



OxLEP Skills consultation response for Apprenticeship and Training Strategy at Symmetry Park (24/00798/DISC)

The plan is comprehensive, outlining activities and relevant organisations for collaboration on apprenticeship and training opportunities. However, some areas lack clarity. A summary of recommendations for improving the plan follows in the summary below.

This plan has been submitted to discharge the requirement for an apprenticeship and training strategy detailing how apprenticeships and training opportunities will be encouraged during the construction phase. The plan has been submitted as an update to a previous strategy which was created with the previous contractor Buckingham, submitted under application 23/01677/DISC.

The strategy compiled by Winvic identifies that it will support apprenticeships on site through direct employment and shared apprenticeship schemes. Wording within the strategy is not clear and we would recommend seeking clarity on the number of apprenticeship starts being created via the development, through direct employment or a shared apprenticeship scheme.

In addition, the strategy could enhance apprenticeship provision by exploring how businesses currently utilise the apprenticeship levy. Employers subject to the levy can allocate funds towards internal apprenticeship programs or pledge up to 50% of their annual levy allowance to smaller local "non-levy paying" companies. Any unused apprenticeship levy funds are returned to the treasury after 24 months, emphasising the importance of directing these funds towards the Oxfordshire economy and communities.

Winvic and Tritax have the opportunity to strategically allocate their unspent levy rather than forfeiting it to the treasury. They can pledge these funds to support apprenticeship growth in Oxfordshire SMEs, charities, and social enterprises, specifying industries or apprenticeships they wish to support (e.g., bricklayers, roofers, groundworkers). Additionally, they can leverage the levy to benefit local businesses, communities, or services associated with their development.

OxLEP Skills has facilitated levy sharing among companies, creating apprenticeship opportunities in critical sectors like Health and Social Care to address skills gaps and labour shortages effectively, such as in Health and Social Care

It is encouraging to see 7 named local schools and colleges which the contractor intends to collaborate with to offer insight and site visits to students and learners. The strategy could be improved by detailing how the applicant intends to offer these opportunities within the building programme year as either individual or collective opportunities and provide a number of visits to be expected during the build programme.

We strongly recommend that the plan ensures engagement with the Oxfordshire Careers Hub as opposed to the South East Midlands Hub which operates across Northamptonshire. This is to ensure that opportunities are reaching the local school and college network where development is taking place.

T-Level placements are also recognised within the plan as option for enhancing training opportunities resulting from the development. Currently there is no Construction T-Level offered within Oxfordshire. However, Abingdon and Witney College and Activate Learning each offer T-Levels which can be applied within business for example, accounting, engineering and business administration. We would encourage speaking with either provider to understand how T-Level placements can be offered during the length of build programme.

We would recommend seeking clarification on the length of work placements being offered or requesting that experiences are at least 5 days meaningful engagement tailored to individuals' interests. We welcome that these experiences are available for students under 18 and recommend that opportunities are offered to local schools and colleges to help them with careers guidance provision. The Winvic Enrichment Programme referenced within the plan is a fabulous example of collaborative working with the supply chain and local colleges to offer a meaningful learning experience and it would be a benefit to the local community to offer this learning experience at the development site. This opportunity could also be offered to employability support programmes for unemployed/under-employed adults - such as SOFEA's 'No Limits' Programme.

The plan includes a comprehensive set of measurements to evidence outcomes. OxLEP Skills has advised the developer on these metrics which reflect current National TOMS (Themes, Outcomes Measurements). We encourage these metrics to help evidence impact from training and employment initiatives.

We welcome the continuity of planning to offer on-site training facility and dedicated space to host site visits etc as part of college training.

The monitoring of on-site spend within a 30-mile radius is also welcomed. It will be helpful to report on this at quarterly meetings, along with other matters to the support group (OxLEP, Cherwell DC, Job Centre, etc), and to also seek any assistance at those meetings to maximise the local benefits of the development.

A summary of our main recommendations for this plan:

- Seek clarity on the number of apprenticeships being created and whether these are via direct employment and/or a shared apprenticeship scheme.
- Request information about current Apprenticeship Levy utilisation and organise a meeting with OxLEP Skills Apprenticeship Advisors.
- Ensure regular meetings are established with Tritax, Winvic, Cherwell District Council's Economic Growth Lead and OxLEP Skills Advisor.
- Request liaison with Oxfordshire Careers Hub for learning opportunities to be offered to Oxfordshire school network.
- Ensure monitoring reports are shared with Cherwell District Council on a quarterly basis.
- Consider how to diversify groups receiving training or employment opportunities as the plan currently focuses on young people in mainstream education. We would recommend the contractor contacts Oxfordshire Skills Hub for support to collaborate with local organisations that offer employment or learning programmes for groups which face barriers to employment and aim to offer at least one work experience placement during the length of build programme.