



**OXFORD TECHNOLOGY PARK, LANGFORD LANE,
KIDLINGTON, OXFORDSHIRE**

**PLANNING STATEMENT & STATEMENT OF
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

ON BEHALF OF:

HILL STREET HOLDINGS & BLOOMBRIDGE

PREPARED BY:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oxford Technology Park (“OTP”) comprises approximately 40,362 sq m gross external area of production, laboratory, storage, office and ancillary space on 8.26 hectares (see Appendix). This will generate between 770 and 1500 jobs, depending on the space requirements of each occupier and the final mix of uses. We believe a job density of 1:30 sq m is a reasonable target for B1(b) and 1:47 sq m for B2 or B1(c).

OTP has been in the policy formulation process for more than a decade. It is now specifically proposed for development as a modification to the Submission Draft Cherwell Local Plan (2014), including a localized amendment to the Green Belt (see Sections 2 and 3 of this Planning Statement). When taken in the context of our very wide-ranging consultations over many years (see Section 5), we are firmly of the view that Oxford Technology Park comprises much needed employment development that is in accordance with national and local planning policy.

Aside from a supportive policy position, three key points have a bearing on the assessment of this planning application:

1. Employment Development for Technology and R&D

OTP specifically addresses the shortfall in B1 employment land around Kidlington and, in doing so, targets the technology and R&D sector. We are satisfied that there is a strong market for such development, bridging the gap between the needs of Stage 1 businesses at Begbroke Science Park and in central Oxford, and Stage 3 businesses moving to the mass production stage (who will target the larger sites available in locations such as Bicester). In a nutshell, **OTP provides the bridge between the role of Oxford, lying at the heart of the ‘Oxfordshire Innovation Engine’, and the dispersal of the benefits of innovation and economic development northwards across the County (ie into Cherwell)**. Moreover, as well as these wider benefits, OTP will also help to regenerate Kidlington by improving the economic potential of the Langford Lane Employment Area, including London Oxford Airport.

2. Green Belt

The proposals for OTP comprise development that, at the time of writing, is in the Green Belt. This Planning Statement sets out the ‘very special circumstances’ that support the proposed development on the assumption that the application will be determined before the adoption of the Cherwell Local Plan. In brief, **the very special circumstances comprise the economic need in the national, regional and local interest, combined with very limited harm, culminating in a defensible, permanent Green Belt boundary**. OTP is surrounded on three sides by development and the proposals go no further south than the current built up area.

So far as the Oxford Green Belt is concerned, it is also worth drawing a distinction between a *localized* and *strategic* review of the Green Belt. The former has been consulted upon since 2006, dating back to the Regional Spatial Strategy, and is in any event an area of policy that is for a local planning authority to consider as part of the review of its local plan (paragraph 83, NPPF). The latter, for the Oxford environs,

requires cross-border co-operation, especially in relation to 'Strategic Gaps'. **OTP does not require a strategic review of the Oxford Green Belt. It is a small scale proposal, with only very localized impacts;** as demonstrated in the Landscape & Visual Appraisal (and Green Belt Review) undertaken by LDA Design (forming part of this application).

3. Acceptable impacts

Overall, the harm caused by OTP is very limited, especially when weighed alongside the substantial benefits. The ecological, landscape, flood relief and transport assessments submitted with this application do not identify any impacts of significance, as confirmed by the Pre-application Report issued on 12 May 2014. The need for an Environmental Impact Assessment has been screened out.

Our intention is to keep this Planning Statement as brief as possible. Given the support expressed through the draft Local Plan (which is at an advanced stage) and the lengthy pre-application process, we do not believe exhaustive detail is necessary. However, for third party stakeholders who have not been involved with the progression of OTP to date, we would draw attention to *Oxford Technology Park: The Compelling Case* published in December 2009 (Part 1) and October 2012 (Part 2). These documents provide a full exposition on the way in which the planning case for OTP has evolved. See: <http://www.bloombridge.com/development.html>

In light of the case put in this Planning Statement, we respectfully request that planning permission is granted within the 13 week statutory period. This will enable us to start on site in 2015.

CONTENTS

	Executive Summary	1
1.	Introduction	4
2.	Planning Policy	7
3.	The Oxford Green Belt & Economic Development ('Very Special Circumstances)	12
4.	Other Planning Considerations	19
5.	Community Involvement	21
6.	Conclusions	23
	Appendix: Site Plan	24

1. INTRODUCTION

1.01 Oxford Technology Park (“OTP”) comprises approximately 40,362 sq m gross external area of office, laboratory, storage and ancillary space on 8.26 hectares. This is more fully described in UMC Architect’s Design & Access Statement that accompanies this planning application. A Site Plan is included in the Appendix to this Planning Statement.

1.02 At this stage, prior to the identification of specific occupiers, we cannot be certain on the precise mix of uses. However, we have assumed predominantly B1(b) and B2/B1(c) uses, with some ancillary B8 and B1(a). This is a distinct ‘technology park’ mix, as opposed to an office-based business park. We believe a job density of 1:30 sq m is a reasonable target for B1(b), 1:47 sq m for B2/B1(c) and 1:18 for B1(a). This will generate between 770 and 1500 jobs, depending on the space requirements of each occupier and the final mix of uses. We would expect to achieve the higher end of this range, say 1250 jobs.

1.03 The site does not comprise agricultural land. The site was once the home of Gosford All Blacks Rugby Club. The pavilion has now been removed, leaving an area of hard standing. The sports pitches have not been used for 15 years.

1.04 As former sports pitches, for more than 40 years, the land has very little ecological or agricultural value. Equally, the land does not contribute significantly towards the openness of the Green Belt (as it is surrounded on three sides by development) and it is too small to serve any purpose as a Strategic Gap or as a valuable feature in the open countryside. There are no views to or from the site that merit protection, as explained by LDA Design.

1.05 The site has an existing, direct access on to Langford Lane, with good visibility splays. Langford Lane joins the dual carriageway part of the A44 at a traffic controlled junction (which has spare capacity). The submission by Peter Brett Associates covers transportation matters.

Vision

1.06 Oxford Technology Park will accommodate high growth, high-tech companies moving from Stage 1 (innovative and business formation) to Stage 2 (‘first growth’). Typical unit sizes will range from 1,000 sq m to 4,000 sq m, possibly substantially larger. The uses will fall predominantly within B1(b) and B2/B1(c) and will comprise production, laboratory, storage, office and ancillary space. Kidlington is ideally placed to accommodate Stage 2 business growth, as it has good access to Oxford and, particularly around Langford Lane, there is an already established employment area and airport that are not constrained by the landscape and historic environs of the city.

1.07 For Cherwell, we would envisage that Bicester, especially with its new Master Plan, will now attract large scale investors and Stage 3 growth (‘mass production’). This will be demanding in terms of land take and operational requirements (large format buildings, 24/7 access, noise, waste storage, security etc). The technology park ‘offer’ is therefore distinct from Bicester. It is also distinct from Oxford’s Northern Gateway, which will focus on B1(a) developed at a reasonably high density, and Begbroke Science Park, which focuses on Stage 1, with small offices and laboratories from 12 sq m to 1500 sq m, together with business support facilities.

1.08 The objective is to make a start on site in 2015 with infrastructure, and possibly a part pre-let and part speculative first phase, to ensure that the technology park is 'open for business' and available to address the lack of suitable, deliverable employment land in North Oxford and Kidlington.

The Proposals

1.09 The description of development for planning purposes is as follows:

Proposed new build technology park (Oxford Technology Park – as referred to subsequently within this document) comprising approximately 40,362 sq m (Gross External Area) of B-use employment based buildings:

- **B1(B1a Offices and B1b Research & Development): Approx. Total - 14,834 sq m**
- **B2 General Industrial (Laboratory) and B8 Storage & Distribution (Storage & Ancillary): Approx. Total - 25,528 sq m**

The Developers

1.10 Hill Street Holdings ("HSH") has developed numerous office, industrial and technology parks around the country, including the former Dairy Crest Site (Langford Lane, Kidlington). HSH specializes in building cost-effective, bespoke buildings for business occupiers, taking full responsibility for construction and fit-out.

1.11 Bloombridge was established in 2009 and specialises in the acquisition, planning and development of mixed use development projects. In their six years together at Arlington Securites (now Goodman), Richard Cutler and Bruce Usher developed a close and well-structured working relationship in their respective roles as Strategy, Acquisitions & Planning Director and Development Director. They worked together on projects such as Oxford Business Park, the Northern Gateway (Peartree), Harwell Science & Innovation Campus and, further a field, Colworth Science Park (Unilever), Uxbridge Business Park (eg Amgen and Bristol Myers Squibb), Hatfield Business Park (eg the Eisai Campus) and Aztec West (Bristol).

1.12 Bloombridge is engaged on projects in East London and Abu Dhabi, and in growth sectors such as motor sport, technology, medicine and high performance engineering (e.g Silverstone and McLaren).

1.13 In addition to the partnership on Oxford Technology Park, HSH and Bloombridge are promoting Bicester Gateway, targeting high growth businesses from the 'Oxfordshire Cluster' and inward investors needing large scale accommodation.

Terms of Reference

1.14 This Planning Statement sets out the case in support of Oxford Technology Park. We have taken an approach that favours brevity over exhaustive detail because much of our case has been discussed over a long period with Cherwell District Council and other key stakeholders, such as Oxfordshire County Council, Kidlington Parish Council, and the likely commercial occupiers demanding the sort of business accommodation that the technology park can provide. Much of the policy arguments, for example, are reviewed in Cherwell's Pre-Application Report issued on 12 May 2014, albeit that the Submission Draft Local Plan has now progressed to modifications that specifically allocate OTP. In short, we do not believe the principle of development is disputed.

1.15 We therefore include analysis in this Planning Statement under the following headings:

- Planning policy
- Development in the Green Belt (ie 'very special circumstances')
- Other material considerations
- Community Involvement

1.16 Our conclusions, in Section 6, draw from the above and confirm that planning permission for Oxford Technology Park ought to be granted.

Further Information

1.17 For further information on Oxford Technology Park, please contact either our Planning Agent (UMC Architects) or the applicants:

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2. PLANNING POLICY

2.01 The pre-application advice received from Cherwell District Council on 12 May 2014 confirms that the proposals for Oxford Technology Park accord with the Submission Local Plan's objectives for economic development and for Kidlington. The advice also sets out some guidance on what this Planning Statement needs to cover by way of the 'very special circumstances' test for development in the Green belt should the application be determined ahead of the completion of the Local Plan and the proposed small scale Green Belt Review proposed as part of the forthcoming Site Allocations Plan (Local Plan Part 2).

2.02 Oxford technology Park does not require a strategic review of the Green Belt, as explained in Section 3 of this Planning Statement and in the landscape advice provided by our colleagues, LDA Design. Langford Lane is not in a Strategic Gap, development would not affect Strategic Views, and there is no need to consider cross-administrative border issues, such as coalescence or the special character and landscape setting of Oxford. The proposals are therefore consistent with the statements at paragraphs B.255, B.256 and B.257 of the Submission Local Plan – and, indeed, Policy ESD14 in respect of assisting the urban regeneration of Kidlington. Section 6 of LDA Design's Landscape & Visual Appraisal summarizes the performance of the proposed development against the five Green Belt functions set out in Section 9 of the NPPF.

2.03 Since May 2014, we consider that the policy position has moved further in favour of granting planning permission for Oxford Technology Park, as evidenced by the fact that Policy Kidlington 1 (Accommodating High Value Employment Needs) now refers specifically to Oxford Technology Park (Modification 127). **The employment and economic need is immediate**, having been established by numerous policy documents since the Oxford Structure Plan Examination in Public in 2004 and the Regional Spatial Strategy in 2009 ("RSS" - now abandoned).¹ We consider that paragraph 22.9 of the RSS marked a change in trajectory by recognising the potential of Kidlington in the context of the proposals for strategically significant growth at Peartree (Oxford's so called 'Northern Gateway'):

"Spatially, economic growth will need to be delivered alongside other housing, social and environmental developments throughout the sub-region. In particular, regard will be had to the following considerations. Within Oxford the overall aim will be to achieve a broad balance between housing and jobs by protecting, as appropriate, existing sites and allocating new land suited to providing for a range of opportunities in accordance with Policy RE3. Options regarding the location, level and form of employment or other development, including the possible use of land at and in the immediate vicinity of the currently safeguarded land at Peartree, will be a matter for

1 An extensive review of the economic evidence base and policy context is provided by *Oxford Technology Park: The Compelling Case (Parts 1 & 2)*, published by Bloombridge in 2009 and 2012. Along with LDA Design's landscape submissions for Oxford Technology Park, these documents form part of the evidence base for the Cherwell Local Plan and have therefore been publicly available for a number of years. A key point is that the synergistic relationship between Oxford, Bicester and Kidlington is now recognized in the Submission Local Plan. Figures 1 of Part 2 illustrates the location of Oxford Technology Park within the urban settlement boundary and Figure 2 illustrates the role of Kidlington in the Central Oxfordshire 'Diamond for Investment & Growth'; which is now more commonly referenced as the 'Knowledge Economy Spine' (as per *The Oxfordshire Innovation Engine*, October 2013). These are important background documents.

local determination. Land should not be released for employment to the north of Oxford that could adversely affect the future economic buoyancy of Bicester, **Kidlington** or Witney..."

2.04 The reference to Kidlington in this paragraph was added by the Secretary of State following the findings of the RSS EIP Panel's Report. The addition is relevant because it recognises the economic potential of Kidlington at the regional level – unusual for a settlement of this size. At the local level, the URS Employment Land Reviews, 2006 & 2012, quantify the extent of the employment land need (of 9.3 to 11.3 hectares of B1) and paragraphs C.191a and B.256 of the Submission Local Plan confirm that it is not anticipated that this need can be accommodated on sites within the built up limits of Kidlington. Hence development in the Green Belt is the only option by which the established employment need for Kidlington can be accommodated. Both paragraphs go on to confirm that:

"... exceptional circumstances are considered to exist to justify a small scale local review of the Green Belt to meet employment needs".

2.05 Given the urgent and pressing need for Oxford Technology Park, and the fact that policy recognizes exceptional circumstances exist for this proposed development in the Green Belt, we do not believe that this Planning Statement needs to provide a detailed policy justification for the proposed development, particularly with regard to the 1996 plan (see below). The development is in accordance with the emerging development plan, as modified in October 2014. This plan has been subject to extensive scrutiny and there have been no realistic or evidence-based objections to Policy ESD 14 (Oxford Green Belt) and Policy Kidlington 1 (Accommodating High Value Employment Needs). The latter specifically provides for Oxford Technology Park. If anything, particularly so far as Oxford City Council is concerned, there is pressure for additional development and a more expansive, strategic review of the Green Belt. The delay that such a strategic review may cause is of serious concern to Hill Street Holdings and Bloombridge and, in that regard, not welcomed.

2.06 In terms of the broader Kidlington context, it is worth noting that Oxford Technology Park and Begbroke Science Park fulfill different functions and are dealt with as discrete entities in the Submission Local Plan:

- The Proposals Map shows two separate areas for a Green Belt Review.
- Paragraph B.256 notes that "a *specific* need has also been identified for the Science Park at Begbroke" [Our emphasis]

2.07 We consider that the Submission Local Plan takes this approach because, in our opinion, these two potential economic assets serve different employment and economic needs and they have different Green Belt characteristics. In particular, the URS Employment Land Review does not deal specifically with University-specific growth – because such growth cannot be assessed or correlated by reference to market signals or past trends. In short, the University has unique needs.

2.08 Both Oxford Technology Park and Begbroke Science Park are essential economic assets for Cherwell, and both have the potential to help deliver the regeneration proposed by the emerging Alan Baxter Master Plan for Kidlington.

Central Oxfordshire (Cherwell) Local Plan 1992

2.09 On other policy matters, the pre-application advice provided a review of the Central Oxfordshire (Cherwell) Local Plan 1992 and its saved policies (1996). Helpfully, the advice also reviewed numerous policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) and the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011; making the point that

“... policies have in effect been superseded by those of the Submission Draft Local Plan (January 2014). This includes strategic policies relating to the Oxford Green Belt (GB1) and landscape protection (EN34).”

2.10 The advice goes on to refer to Policy EN32 and the coalescence of settlements, which is addressed in full in the landscape submission by LDA Design. We do not consider that Policy R7A, dealing with development proposals on playing fields, provides any restriction to development as the application site has not been used as such for well over a decade (and, therefore, is no longer suitable for sport). In any event, with regard to the Modified Local Plan (October 2014), the specific inclusion of Oxford Technology Park in Policy Kidlington 1 makes it plain that the principle of development is fully supported. More than this, Cherwell District Council’s case at the Examination in Public (in June and December 2014) has demonstrated clear, policy-based support for Oxford Technology Park.

Summary

2.11 Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that:

“Local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.”

2.12 We are pleased to confirm that, especially since the publication of *Oxford Technology Park: The Compelling Case (Part 2)* in October 2012, we have had a long and positive pre-application dialogue with officers of Cherwell District Council. We have sought to participate fully in the policy formulation process by submitting representations on the draft Local Plan in 2010, 2012 and 2013, and we have appeared at the Examination in Public in June and December 2014.

2.13 We therefore consider that there are two principal questions that Cherwell District Council needs to assess in determining whether to grant planning permission for Oxford Technology Park:

- Whether the Modified Local Plan is sufficiently advanced to confirm that ‘exceptional circumstances’ exist specifically for Oxford Technology Park?

- Whether there are any other material planning considerations which would weigh against the grant of planning permission in accordance with the Modified Local Plan or on the basis of ‘very special circumstances’?

2.14 On the one hand, we can see the case for Cherwell waiting for the publication of the Inspector’s Report in Spring 2015 before making a decision based on the ‘exceptional circumstances’ that an adopted plan would provide. Against this, however, there is the threat of Judicial Review clearly set out in Oxford City Council’s legal submission to the Examination in Public on 9 December 2014. This would cause a delay of at least two years. A similar delay would be caused if the Inspector concludes in his report that it would be ‘sound’² for the progression of Oxford Technology Park to proceed by way of the forthcoming Site Allocations Plan (Local Plan Part 2) or an early review of the Local Plan.

2.15 We take the view that a further delay (from 2006, when the original employment land need was established) would be wholly unproductive. Whilst, arguably, the Modified Local Plan does not allocate Oxford Technology Park (which is the key question we have put to the Inspector), it confirms that ‘exceptional circumstances’ exist to justify employment development around Langford Lane and the policy specifically mentions Oxford Technology Park. This distinction is fine and, arguably, not relevant in policy terms. For example, it could be argued that it is just the boundaries and extent of the technology park that remain to be determined, and a planning application is a perfectly reasonable basis for achieving this (rather than the Site Allocations Plan). In these terms, Oxford Technology Park is policy compliant, as a ‘strategic site’, and the annotations on the Proposals Map are similar to the generalized allocations and ‘areas of search’ applied to, for example, Regional Investment Sites (see RSS11: West Midlands, now withdrawn, along with most other attempts at strategic planning).

2.16 Given that ‘exceptional circumstances’ and ‘very special circumstances’ essentially comprise the same test (one for policy and the other for the determination of planning applications), Section 3 of this Planning Statement sets out the criteria that underpin the satisfaction of this test, thereby enabling Cherwell to make a decision (1) either on the basis of the adopted Local Plan or (2) on the basis of ‘very special circumstances’. The latter would be consistent with the decision made for Begbroke Science Park where the Secretary of State confirmed in his letter of 27 March 2002 that he “.... is satisfied that the issues raised do not relate to matters of more than local importance” (paragraph 5). This decision of the Secretary of State, together with the fact that granting planning permission for Oxford Technology Park would not cause any harm that has not been considered as part of the plan-making process, provides ample evidence to counteract any concerns regarding prematurity (in advance of the Local Plan being adopted). There is simply no reason to wait any longer – on the contrary, waiting is likely to be harmful to the local economy, at a time when the NPPF provides strong guidance on the need to build a strong, competitive economy (paragraph 18 et seq).

2. Note that ‘soundness’ is not akin to ‘best’ or ‘most sustainable’. We consider that Oxford Technology Park is one of the best employment opportunities in Cherwell and the proposals are highly sustainable (eg it is common ground that there are no suitable, available brownfield sites). Moreover, whilst we have sought greater clarification through our representations in the Local Plan, further clarification is not necessary for Cherwell to conclude that our application for Oxford Technology Park is in accordance with the Local Plan. We would prefer clarity, but, in the context of the urgent need to get the Cherwell Local Plan adopted, the minor outstanding points we have raised with the Inspector are not decisive. They certainly do not warrant any further delay, given the high degree of certainty that the Modified Local Plan already provides.

2.17 In short, we are satisfied that the policy structure does not preclude a planning application, rather than a Site Allocations Plan, being used as the method by which the Green Belt is tested and Oxford Technology Park is confirmed; albeit that the formal review of the Green Belt boundary would have to wait for a review of the Local Plan (Part 1 or 2). In this regard, it is worth noting that Begbroke Science Park, including all of its recent development, remains within the Green Belt pending the local review anticipated by Policy Kidlington 1 (see LDA Design, Figure 2).

2.18 Section 3 of this Planning Statement now sets out the arguments that underpin both the 'exceptional circumstances' and 'very special circumstances' tests, leaving it to Cherwell to choose which decision basis to follow.

3. THE OXFORD GREEN BELT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ('VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES')

3.01 The policy position reviewed in Section 2 of this Planning Statement covers both the policy basis for a Green Belt Review around Langford Lane, Kidlington, and the long-standing need for 9.3 to 11.3 hectares of B1 employment land. Oxford Technology Park is specifically referenced in Policy Kidlington 1 as satisfying the necessary 'exceptional circumstances' test and, in addition, it offers the ability to provide a mix of (technology-based) employment, including B2, B8 and some ancillary uses.

3.02 In the pre-application response from Cherwell (14 May 2014), the Economic Development Officer ("EDO") confirms that the proposals for Oxford Technology Park are in accordance with the adopted Cherwell Economic Development Strategy (2011-16) and they will help achieve the Strategy's goal for this area in "developing a science and technology cluster". The evidence we have reviewed in Section 2 makes it clear that there is no need to delay the delivery of Oxford Technology Park – on the contrary, this will certainly lead to the loss of precious, high quality employment opportunities (of both local/Cherwell and national significance). The pre-application advice of the EDO states:

".... some of the more successful businesses at Begbroke have in recent years felt the need to move to, for example, Oxford Science Park (south of Oxford) in order to find suitable expansion space."

3.03 We are clear from our work on the Advisory Working Group for *The Oxfordshire Innovation Engine* (October 2013) that this 'economic leakage' is just one example. Many other examples were quoted by members of the Advisory Working Group and there were very real concerns that Oxford(shire) is losing its competitiveness with regard to Cambridge (eg Astra Zeneca), other sub-regions, and internationally. As the EDO states, the opportunity proposed by Policy Kidlington 1:

".... would include the emerging strengths in bio-medical, nanotechnology, material development and other such sectors to co-locate to build not only an important cluster for the district but one for the nation and potentially internationally"

3.04 We welcome this endorsement from the EDO and, in doing so, we acknowledge that a request for further detail on 'smart growth', linkages to Begbroke Science Park and precise occupancy arrangements was made as part of the EDO's pre-application advice. In response there is, sadly, no planning mechanism to ensure the delivery of 'smart growth' or linkages with other local initiatives. However, we hope Section 4 of this Planning Statement clearly shows that we have made strenuous efforts to engage with the local technology, science and R&D communities – indeed, few other organisations have this level of experience or track record in delivery. It will remain in our interests to continue these efforts and we will gladly work closely with the EDO. With regard to occupancy arrangements, we believe the way we have structured the description of development adequately ensures that a technology park (rather than a business park or logistics centre) will be delivered. There is, in short, because of the technology park's locational advantages, a very close alignment between market, planning and occupier interests around Langford Lane. There is a very strong need for a well-planned, tightly managed

technology park³ in this area to complement Begbroke Science Park; and, as demonstrated by the history of Langford Lane, it is unlikely that large scale B1(a) or logistics will be attractive to investors or the occupier market. Speculative development along these lines would be far too risky.

3.05 It is therefore reasonable to conclude from the above that the ‘economic need’ part of the ‘exceptional circumstances’ test is undisputed. This is consistent with paragraph 2.7 of PPG2 (now paragraphs 83 to 85 of the NPPF) and, in addition, 22.18 and Policy SP5 of the RSS (now abandoned) that sets out the strategic case for a review of the Oxford Green Belt, providing for “small scale local reviews.... pursued through the local development framework process”. We are now five years on from the adoption of the RSS in 2009. There remains, still, no new employment land available in Kidlington’s established employment area, Langford Lane. The evidence is therefore compelling. This, when combined with the fact that Kidlington is essential to the success of Bicester, provides the main elements of the exceptional circumstances case required to justify the release of Green Belt land, now.

3.06 The consequences of not allocating Oxford Technology Park in the Local Plan are clearly summarised at sub-section 8.2.1.1 of the URS Employment Land Review:

“The opportunity cost to the district of not expanding the supply of office employment land in the south of Cherwell is that the district will potentially lose the positive economic benefits that higher value companies will bring if those companies seeking to locate in Cherwell are forced to look at alternative locations due to the lack of available land or premises. Office growth in the higher value sectors around Kidlington could also produce catalytic effects that could help the Eco-town strategy in Bicester and could thus become a Cherwell District Council aspiration. This strategy could be achieved through a staged approach, whereby the economic benefits gradually radiate out from Kidlington as the high tech cluster in Kidlington establishes itself and companies seek ‘grow on’ space and/or production facilities in Bicester and the surrounding area.”

3.07 The Cherwell Economic Analysis Study (Roger Tym & Partners, August 2012), also part of the Local Plan evidence base, adds to these arguments. Paragraph 2.27 states that “Kidlington is the least self-contained part of the district with nearly 40% of its workers working in Oxford”. Table 2.2 records that just 14.8% of Bicester residents work in Oxford and 3.4% of Banbury residents, thus confirming the locational advantages of Kidlington in meeting Oxford’s needs. So far as Oxford Technology Park is concerned, locating more jobs in Kidlington may help to reduce the 39.3% commuting to Oxford and/or, in the alternative, the local (‘Oxford familiar’) workforce in Kidlington will attract spin out businesses from Oxford, especially once the (reduced) cost of business accommodation is taken into account.

3.08 In terms of specifics, we calculate that Oxford Technology Park will generate between 770 and 1500 jobs, depending on the space requirements of each occupier and the final mix of uses. We believe a job density of 1:30 sq m is a reasonable target for B1(b) and 1:47 sq m for B2/B1(c), based on standard guidelines. Similarly, 1:12 sq m might be applied for the B1(a) and

3 The approach and ‘needs’ are described in Sections 2 and 3 of *The Compelling Case* (Part 2) and the appendices of these documents provide economic commentaries by SQW and Ramidus, together with expressions of interest from a variety of local businesses.

1:70 sq m for the ancillary B8. For simplicity, we have quoted approximately 1,250 as the job yield,

The Very Special Circumstances Test

3.09 It is a trite point but if it is accepted that ‘exceptional circumstances’ exist then the development proposed in this Planning Statement will pass the ‘very special circumstances’ test. There are, however, three nuances that need to be considered to ensure a full assessment of the Green Belt case:

1. **Timing, now, versus prematurity.** As explained above, we see only harm arising from delaying the grant of planning permission. As the pre-application report recognizes, the Site Allocations Plan (Local Plan Part 2) could “potentially be some time off”. This harm, particularly to the prospects of building a strong, competitive economy is clearly contrary to national policy (NPPF, paragraph 18 et seq); a point endorsed by Chris Green (Managing Director of SQW) in giving evidence on behalf of Cherwell at the EIP on 9 December when he made it clear that, in the national interest, the Oxfordshire economy is expected to outperform the national average. It is a long way behind Cambridgeshire, as evidenced by the unsuccessful site search around Oxford by Astra Zeneca. The economic case for Oxford Technology Park is urgent and pressing.
2. **Strategic versus a local Green Belt Review.** We are firmly of the view that Oxford Technology Park entails a local review, which is entirely within the remit of Cherwell District Council. We would also draw a distinction between a ‘local’ very special circumstances’ case (akin to the 2002 decision on Begbroke) and a ‘strategic’ planning application. Because of the localized impacts on the Green Belt it is entirely reasonable for Cherwell to rely on the Green Belt Review undertaken by LDA Design, submitted with this Planning Statement, as a way of expediting planning permission for Oxford Technology Park. The site can subsequently be removed from the Green Belt as part of the Site Allocations Plan or review of the Local Plan. This delivers benefits that outweigh any harm to the Green Belt.

To summarize, Langford Lane is not in a Strategic Gap, there are no Strategic Views (including from the A44 main route into Oxford), and there are no impacts on the historic or landscape setting of Oxford. Moreover, given that Oxford Technology Park is enclosed on three sides by urban development, there are no issues with regard to coalescence or encroachment into the countryside (per paragraph 80 of the NPPF).

3. **This Planning Statement provides a detailed ‘very special circumstances’ case covering the economic issues.** It needs to be read in conjunction with the LDA Design submission. We could provide even greater detail on the economic case than that which follows in this section, but there is common ground, as provided for by the Modified Local Plan, that the economic case for Oxford Technology Park satisfies the necessary exceptional test.

3.10 In addition to these three nuances, there are two further points that need to be considered before a conclusion on the ‘very special circumstances’ test can be reached:

4. **Very limited harm.** Because the test requires a balancing exercise, the benefits (employment and economic development) need to be weighed against the harm to the Green Belt. We are content, as described later in this section and in the LDA Landscape & Visual Appraisal, that the development proposed in this Planning Statement will cause very limited harm to the Green Belt – and, crucially, this harm is localized.
5. **Defensible Green Belt boundary.** Even if development is granted under ‘very special circumstances’ Green Belt boundaries are meant to endure so it is important to be mindful of not setting a precedent for continuing, unconstrained development. As explained in the LDA submission, we consider that taking the technology park to the southern extent of the established development on Langford Lane will provide a clear, defensible boundary

3.11 We conclude that ‘very special circumstances’ exist and that Oxford Technology Park should be granted planning permission for immediate development. For the avoidance of doubt, and in summary, the ‘very special circumstances’ case first put in *The Compelling Case* (Part 2) is repeated here (and slightly updated).

Development in the National Interest

3.12 The development of Oxford Technology Park would be in the national interest. This seems an obvious point given the continuing economic uncertainty arising out of the banking collapse and the contribution that the knowledge economy is expected to make to the future of UK plc, but, leaving aside countless quotes over the last few years on the importance of the economy (from Ministers, industry leaders, economic partnerships, trade unions etc), our proposals are clearly in line with the economic role that the planning system is expected to perform: “contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the **right places and at the right time** to support growth and innovation” (NPPF, paragraph 7, March 2012). Paragraph 20 of the NPPF goes on to state that “local authorities should plan proactively to meet the development needs of business and support an economy fit for the 21st century”. The Employment Land Reviews (2006 and 2012), combined with, say, paragraphs 4.2.7, 5.2.8, 5.2.13 and 5.2.14 of the Over Arup Report (2009) and the Regional Spatial Strategy (paragraph 22.9), could not be clearer on how the lack of employment land in Kidlington jars with the settlement’s “considerable potential for employment development” (paragraph 5.8.4 of the Over Arup Report). Moreover, central government expects Oxfordshire to out perform the national average in order to achieve growth targets for the nation as whole.

3.13 Paragraph 83 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms that “Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation of the Local Plan.” So, the Local Plan is clearly the place where harm to the Green Belt should be weighed against the employment needs and economic benefits of a strategically important proposal like Oxford Technology Park. We are content that Policy Kidlington 1 of the Local Plan provides sufficient policy support to ensure that a decision to grant planning permission for the proposed development would be plan-led, in accordance with the Town & Country Planning Act

(as amended) and paragraph 196 of the NPPE.

3.14 There are two further points. Firstly, we suspect that if ‘very special circumstance’ existed in 2002 for Begbroke Science Park (including more recently for the new access road onto the A44), they also exist now for Oxford Technology Park. Secondly, the unwillingness of the Secretary of State to call-in the 2002 application seems to demonstrate both the national interest point and, moreover, a desire to see Cherwell make Green Belt decisions on small scale local reviews.

3.15 We believe the national economic circumstances are now very well aligned to delivering jobs in Kidlington. There remains uncertainty, and a pervading sense that the structure of the economy is still fundamentally unstable; however, the property market is strong and investor sentiment is positive with regard to development in Kidlington. This willingness to take a risk by commencing an entirely new technology park is not likely to last forever. It would be prudent to seize the opportunity to establish ‘critical mass’ at Oxford Technology Park whilst there is a buoyant Oxfordshire property market and investors are engaged. Growth comes in waves (see: John Montgomery, *Upwave*, 2011) and it is important for economic development strategies to be available to respond at the right point in the market cycle – for Kidlington, this means having a good proportion of the 9.3 to 11.3 hectares of B1 land consented and available for development as the economic cycle turns upwards.

3.16 From the national perspective, we therefore conclude that there is a national interest case; especially given the wider context of the linkages to Bicester explained in Part 1 (pages 3 to 13) and Part 2 (Section 3) of *The Compelling Case* and the regional role of Central Oxfordshire. Oxford Technology Park will assist the delivery of the Bicester Master Plan and the more recent announcement of Bicester Garden Town.

Development in the Regional Interest

3.17 The development of Oxford Technology Park would be in the (sub) regional economic interest. It is consistent with the long pedigree of economic strategies established by the RSS (and for that matter the Regional Economic Strategy) which represent the culmination of many years work and a rigorous analysis of the (substantial) evidence at the RSS examination in public in 2006/7, consistent with the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. This work is now summarised and illustrated, for example, in the ‘knowledge economy spine’ proposed by *The Oxfordshire Innovation Engine* (October 2013): see Figures 3.3, 4.1 and 6.2 of this publication (see: www.sqw.co.uk).

Development in the Interests of the Local Economy

3.18 The development of Oxford Technology Park would be in the local economic interest, from a Cherwell-wide and Southern Cherwell perspective. There are a number of assets that drive the performance of the Cherwell economy, but the district’s relationship to Oxford is certainly the most important; as confirmed by the RSS, RES, the two Employment Land Reviews and the Ove Arup Report. We feel this local interest point is further underscored by the Bicester Master Plan. This is an excellent example of positive planning, but to be successful the initiatives for Bicester need to be carefully linked to Kidlington’s ‘seed growth’ potential – ie together, in a purposeful, linked up way, not as an ‘either/or’ (see page 18 of our Compelling Case submission, December

2009). If Cherwell can attract Stage 1 and Stage 2 growth to Kidlington, larger format growth in Bicester (especially Stage 3 growth) is made more likely and will be achieved earlier in the plan period.

3.19 Since our involvement in the Oxford Technology Park project in 2003, the District Council has only expressed two reservations: to paraphrase (a) that growth in Kidlington should be constrained in order to help Bicester and (b) that only the Structure Plan or RSS could undertake a Green Belt review and failing that a planning application would need to be determined on the basis of ‘very special circumstances’. We believe both of these reservations are now resolved by the independent economic evidence base assembled by the Council and others – and of course by Policy Kidlington 1 in the Modified Local Plan (October 2014). It is plain and, in our opinion, beyond any doubt whatsoever that, for example, the Employment Land Reviews (2006 and 2012) and the Ove Arup Report (2009) lead to the conclusion that there is an urgent economic need, now, that provides the necessary circumstances for the release of Oxford Technology Park from the Green Belt. This conclusion is further endorsed by Cherwell’s highly commendable work on the Bicester Master Plan, which has encouraged us to invest in Bicester Gateway. This, along with the Alan Baxter Master Plan for Kidlington and the overall framework provided by the Cherwell Local Plan, help to ensure that the spatial strategy for Bicester and Kidlington is joined up and synergistic.

3.20 The appendices to *The Compelling Case*, Part 2, provide our own evidence from SQW, Ramidus and Colin Buchanan & Partners in support of this conclusion.

Very Limited Harm

3.21 The Design & Access Statement prepared by UMC Architects and our *Compelling Case* (Part 2) provide a spatial analysis that looks at the place making opportunities offered by Oxford Technology Park, especially in relation to boundaries, adjacencies and the entrance to London Oxford Airport. It is possible to conclude that, because Oxford Technology Park is surrounded on three sides by development (categorized as ‘urban settlement’ – see Figure 1 of Part 2), and because we are not intending to develop further south than the current built up area, there will be **very limited harm to the Green Belt**. Moreover, we feel any **harm is clearly outweighed by the economic benefits**. Our ecological, landscape, flood relief and transport assessments submitted with the planning application for Oxford Technology Park (see Section 4) have not identified any impacts of significance.

Defensible Green Belt Boundary

3.22 Lastly, given that Oxford Technology Park is surrounded on three sides by development, and is not within a Green Belt Strategic Gap, we believe that the proposed small scale local review will produce a defensible, permanent Green Belt boundary that will stand the test of time (as required by paragraph 85 of the NPPF). Further detail is set out in the Design & Access Statement and the landscape submission by LDA Design.

Summary

3.23 Oxford Technology Park is supported by Policy Kidlington 1 of the Modified Local Plan (October 2014). It has been subject to scrutiny at the Examination in Public and, given the long-established need for more B1 employment land in Kidlington (at least since 2006), and the resultant harm to employment and the economy that will arise from further delays (eg opportunity costs), we conclude that our proposals are much needed and plan-led. In terms of the Green Belt, the 'very special circumstances' are provided by the national, (sub) regional and local economic need, as reviewed in this section. This need can be set in the context of very limited harm to the Green Belt (as described by LDA Design) and there is certainty that the southern boundary of the technology is defensible and will endure. There is therefore no reason in policy terms to delay the grant of planning permission.

3.24 To round off the decision making process, Section 4 of this Planning Statement considers 'other material planning considerations' and confirms that none of these would merit the refusal of planning permission.

4. OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.01 We do not consider it necessary to provide exhaustive detail on all of the other possible material planning considerations because all material concerns have been identified and addressed through the pre-application process. Aside from the principle of development within the Green Belt, which is addressed in Sections 2 and 3 of this statement, we therefore concur with the professional assessment of the pre-application Case Officer, and note the following key considerations:

1. Employment & the Economy

This is reviewed in Sections 2 and 3 of this Planning Statement. This provides the key justification for development in the Green Belt.

2. Landscape & Visual Impact (Including a Green Belt Review)

This is fully addressed in LDA Design's Report, December 2014.

3. Transport

This is fully addressed in PBA's Transport Statement, November 2014, which has been agreed by Oxfordshire County Highways.

4.02 In addition, our planning application provides details on:

4. Urban Design

The concept prepared by UMC Architects was subject to pre-application consultation. The Design & Access Statement provides more detail and responds to the comments made by Urban Design Officer.

5. Flood Risk & Drainage

The application is supported by an up to date Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy prepared by Baynham Meikle.

6. Contamination

The engineer's appraisal conducted by Haydn Evans Consulting concludes that the contamination risk of the site is low.

7. Noise & Air Quality

Peter Brett Associates have completed appropriate assessments and have identified no issues that would require planning permission to be refused.

8. Ecology & Arboriculture

A Phase 1 Habitat Assessment has been conducted by Southern Ecology Solutions, November 2014. This assessment also maps the trees and hedgerows currently present on the perimeter of the site. The ecological assessment agrees with Cherwell's Landscape Officer's comments that the overgrown and straggly hedge at the front of the site has little value and could beneficially be replaced by a high quality landscape, as presented by the proposals formulated by LDA Design. The other hedgerows on either side of the site are proposed to be kept and improved as shown on the perimeter plan presented by UCM Architects within the full set of drawings.

4.03 None of the above considerations raise matters that would warrant the refusal of planning permission or which cannot be dealt with by means of planning conditions.

4.04 We conclude that the fundamental issue for this application is whether the economic need for, and benefits of, Oxford Technology Park outweigh the need to protect the Oxford Green Belt. To a very large degree, in our opinion, this issue has been debated within the framework of the emerging Local Plan and this plan has been considered in full at the Examination in Public, which re-opened on 9 December 2014. In this regard, we welcome the supportive tone of the Local Plan and the Pre-Application Report. We note that Modification 127, published over the summer (ie after the Pre-Application Report) now specifically lists Oxford Technology Park in Policy Kidlington 1.

5. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

5.01 We have undertaken very extensive stakeholder engagement over a 10 year period, including appearing at the draft Oxfordshire Structure Plan Examination in Public in 2004 and the draft Regional Spatial Strategy Examination in Public in 2006/7; both of which produced substantial debate on the future of Oxfordshire's economy and Green Belt. The resultant documents provided the foundation of a localized Green Belt review around Kidlington.

5.02 Since 2010, we have been actively involved in various draft stages of the Cherwell Local Plan and, in 2013, we were part of the Advisory Working Group that was consulted on *The Oxfordshire Innovation Engine*, published by SQW in October 2013.

5.03 In short, we have a long track record of being an active stakeholder in the formulation of planning policy for Oxfordshire. With this in mind, this Statement of Community Involvement does not set out every contact or meeting with every stakeholder, but provides more than sufficient detail for Cherwell to be satisfied that we have engaged appropriately (indeed abundantly) with the local community and relevant stakeholders, as set out under the sub-headings below.

Economic Stakeholders

5.04 We have attended Venture-Fest in 2013, 2012 and 2010 and we attended Bio-trinity in 2010 and 2012. We have attended twelve OBN events since December 2010. We have also been actively involved in ISIS Innovation Ltd, the University's technology transfer business. These consultations have provided an excellent insight into the accommodation needs of the technology community.

5.05 We have held meetings with Oxford City Council and the Economic Development Officers at Cherwell and West Oxfordshire. We met the Economy & Skills Team at Oxfordshire County Council on 24 November 2014 (in response to a request made as part of our pre-application submission).

5.06 We have held four meetings with the University of Oxford's Estates Team since 2009 and, in the last 18 months, we have attended three meetings with Professor Sir John Bell's team looking at the innovation needs of Oxford University. We also presented to Paul Inman at Oxford Brookes University in 2013 (who is also a LEP Board Member) and Science Oxford in 2012. Richard Venables, also active on the Oxfordshire LEP, is part of our professional team, providing market and agency advice.

5.07 We have held meetings with James Dillon-Godfray at London Oxford Airport and Roger File of the Blenheim Estate.

5.08 We have presented to Kidlington Vision and received unanimous support for our proposals.

5.09 We have distributed over 100 hard copies of *Oxford Technology Park: The Compelling Case* (Parts 1 and 2) and soft copies have been available to download from the Bloombridge website since 2012.

5.10 In short, we have immersed ourselves in the local economic community. We have received nothing but support, in principle, for Oxford Technology Park.

The Local Community

5.11 In January 2010 we wrote to all Kidlington Parish Councillors and local District Councillors about OTP, canvassing opinion and support. We presented to the Parish Council on 15 September 2011, 24 June 2012 and 4 April 2013 and attended the exhibition at Exeter Hall, Kidlington, on 26 September 2011.

5.12 We also attended the Kidlington Master Plan Workshop at Exeter Hall on 20 September 2013, hosted by Alan Baxter Partnership. This event was attended by a very wide range of local stakeholders and offered an opportunity to engage directly on our plans for Oxford Technology Park.

5.13 In 2013 we specifically canvassed advice from the Parish Council on whether we should set up a pre-application consultation with the local community. We were advised that this would not be necessary for employment development at Langford Lane.

5.14 Following receipt of the Pre-Application Report in May 2014, we wrote to Helen Marshall and Bruce Tremayne at CPRE. and received an email reply on 23 June 2014. The reply expressed concerns in principle with the loss of Green Belt. We were not expecting a letter of support.

Summary

5.15 We have taken an open and proactive approach to community engagement and believe that we have taken all reasonable efforts to explain our proposals for Oxford Technology Park. We will continue to monitor local opinion and we will respond to any matters raised through consultation on our planning application.

6. CONCLUSION

6.01 Given the wealth of support in the Submission Local Plan (as modified) and its associated evidence base, we conclude that:

1. The need for Oxford Technology Park far outweighs the limited harm to the Green Belt and any other harm.
2. The integrity of the Green Belt is maintained by making the southern boundary of Oxford Technology Park the long-term defensible Green Belt boundary, consistent with the southern urban edge of development on Langford Lane.
3. In summary, either
 - a. On the basis of strong, policy-based support, **'Very special circumstances'** exist to support the grant of planning permission in the Green Belt, or
 - b. In the event that the Inspector's Report on the Submission Local Plan is made available in Q1 2015 and (i) supports the allocation of Oxford Technology Park (Policy Kidlington 1, Modification 127) and (ii) supports our evidence (prepared by LDA) confirming that a small scale local review of the Green Belt has been undertaken, and **'exceptional circumstances'** exist to effect this review, then we would request that planning permission is granted based on conformity with the Local Plan.

Given the long-established and objectively assessed need for Oxford Technology Park, as underscored by the 9.3 to 11.3 hectares of B1 employment land proposed for Kidlington in the URS Employment Land Reviews (2006 & 2012), combined with favourable economic circumstances to make a start on site, we request that Cherwell makes a decision, without delay. A further (say two year) delay pending the adoption of the Site Allocations Plan is not supported by the economic evidence or warranted by any other material consideration, including the Green Belt (given paragraph B.256 of the Modified Local Plan confirms that 'exceptional circumstances' exist).

4. Finally, in all of the above, we reiterate the overwhelming consensus in support of economic growth generally, the urgent need for more employment land at Langford Lane (as set out in the URS Employment Land Review, February 2012, page 79), the need to assist the regeneration of Kidlington (as proposed by the emerging Alan Baxter Master Plan commissioned by Cherwell District Council) and the need to help Oxfordshire continue to fulfill its vital, internationally and nationally significant role in innovation, science and technology (eg the *Oxfordshire Innovation Engine*, October 2013).

6.02 We consider that the need for Oxford Technology Park is not simply established it is, in fact, an urgent and pressing need. We would therefore request that planning permission is granted within the statutory 13 week period.

APPENDIX: SITE PLAN



A full size (to scale) version of this plan is included within the Design & Access Statement.