

Overview

It is important to stress that Stratton Audley Parish Council's main concern is that of traffic management, since the development will have a major effect on the Buckingham Road area of Bicester, and will generate a considerable increase in traffic. Congestion at the main roundabout on the A4421 is already considerable and a left only turning coming out of the hotel site will only serve to increase traffic at this pinch point. However, that recognised, we are particularly concerned that the effects on residents living to the North of the proposed development are not being considered and no mitigation measures are being offered. Our concern not only involves vehicle traffic but importantly the increased risks for pedestrians and cyclists, and in this respect we do not feel that the plans go far enough.

Key Issues

1. Stratton Audley Parish Council wishes to make clear that whilst it broadly supports the development of a hotel on the site, it objects to specific access and traffic management plans which are completely Bicester-centric and take no account of the impact such a development will have on the area to the North in the direction of Buckingham
2. Our concern is heightened since we understand these plans have been fine-tuned as a result of discussions with CDC and OCC, and the implication is that this area has been ignored or overlooked. Whilst the proposals heavily emphasise the sustainable credentials, on closer reading they are incomplete, and we would ask Planners to note our objections and concerns and ask for the sustainable measures outlined below to be incorporated into the plan
3. It is Stratton Audley Parish Council's view that the traffic management proposals can be significantly improved with relatively little effort, and in the process better reflect the detail and intent of the green & sustainable measures in the National and Local Planning Guidelines
4. **Our main contention is that whilst we note the proposed provision of a brand-new shared use cycle path running from the proposed hotel in the direction of Bicester, it is disappointing that no similar provision has been made running north of the site in the direction of Buckingham, at the very least up to the Stratton Audley turning – a distance of only 200-300 meters**
5. **The PC thinks this is a significant omission and one that must be made a condition of approval. We consider that the provision of this short length of shared use cycle path from the hotel in the direction of Buckingham along the A4421 road up to the junction with the Bicester Road that leads to Stratton Audley, is an essential additional condition which would be wholly beneficial on a number of levels:**
 - It would substantially remove the risk of cycling and walking along a narrow, busy and dangerous length of the A4421 (one being made busier by this Development)
 - In doing so it opens up the opportunity for greener travel to villages to the north east including Stratton Audley, which is consistent with the objectives espoused in Ss 5.53 & 55, and others
 - It also provides potential shared economic benefit for a broader area than would otherwise be the case
 - In addition it opens up a significant amenity for visitors to the Heritage Hotel and the Heritage site in general, by offering them safe access to many miles of unspoilt lanes in and around the area, via a safe and sustainable route
6. We would also like to make clear that, with or without the additional cycle path, the plans as presented will have a negative effect on Stratton Audley in that they will increase congestion for residents and the many people who use the village as a through route from other villages, causing increased dangers accessing the main road from the Bicester Road junction and significantly increasing the risk for cyclists

and pedestrians attempting to traverse the stretch of the A4421 between the junction and the new hotel entrance

7. Furthermore we would ask planners to note that residents have also questioned why there is not a proposal for a mini roundabout or traffic light system on the A4421 at the entrance to the proposed hotel which would have the added benefit of aiding access to and from the housing estate opposite, via Thompson Drive and be a significant traffic calming measure in its own right
8. A shared use path could also be incorporated into the scheme at this point and would mean that cyclists and pedestrians entering and leaving the hotel would be able to use the new crossing to access the existing cycle/footpath on the west side of the A4421 which runs from Thompson Drive down to the main roundabout in the direction of Bicester
9. The Parish Council supports this view and suggests that by adopting this type of idea would eliminate the need for the proposed Toucan crossing by the main roundabout, which is likely to cause further traffic delays at a point in the road where congestion is already experienced as a result of the busy roundabout
10. It would also mean that the proposed cycle path from the hotel in the direction of Bicester along the airfield side of the A4421 would not be necessary, thus making a cost saving for Bicester Heritage

Below we identify various references from the planning documents which talk about sustainable travel measures and we highlight these in order to draw attention to the fact that sustainable measures are not being fully met in the current plan.

The various documents are populated with many references to the sustainable credentials of the proposals in order to demonstrate that the plans meet local requirements. We have listed many, although not all of these in the paragraphs below, with our response to each.

All comments are intended to ensure that the benefits of the development are maximised, and that negative impacts are eliminated or sufficiently mitigated, and as such we hope that they will find favour.

The PC fully supports the objective of improving public access to the historic environment at **S 5.10** and views it as a valuable local asset. We are however mindful that Bicester Heritage is a commercial enterprise and will seek to maximise its visitor numbers, and as such bears the primary responsibility to mitigate the negative effects of the resultant increased pressures on infrastructure in the local community. We are pleased to note those which are already incorporated and would simply ask that they extend such mitigation to the other local communities which neighbour the proposed development to the North.

S 5.50

The PC does not agree that cycle links being “*in close proximity*” equates to accessibility of the site, especially for cyclists travelling from the Buckingham direction on what is a narrow road, with traffic travelling at average speeds close to the road’s 50mph maximum (as stated in the Mode Survey) and with no specific provision for cyclists. Bus services from these outlying villages are also very limited, meaning that site access is effectively limited to those with access to cars.

Similarly, there is no provision for walking from the Buckingham direction, pedestrians having to use a narrow strip of uneven verge next to a deep ditch on the Caversfield side of the A4421 in very close proximity to traffic.

S 5.53

Acknowledges the above points, however it mentions only the routes to the West of the A4421. It makes no reference to the issues faced by those coming to the site from the Buckingham direction, and details no proposals to mitigate or ameliorate their issues.

S 5.55

Rather compounds the above issues by its referencing of compliance with local policy on sustainable travel, making particularly positive mention of encouraging cycling through the provision of secure parking, and washing and changing facilities. This is of little utility if cyclists dare not cycle to the hotel to use them.

S6.4

The PC also notes the statement in **S 6.4** stating that:

“the local highway can accommodate the additional foot and cycle traffic...”

We again would respectfully point to the provision of a new shared use cycle path being proposed in the direction of Bicester, but the complete absence of such provision from the A4421 in the direction of Buckingham. Only slightly in jest we would point out that the development should acknowledge and actively make provision for the fact that there is life outside Bicester too!

The above themes are mirrored in the Mode Report, with reference being made to sustainable transport at **2.2.3**, citing the **NPPF 2012**. As such, the PC considers that the development should do more to ensure that such sustainable transport is universally available, through the provision of a “bridging” section of mixed use cycle and pedestrian pathway.

S 2.2.5

References Para 35's requirement that, *“where practical, developments must”*, amongst others:

- Give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements...
- Create safe and secure layouts which minimise conflicts between traffic and cyclists or pedestrians...

It is the PC's view that this development does neither for those seeking to travel to and from the Buckingham direction under either of these bullet points. We are also concerned with the use of the words ‘where practical’ as this can be widely interpreted as a let out clause to justify no action on this matters .i.e, ‘a cycle path was consider but thought not to be practical’.

S 2.7.3

References the Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan (**LTP4**) whose provisions include OCC's support for (**Policy 03**) *“... measures and innovation that make more efficient use of transport network capacity by reducing the proportion of single occupancy car journeys and encouraging a greater proportion of journeys to be made on foot, by bicycle, and/or by public transport”*

The PC would suggest there would be an opportunity missed, were such provision not to be extended to those who travel from the Buckingham direction.

S 2.7.5

Cites **Policy 17** whose objectives largely mirror those in the above para.

S 2.7.6

Cites **Policy 34** whose objectives again mirror this more sustainable approach. In particular: *“OCC will require the design and development of new developments to proactively encourage walking and cycling....”*

S 2.8.3

Compellingly, the Report references **LTP4's** provisions for Active & Healthy Travel Planning. It states: *“It is essential that new developments are planned with cycling in mind and with facilities to make cycling both convenient and safe. Designing new developments so that cycling is the most convenient transport methods for the majority of trips...”*

The Plan as currently presented completely fails to do this for those travelling from the Buckingham direction. Indeed, by increasing traffic movements, it appears to directly militate against the achievement of this objective.

Table 3.1 should be noted. It readily illustrates that accidents involving Sensitive Users comprise 28% of the recent total, which is disproportionate to their participation as Road Users. The fact that these statistics are classed as “low” takes no account of the well-recognised tendency for vulnerable users to elect not to expose themselves to risks presented by busy and congested areas. It is therefore doubly disappointing that no mitigation is proposed for A4421 users coming from the Buckingham direction.

S 3.4.13 asserts that:

“...no requirement for any specific road safety issues to be addressed as a part of the development process.”

The PC, for the reasons stated, suggests that this is too narrow a view. The Report's partial view is echoed at **S 7.1.4**.

S 3.5.3

It should be noted that the shared use provision terminates at Cherwood House Care Home. The proposal as put forward here by the PC is for only a short length of new shared use pathway, terminating at the junction with the Bicester Road leading to Stratton Audley.

S 3.5.28

Concludes by stating that:

“The site is accessible by sustainable modes of travel...Pedestrian and cycle links surround the site [PC’s underlining] and provide good connections with neighbouring residential areas and links to Bicester town centre.”

Stratton Audley PC would respectfully point out that such links *do not* surround the site, since the main arterial route to the site from the Buckingham direction is completely without such provision. Again, we would respectfully point out that a mutually beneficial solution is readily available as described earlier.

S 7.1.5

The PC also respectfully disagrees with the assertion that the site is adequately accessible by sustainable modes of travel. This site is not accessible from the Buckingham direction, and the development, unless it mitigates its impact in the way suggested, will make such access as exists (via a narrow verge and busy A road for pedestrians and cyclists respectively) significantly worse, to the detriment of both local residents, and the development itself.

Summary

In summary, the PC reiterates that it is not opposed to the scheme, and recognises its potential to have a positive impact on the overall economic wellbeing of the area. However the Plan as submitted takes no account of, nor makes any provision for those living outside Bicester to the North in terms of the many planning provisions which focus on sustainable travel. Indeed, by increasing car journeys along the A4421, it will exacerbate the separation of the villages from the new development and Bicester itself. Stratton Audley in many ways is not the end of the road but a gateway to the wider country side beyond and as such is an important conduit for traffic to and from those areas.

As identified earlier, part of the solution is a simple one, which is that of the creation of a short section of shared use pathway for cyclists and pedestrians along the A4421 to the turn-off of the Bicester Road leading to Stratton Audley. Whilst the Parish Council claims no particular planning expertise, it is clear that the pathway could run along the edge of the airfield behind the bushes and trees that front onto the main road, without any major disruption to natural habitats.

As stated previously, this would have benefits for the Bicester Heritage Development and its clients as well as the local community, and we urge that such provision is added to the Plan in accordance with the many planning guidelines issued by OCC, Cherwell District Council, and National Government.

We would also ask planners to take another look at the entry road layout and the idea of a mini roundabout or traffic lights close to the hotel entrance on the A4421, which would appear a more substantial and beneficial solution to the problems of getting traffic in and out of the development. In particular, it would avoid routing all motorised traffic leaving the hotel to the already overcapacity roundabout feeding Skimmingdish Lane, and others.

We believe the proposed amendments as stated above, will enhance the overall plan and remove the main concerns and objections that we as a Parish Council have identified.

At this stage the Parish Council would also request a formal commitment from Bicester Heritage to detailed discussions and information disclosure about other collateral issues which have the potential for significant impact on Stratton Audley as a neighbouring Parish.

Items for discussion include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Clarification is sought as to the plans for entry/exit points for service and supply vehicles to the rear of the site. In particular the Parish Council would wish for an assurance that there are no plans to open up the disused entrance at the top of the Bicester Road near the junction with the A4421 as this would meet with considerable resistance
- (2) The Parish Council has been asked about the size of the hotel in terms of rooms and what occupancy levels are to be expected?
- (3) Assuming the occupancy levels are high what additional plans are in the pipe line to ensure the development is attractive in terms of facilities? For example some hotels have golf courses attached.
- (4) To what extent will the newly acquired Quarry site form part of the leisure proposition for the hotel going forward?
- (5) The proposal includes a conference facility and depending on how often events are held, this will have a further impact for traffic congestion and traffic management?
- (6) Does the hotel have any plans for it to be a collecting centre for Silverstone traffic - running a shuttle service to and from the track particularly on Grand Prix weekend and practice days? What will be the effect of these activities on the local traffic? Is the development planning the installation of a helipad. If so have the effects of noise on neighbouring communities been considered.
- (7) How will the development impact existing arrangements with Bicester Village for parking and shuttle services?
- (8) The Parish Council would also welcome a sight of the development Masterplan to understand proposals for the Stratton Audley side of the airfield.