across the valley into Hornton, where the valley bowl is known to act like a reverberation chamber for other undue noise. See <https://planningregister.cherwell.gov.uk/Planning/Display/20/02126/CLUE>

- **No advantage socially or economically**

Similarly, there is no convincing evidence of how this scheme would be a significant investment for the area both economically and socially: the tanker drivers will come and go, a few employees will run the place, the land and depot owner will make money and everyone else in the neighbourhood will suffer and have their lifestyles impacted on a daily basis.

- **Landscape blot**

There is no evidence to show how the development would fit into the local character and appearance of the highly valued surrounding landscape which is a patchwork of farm estates and small Conservation Area villages, as well as the neighbouring 'jewel-in-the-Midlands-crown' National Trust property, Upton House, and the Upton Viva estate.

- **Light pollution**

We find it difficult to understand the claim that light pollution will not be a problem because the site is in the base of a former quarry so the stray light will not pollute the present relative dark skies. They plan on setting up five-metre-high floodlights around the site of the distribution terminal which, admittedly, will be below the rim of the old quarry but the stray light will still bounce off the ground, polluting the skies above. They also don't seem to take

into account the headlights from all those HGVs.

- **Where next for this site?**

Although technically a 'brownfield site', this is clearly a totally rural location and our understanding is that the permissions for former mineral extraction required the land to be put back to agricultural use when mining ceased. Instead, through some kind of planning oversights, perhaps, it seems that light industry was introduced and this has morphed into heavier stone-cutting industry and threatens now to turn into heavy industrial use. We feel sure you will agree that it's about time a line were drawn and rules enforced or we are in danger of the adjacent Building Stone cutting yard turning into some lucrative heavy industrial site too when the current occupants' tenure is up in a few years' time.

- **Contradicting the 2040 Local Plan**

The application is contrary to Cherwell District Council July 2020 review of the Local Plan to 2040, which stressed the importance of protecting 'valued landscapes' and 'areas of tranquillity'.

The Cherwell district branch of CPRE, the countryside charity, has publicly welcomed this approach, together with the suggestion that the Council would 'protect those areas which are relatively undisturbed by noise'.

This proposed fuel depot site sits bang in the heart of one of the two areas CDC suggest for protection - the Ironstone Downs. After setting such admirable aspirations, it would surely be highly irregular for the Council to approve this application in contravention of them?

- **Biodiversity and conservation**

There is a very real threat to the biodiversity and geological diversification of this rural location and the immediate rolling landscape around it.

The *Cherwell Corporate Biodiversity Action Plan* sets out how CDC will contribute to conserving wildlife and the natural environment. It has actions and targets under five themes:

- Planning and sustainable development
- Land and buildings management
- Council land and buildings management
- Green space and conservation target areas
- Health and well-being."

The CDC website states the legal requirement: "Some of the most important sites, habitats and species in Cherwell are protected by legislation, others by planning policy." Clear guidance can be found in the 2014 *Biodiversity and Planning in Oxfordshire* document.

The rural landscape around the proposed site is rich in many wild species. It is a wonderful haven and breeding site for some of Britain's most protected birds, including nine birds which have been listed on the RSPB register (of 2011) as 'of high conservation concern' ie. they have undergone more than a 50 per cent decline in UK breeding population or range over the last 25 years.

It should be noted that Balscote Quarry, which is a Banbury Ornithological Society Reserve, is near the proposed site. The reserve is a breeding ground for curlew. The UK's breeding population of curlews is recognised as being of international importance, their IUCN status is 'Near Threatened' and the bird is a UK BAP priority.

Some birds, listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) receive an extra level of protection which means that they cannot be disturbed during the breeding season; those likely to be found on or around the proposed fuel depot site include red kite and barn owl. Moreover, this area of land has been identified formally as home to protected/declining mammal species including badgers, bats, water vole, dormice and brown hares. It is also

populated by badgers, hedgehogs, foxes, fallow and roe deer and muntjac. We also believe there may be greater crested newts in some of the spring-fed ponds and streams.

- **Leakage, drainage and flooding**

Anyone farming or living next to, or near, such a site is sure to be very concerned about the risk of oil spill and leaks into the ground and the effect on drainage and ground water, especially as the site, being a former quarry floor, is already dug down below original ground level. Indeed, we know from walking there that the adjacent farm terrain floods on a regular basis, despite claims by the applicants' agent to the contrary. There is a spring feeding the stream at Hornton Grounds Farm and the current purity of the water has been much prized.

- **Accident or explosion**

Finally, the worst risk – that of a major accident or explosion. Hornton Grounds Farm is 250-350 metres from the site and its access driveway. The farm team tend animals just six metres away from the fuel depot boundary. On a typical weekend, at any one time, at least 20 people might be on the farm as guests, horse riders, customers, staff and inhabitants. Open Farm Sunday sees scores of visitors.

In summary, the proposal to move from Banbury to Hornton Grounds seems to be based on trying to take on an opportunity to use a disused quarry to reduce constraints at their present site. But they appear to operate well from their present site so we do not see the urgent requirement to move - and especially from a site relatively close to the M40 to one in an area of known countryside beauty.

Surely, there are far better sites for this type of facility. Please don't allow this part of rural North Oxfordshire to be ruined for ever – this is the thin end of the wedge.

Thank you for your expert consideration.

Yours sincerely

Mr S & Mrs C Woodcock