

# Consultation – Economic Growth Service (Cherwell District Council)

**Application No.:** 22/01144/F

**Applicant's Name:** Tritax Symmetry Oxford North Ltd & Siemens Healthineers.

**Proposal:** Full planning application for the erection of a new high quality combined research, development and production facility comprising of Class B2 floorspace and ancillary office floorspace with associated infrastructure including: formation of signal-controlled vehicular access to the A41 and repositioning of existing bus stops; ancillary workshops; staff gym and canteen; security gate house; a building for use as an energy centre (details of the energy generation reserved for future approval); loading bays; service yard; waste management area; external plant; vehicle parking; landscaping including permanent landscaped mounds; sustainable drainage details; together with the demolition of existing agricultural buildings within the red line boundary; and the realignment of an existing watercourse.

**Location:** OS Parcel 5700 South West of Grange Farm, Street Through Little Chesterton, Chesterton.

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## Summary

- 1) The proposed development of a combined research, development and production facility for magnets used for medical diagnostic scanning systems would represent a significant investment in Cherwell district, with great economic potential to be realised not only locally but also regionally and nationally, with its products also being of international significance.
- 2) Whilst this proposal would ideally be developed adjacent to an existing town, the scale of the proposal means that there are no suitable alternative sites available. The selected site is the most appropriate and any unsustainable elements of the development should be mitigated against.
- 3) Overall, the development would safeguard and create additional jobs/careers, adding considerable value to the local economy and therefore support the Council's economic growth aims – as reflected in its Business Plan Priority to support "An Enterprising economy with strong and vibrant centres".

## Background

- 4) The sizeable development of 54,000 sq.m of floorspace is specifically tailored for Siemens Healthineers AG - an established and significant business in Oxfordshire, operating from its premises in Eynsham - approximately 3 miles from Cherwell district's administrative border. From the existing premises, the development site at junction 9 of the M40 is located approximately 12 miles away.
- 5) The Headquarters facility would be built in 2 phases including:
  - Phase 1
    - A clear production space for the manufacture of a new dry-magnet product;
    - Loading, workshops, welfare, restaurant, staff changing and 3rd party suppliers' offices;
    - Research & development offices;
    - Site facilities (e.g. waste, infrastructure, loading yards, roads, car parking and landscaping).
  - Phase 2
    - Additional production space only.
- 6) The applicants' case is comprehensively presented through statements on socio-economic impact, planning, design & access and other supporting documents. The projected economic benefits are noteworthy:
  - Capital Investment of £80M into the economy;
  - 670 *temporary* construction jobs;
  - The retention of 528 current jobs (90% are already Oxfordshire based – of which 42% live in Cherwell district);
  - Up to 1,200 skilled jobs when fully operational;
  - A net additional £820M to the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the Oxfordshire economy by 2040 (around £60M per annum).
- 7) The timescale aims to be operational by the first quarter of 2024.

## Site Selection and Design

- 8) The scale of the proposal is such that the case is made in the Planning Statement that no alternative and available site exists within the search area, including those allocated through Cherwell's Local Plan. I am unaware of a more suitable site and therefore – to facilitate local economic growth – support the selection in principle of this site.
- 9) To mitigate adverse impact, the incorporation of the social and environmental aims of Siemens Healthineers into this development is key. At such a prominent 'green field' location adjacent to the M40, at the A41 gateway to the 'eco-town' of Bicester, I believe that an exemplar level of energy-efficient building construction should be expected, as should a high standard of architectural design to limit the visual mass of the buildings.
- 10) In citing Local Plan Policy SLE1, it is recognised by the applicant that "(The development) will be designed to a very high-quality standard using sustainable construction and be of an appropriate scale and respect the character of the villages". I would hope that this proposal reaches and exceeds those standards.

## Strategic Location

- 11) This development would be likely to be a significant asset not only to Cherwell's economy but also for inter-relationship with the wider region.
- 12) The Oxford to Cambridge Arc concept and other partnerships have sought to enhance links between universities and business, enable the local knowledge economy to expand through innovative co-operation and spin-out enterprises.
- 13) This site already has efficient access to Oxford with road and rail options being supplemented by sustainable infrastructure improvements - such as those within this proposal that can hopefully be enhanced further.
- 14) The Birmingham-London M40 is also an efficient route to support the operation of the business, its clients and employees.
- 15) The commercial property sector has in recent years confidently invested in modern, flexible units with expectation of attracting logistics occupiers. The reality has also shown that those units and the district are well suited to meet the requirements of advanced engineering companies.
- 16) I would expect that this development, if permitted, would create a clustering effect – encouraging supply chain development and enhancing Bicester's economic profile, serving to attract further high-value investment into the town and surrounding district.

## Skills and Training (Community Employment Plan)

- 17) A significant aspect of this development would be the creation of jobs in two phases:
  - 1) The construction phase (670 *temporary* jobs)
  - 2) The operational phase - when Siemens occupy the premises (up to 12,000 long-term jobs/careers).
- 18) The socio-economic impact assessment identifies opportunities for apprenticeships and job growth within both phases but does not appear to provide a plan for implementation and monitoring outcomes.
- 19) I suggest the applicants develop a Community Employment Plan with support from the economic growth team, OxLEP Skills and other relevant education providers to maximise the opportunities for local skills development and also provide a monitoring framework for outcomes. I have informally discussed the point with Tritax Symmetry and I gather that discussions have begun with local providers.
- 20) The construction phase requires forethought in order to avoid reliance upon distant contractors, to reduce the risk of shortage of staff leading to delays, and to prepare local residents for the opportunity to learn and then use their skills locally.
- 21) The proposal identifies the use of energy technologies and there are opportunities to provide training linked with green/net-zero construction. If an early plan is developed, the development might then not only be prepared to be net-zero but already net-zero with the applicants stated ambitions already being delivered.
- 22) If construction apprenticeship targets are set through a S106 Agreement, it is important that the applicants understand the target prior to procurement so that it feeds into its procurement strategy for a main contractor. The draft Heads of Terms will hopefully reflect this and be considered well ahead of procurement planning.

23) The operational phase could be expected to build upon the good practice already adopted by Siemens, as demonstrated by its connections with schools, universities and elsewhere. An enhanced Community Employment Plan would prepare for the recruitment (and retention) of up to 700 further staff. This could include, for example, how to engage with residents and businesses in Bicester and nearby growth centres and how to develop additional relationships with schools and other education providers.

24) For both phases, the Council's economic growth service, OxLEP Skills and partner agencies could assist.

#### **Cherwell District Council's Business Plan**

25) Of the Council four priorities, the creation of "An enterprising economy with strong and vibrant local centres" is key to this proposal.

26) In considering elements of this priority, the proposed development responds positively to:

- *Support business retention and growth;*
- *Develop skills and generate enterprise;*
- *Secure infrastructure to support growth in the district.*

27) A further element may be indirectly contributed to through its proximity to Bicester for instance - enhancing job opportunities (and local spending power) for residents, development of supply chains within adjacent towns and the stated corporate intent to develop its presence within schools and the local community:

- *Secure investment in our town centres.*

#### **Conclusion**

28) The proposed development would contribute significantly to the local economy, providing a range of knowledge-intensive employment opportunities within a headquarters facility of an established, growing Oxfordshire employer.

29) Without a more suitable site being evident, the proposed location would be likely to serve the needs of both Siemens as an expanding business and the expanding resident population of Cherwell district.

30) The premises should seek to minimise the impact of both energy consumption and development within a rural area. Early on-site investment in technologies and design should be delivered to maximise the potential positive impact this development could have in drawing further science-led, knowledge-based investment into Bicester whilst minimising environmental impact.

31) Community Employment Plans should be prepared and implemented as soon as possible to prepare a 'pipeline' of talent to construct this valuable facility, and to operate within it over many years to come.

**Steven Newman MRTPI MIED**  
**Senior Economic Growth Officer**  
**Cherwell District Council**