

February 13th 2023**By e-mail only:**

Case Officer - Development Management (Major Schemes)
Cherwell District Council
Bodicote House
Bodicote
BANBURY
OX15 1AA

Dear Sirs,

22/03883/FUL - Allocation PR7a (North) - Land East of Bicester Road Gosford**1. Background**

We write with regard to the consultation on the current planning application.

Stagecoach is the major commercial bus operator in Cherwell District. We now provide the vast majority of all services run in the Kidlington area from Oxford, as well as onwards to both Banbury, Bicester, and Woodstock. From 5th March 2023, we will be extending our service from Kidlington to Woodstock operating today as service 7, to Witney. It will be renumbered as S7.

Wider adjustments to services in the immediate area, including along Bicester Road, which runs directly past the western frontage of the site, will see coordinated timetables put in place to increase the effective frequency on the main route on Oxford Road to every 5 minutes in each direction as far as possible.

Stagecoach consistently supported the allocation of this land through the Local Plan Part 1 Partial Review process. We have long recognised the inherent sustainability of this site in transport terms, presenting very wide ranging opportunities to take advantage of walking cycling and public transport to reach a range of local destinations, and, given the sites location on or close to three inter-urban bus routes, also destinations somewhat further afield. At this stage, the key is to ensure that these opportunities are properly leveraged to maximise the contribution of sustainable modes to the mobility needs of residents.

2. Baseline Public Transport position

This is set out at section 2.23-2.27 of the Transport Assessment supporting the application. It accurately reflects the position at this writing. This level of service has been quite long-standing.

However, these services are to change in the near future. Service S5 will operate on a core frequency of every 20 minutes Mon-Sat daytimes; however, a 15-minute peak frequency to and from Oxford will be retained. This reflects permanent changes in demand on the S5 that in fact date back well before COVID, but which have been further aggravated by enduring changes in working patterns and demand for travel to

Oxford following government advice not to use public transport during COVID, which has never been withdrawn.

Service 250 is not operated by Stagecoach but by a contractor to Oxfordshire County Council. This service has recently been re-procured. It is changing substantially from the prevailing position, again to take effect in the short term. The exact situation should be confirmed with officers at Oxfordshire County Council.

However, it should be stressed that a regular service will remain running past the site, linking it both to Oxford city centre and to Bicester.

Naturally, the proximity of Oxford Parkway Station is highly relevant to the sustainability of the site. Work has begun on the next stage of East-West Rail, which will re-open the line between Oxford and Bletchley serving the station, creating entirely new fast link to Milton Keynes and the West Coast Main Line.

3. Existing and proposed bus stops

Stagecoach notes that the applicant has established that the two existing pairs of bus stops on Bicester Road lie somewhat to the north of the site at Kings Arms, Gosford (590 m) and to the south at Bicester Road (East of Sainsburys) (750m). These figures set out in Table 2.2 of the Transport assessment (TA) reflect the fact that the stops are widely separated. This in turn reflects the fact that until 1990 when the Pear Tree to Wendlebury Improvement was opened, the Bicester Road past the site formed part of the national Trunk Road network, and was in effect engineered as a bypass. Housing to the west of Bicester Road completely “turns its back” on the route and there is very limited pedestrian permeability across this urban edge. As such, there was no logic to establishing bus stops between Gosford and the Oxford Road. In fact, the existing stops near Sainsbury’s were instituted only since the downgrade of the road, and reflecting the access arrangements put in place for the Sainsbury’s store.

The locality will change profoundly with the delivery of strategic allocation PR7a east of Bicester Road, including this site. Bicester Road will run through a built-up area. New development on the allocation needs to be able to take advantage of the regular bus service on Bicester Road without needlessly extended walks.

The development needs in any case, to form a new access junction on Bicester Road. As part of works to the public highway to effect this junction.

We note and welcome, therefore, the proposals set out as follows in the TA at paragraph 4.6:

“The main pedestrian and cycle access to the site will be via a 3m wide footpath / cycleway that will be provided to the north of the site access priority junction and along the western boundary of the site. The footpath / cycleway will extend along the western boundary of the site and will provide a connection to new bus stops and a Toucan crossing being provided along Bicester Road. This is outlined in TPA drawing 1704-010.PLO2(B).”

We note the position of the crossing and pedestrian links, which is a short distance to the north of the priority junction. In seeking to minimise the distance between the crossing and site access, this has meant the pair of bus stops are both located to the north. In turn, in line with customary practice (and our recommendation) the stops are offset down flow. The amount of offset is very small, thus on the – albeit rare – occasions that buses are stationary on both sides of the road, of approaching the stops simultaneously, there are some potential hazards, especially for passing traffic.

These stops will also potentially be relevant to residents at the northern end of the adjoining portion of PR7a in Barwood control. This being the case, we would urge that the stops are as closely related to the access junction as it is possible to achieve, while being consistent with safety considerations.

For these reasons, we would recommend as follows:

- The southbound stop is relocated south of the new priority junction with a length of footway to access the boarder This places it some distance downstream of both the crossing and suitably clear of the side arm. The area of hatching associated with the shadow island does potentially create some buffer to avoid conflict between traffic passing the bus.
- The proposed pedestrian crossing is retained as proposed
- The northbound stop could then be sited a little closer to the crossing bringing it nearer to the site access.

Given the scale of the PR7a allocation of which the proposals form a part, and the fact these stops will also serve a slightly wider hinterland we would support shelters being installed in both directions.

4. Conclusion

Following the review of the transport infrastructure and transport effects of the development proposed, the conclusion of the TA states at paragraph 6.15:

“This Transport Statement concludes that the proposed development is located in a highly sustainable location and can be accessed through walking, cycling and public transport services. The proposals will have a minimal impact on the local highway network. As such, it is considered that there are no transport and highways reasons for the refusal of the planning application.”

Stagecoach is happy to offer its formal endorsement of this conclusion. The site is an important part of the supply of new homes to meet the needs of the City of Oxford, including 50% affordable homes of which a significant number will be for social rent. This has particular importance and relevance to all providers of public services in and around the city, given the exceptionally cost and availability of housing accessible by many staff – including supervisory staff - on the open market.

We therefore support the application in principle, and urge that it is progressed to a positive determination as soon as possible.

We trust that the detailed observations and recommendations about the proposed bus stops can be duly and positively considered by the applicant and the County Council as Highways Authority, in the interests of highway safety and in maximising the convenience of access to public transport services.

Yours sincerely



Nick Small

Head of Strategic Development and the Built Environment