

ENVIRONMENT & PLACE INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

From: Economic Growth Service – Cherwell District Council

To: Principal Planning Officer – Major Projects Team (Caroline Ford)

Our Ref: 2021-12

Your Ref: 21/03177/F

Ask for: Steven Newman

Ext: 1860

Date: 03/11/2021

This response raises the key local economic issues only.
The response is provided without prejudice to the consideration of applications for planning permission.

Application No: 21/03177/F
Address / Location: Axis J9 Phase 3, Howes Lane, Bicester.
Proposal: Full planning application for employment development (Use Classes E(g)(iii), B2 and/or B8) and associated parking and servicing, landscaping and associated works.
Location: Axis J9 Phase 3, Howes Lane, Bicester
1.0 Summary 1.1 The proposed development of Phase 3 of Axis J9 business park, as indicated in the submitted documentation, should create facilities that would contribute towards the economic growth aims of the Council. The proposed modern premises would be suitable for a range of business activity to assist the advancement of local employers and inward investors. It would also assist the development of supply chains and the creation of employment opportunities, complementing the evolution of the local economy and increasing resident population. 1.2 From an economic growth point of view, I would therefore support this proposal subject to the further observations listed below.
2.0 Provision of Modern Employment Premises 2.1 The proposed third and final phase of the Axis J9 development would appear to complement the initial phases, and indeed be of particular benefit to small and medium-sized employers. This should allow businesses future options to potentially grow and expand into nearby units, or to reduce size according to circumstance – making effective use of the productive space created by proposed units. 2.2 The Market Report confirms my understanding of the level of recent and on-going demand for commercial premises. Furthermore, whilst the proposed 'Use Classes' afford a broad range of activity based upon recent market experience, I would also expect that other activity within Class E(g) - such and 'research and development' - could reasonably be accommodated within the proposed premises as the local economy continues to evolve over coming decades. 2.3 As with earlier phases, Phase 3 appears to include at least an ancillary level of office accommodation which would contribute towards the quantum of additional 'Grade A' office space in Bicester and is an indication of the variety of employment that could be supported. The steel frame construction method proposed should also allow for modular adaptation to respond to the future needs and demands of occupiers whilst maintaining an attractive built environment. 2.4 Whilst the zero-carbon ambition of the proposal is to be welcomed, I would however hope to see more advanced 'exemplar construction' on this 'exemplar site': If not 'Outstanding' then at least the achievement of BREEAM 'Excellent'. Whilst this would add cost to the initial development, the

commercial occupier market has ever-increasing expectations of quality accommodation which command a premium whilst minimising longer term operational costs.

2.5 I acknowledge that the Sustainability Statement indicates many positive aspects of the proposal. However, as demonstrated elsewhere in Bicester, exemplar eco-buildings command national and international attention which can appeal to key businesses seeking accommodation in tune with the town's ambitions and wider climate concerns.

2.6 Occupiers and/or owners of the premises should be encouraged to maintain and upgrade the buildings over the years to come, minimising the impact of operations. Nevertheless, now is the time to most efficiently and effectively create exemplar premises.

3.0 Local Employment Opportunities

3.1 The proposed development would create significant local job opportunities. Residents of the town and surrounding parishes would be able to gain convenient sources of employment and/or opportunities to start or grow their own enterprises in comfortable, modern facilities.

3.2 The applicant expects a broad range of employment opportunities to be created in two broad phases:

- 1) Around 110 construction jobs over the 12-month build phase
- 2) Between 300-400 FTE jobs (once fully occupied) in perpetuity on the Site

3.3 The proposal also indicates that '3 apprenticeship starts' will occur during the construction phase. Reference is made to the previous commitment to 7 apprenticeship starts for Phase 1 and 2 but it is unclear whether or not this occurred, and if so where the apprentices were recruited from and how lessons learned would be used in Phase 3?

3.4 The proposal to create a 'Training and Employment Plan' is to be welcomed, including consideration of the above points. Resources and support is available, as guided by the Local Enterprise Partnership: <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/skills/our-programmes/community-employment-plans>

3.5 Also, once occupiers are identified by the developer, bespoke support is available through the Council's economic growth team to enable individual businesses to settle into their new premises, to recruit staff, to establish themselves locally and to gain assistance with any operational matter that may be faced.