

Cllr Ian Corkin
By email

September 15th 2020

Dear Ian

Heyford Park masterplan application; traffic mitigation

Many thanks for keeping parishes in the loop regarding the traffic implications of the Heyford Park masterplan application, via your email to parish clerks dated 9th September.

You are of course aware of the general unhappiness of all the affected parishes at the increases in traffic volumes that are predicted by the consultants' modelling. I note that you say you are expecting to see more information about the modelling, but no doubt you are also aware that many have questioned the predictions and do not place much trust in the numbers as a basis for action. Your officers at OCC Highways now appear to have agreed with the applicants on the package of measures put forward by the applicants, although I have great difficulty finding any analysis by those officers that could be regarded as offering any sort of challenge to the thinking of the applicants, at any stage in this long-winded process. If you can find such a document, I would be very pleased to receive it.

So the main reason for this email is to put to you the following argument:

It is clear that the proposed development will generate increased traffic through many of the local villages. This was always going to be case, and we all knew that unless the development were stopped, that traffic mitigation would be the only "solution" (or perhaps "outcome" would be the better word). However, I trust you would agree that there is not much point in having mitigation measures that are ineffective. The current package of proposals, however, seems to deliver just that. As a result of our unsuccessful attempts in 2019 to proceed with a pilot project in Upper Heyford village, we now know that £50k will deliver very little per village. It isn't enough to even build one chicane, let alone deliver the ambitious packages that most of the villages have in mind.

On top of this, there seems to be a determination to proceed with the proposed bus gate at Middleton Stoney. This is apparently intended to address the clearly identified problem of congestion at the B430/ B4030 junction, by relieving queues of traffic on one of the four arms of the staggered crossing (which, incidentally, although no doubt a nuisance only really occur at peak times). It is clear, however, that all the traffic thus removed will simply be added back to the other arms, as this junction is unavoidable for most traffic. The proposal therefore does not have the support of Middleton Stoney Parish Council, which extends its opposition to the application on other grounds too. The bus gate proposals have therefore failed to gain acceptance by the community which was supposed to most benefit from it. What is the point of that? To make matters worse, the bus gate is clearly predicted to even further increase volumes passing through other villages, with traffic seeking to avoid the bus gate.

It seems that the promoters, and would-be approvers, of the scheme have lost sight of the point of the mitigation measures. If they completely fail to win the support of the communities that are affected, something has gone seriously wrong with the process. I don't think anyone wants to see the masterplan rejected, but our democratic representatives have to step up and say that the traffic aspects of the proposals simply do not work. They are not, as you suggest in your email, the art of the possible, because they will not produce the results that are intended. It has to be possible for someone to come up with further options that have either not been properly explored, or were set aside earlier. It would be better to omit or delay approval of these aspects of the scheme than to let them proceed in the full knowledge that they will fail. There is also a failure to include wider measures of mitigation such as a safe cycle route to Bicester from Heyford Park.

All of this shows the severe limitations of our planning system, whereby OCC Highways can do nothing more than react to proposals from a developer's consultants, while CDC - with the responsibility to approve or not - can do nothing other than defer to OCC on this matter. So we end up with a flawed set of traffic proposals that will not work, just because it is nobody's job to produce a better answer.

In the circumstances, MCNP Forum proposes, on behalf of all its member parishes, that OCC be requested to commission an independent report on options for traffic mitigation throughout the MCNP area and beyond, a process in which we ask that MCNP parishes should be engaged.

We ask that CDC Planning Committee defer consideration of the traffic mitigation proposals associated with this application, including the proposed S.106 agreement, until such an independent report has been received and properly considered.

We have seen the applicants' proposals and found them wanting. A flawed scheme should not be approved by our elected representatives.

Regards
Martin

Martin Lipson
MCNP Forum Chair

NB This letter has been approved by the majority of MCNP Forum representatives from its 11 parish members.

Copies to: Cllr Arash Fatemian, OCC; Cllr. James Macnamara, CDC; Cllr. Mike Kerford-Byrnes, CDC; Cllr. Hugo Brown, CDC, Cllr. Bryn Williams, CDC, Cllr. Barry Wood; Andrew Lewis, CDC Planning.