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20<sup>th</sup> April 2015

## Planning Application P15/SO433/FUL – Orchard Centre

Dear Sir,

Harwell Campus Bicycle Users Group (HarBUG) would like to object to the planning application for the Orchard Centre extension in its present form. Whilst, in principle, the development is to be welcomed, we don't believe the current plans support sustainable travel in Didcot and particular, cycling. In summary:

- The plans will result in the closure of the High Street link for buses and cyclists. This does not remove the desire line of cyclists to link from Hitchcock Way to the Broadway. Closing this link will not be in the long term benefit for Didcot. It will sever a cross town cycle route and curtail plans for a town cycling network.
- The planned cycle facilities are very unambitious and represent the bare minimum requirements. The number of cycle parking spaces proposed are not even the minimum required by the South Oxfordshire Local Plan. The plans will do little to encourage people to cycle to the Orchard Centre.
- We would ascertain that the plans do not meet the criteria of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) when it states that "*the transport system needs to be balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes, giving people a real choice about how they travel*".

### The Closure of the High Street Link In-between Hitchcock Way and Broadway

This link is an important North-South route across Didcot. This will become even more important as the Ladygrove North East is developed, with a need for more cross town journeys. Closing the link does not remove the desire line for this route and may result in cyclists still using the shortest, safest, most convenient journey i.e. through the Orchard Centre. This may be seen, by observers, as anti-social behaviour on the part of cyclists, but it is the poor design of the development which will be to blame.

HarBUG raised these points at the Didcot Community Forum on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014 and sent emails (attached) to G.L.Hearn and the district council. It is stated in section 1.6 of the Orchard Centre Transport Assessment, Volume 1, that '*comments received have been considered in the preparation of the proposals*' but no change has been made to the original outline plans.

In section 8.8 of the Transport Assessment Vol. 1, you have outlined three alternative options to the High Street Link:



1. Shared surface bus route / Station Road. We welcome the re-opening of Station Road for cyclists but this should be 'as well as' the High Street Link, not as an alternative.
2. Via the Jubilee Way roundabout. This is a very poor suggestion, the Broadway is very busy and unlikely to be used by cyclists. This certainly will not encourage anybody to cycle. In reality cyclists will go through the Orchard Centre, as previously described.
3. Via the southern and main Orchard Centre car parks. Car parks are amongst the most dangerous places to cycle, with cars reversing in and out of spaces usually with limited visibility. Dismounting your cycle to walk through is not an acceptable alternative. We are surprised that this has been put forward as a proposal.

HarBUG wants to see the High Street Link retained for cyclists to have a North-South route through Didcot connecting the Ladygrove and Didcot North East with St. Birinus School and South Didcot.

### Cycle Facilities

We disagree with the number of cycle parking places being proposed, detailed in section 3.16 to 3.19. The conclusion that because current provision is under-utilised (on one site visit) that the development can 'get away' with less parking spaces. This is both flawed and short sighted. We would like to highlight the example of Didcot Parkway, where cycle parking capacity was tripled, with the new forecourt, and is already full most mornings.

The provision of good, covered and secure cycle parking is a sound commercial decision for retail developments. Promoting and encouraging cycling will result in a higher footfall in the Orchard Centre when compared against car use i.e. you can get more cyclists in the same space as cars.

In Portland, Oregon and Copenhagen, research has shown that cyclists spend more per week in local shops than motorists. Although cyclists spend less per visit, they visit more often.

We welcome the fact that new cycle parking will be covered and that it is additional parking. We think it is important to keep the existing cycle parking at the front entrance of Sainsbury's and the Cinema (could these be covered also?).

Good cycle provision would include the following measures:

- The number of cycle parking spaces must be the minimum required by the South Oxfordshire Local Plan.
- Space must be available to expand capacity if needed.
- Cycle parking will be covered and well lit. Ideally the parking will be covered by the centre's CCTV system.
- Covered cycle parking should be designated as no smoking zones.
- Some cycle parking should be secure e.g. cycle lockers. This may be subject to a charge or subscription.
- Lockers should be available to cyclists to store clothing, helmets, bags, lights etc. whilst they shop, eat or use Cornerstone / cinema. This would be free, with time limited lockers only available for short periods e.g. four hours.



- Staff cycle parking should be separate to public cycle parking and in a secure area e.g. in service yards.
- Staff should have access to changing facilities and showers. This would probably be a tie-in with the new Gym. We would urge consultations with interested Gym operators to ensure that this facility will be made available to Orchard Centre staff.
- Provide a public cycle pump.
- Orchard Centre management should actively promote cycling as an alternative to using the car.

### Other Comments on the Transport Assessment – Volume 1

Section 4 - Policy Context. 4.20 & 4.21:

The current proposals for the Orchard Centre expansion do not sufficiently cover the needs of cycling as a means of sustainable transport. Therefore we conclude that the development proposals do not comply with the relevant transport policies at national and local level.

Section 5 – Multi-Modal Trip Attraction. There is a lot of text given over to explaining how additional retail floor space will not result in a significant increase in traffic. This may be the case, but surely an increase in the number of houses in Didcot by 8,000 will increase the traffic using the Orchard Centre. This makes the need to attract visitors, using sustainable transport, even more important.

Section 6 – Car parking. In the summary (6.17) the conclusion is that '*non-car based modes of transport to the Orchard Centre are readily available and provide a viable alternative to car-based travel*'. To encourage more people to cycle, the proposals will need to make cycling a more attractive option than currently detailed.

Section 7 – Traffic Flows. The traffic flows used for the assessment of impact on highways were based on surveys taken in 2012. In Didcot a lot of housing development has been carried out in the intervening 3 years. There is no evidence to show that the figures have been uplifted to compensate for this increase in housing, of which almost all are reliant on car use.

Section 7 – Committed Development (7.8). We are puzzled as to why the only developments chosen to be included in the traffic assessment are:

- Aldi supermarket.
- Ladygrove East – 630 dwellings
- Hadden Hill – 74 dwellings

Is there a reason why the following developments not been included:

- Didcot North East – 1800 dwellings
- Great western Park – 3300 dwellings
- Valley Park – 2250 dwellings (possibly 4,500)



Section 8 – Impact on Sustainable Modes. This has been addressed in our comments on the proposal to the High Street Link. We don't believe *'that the scheme has sought to maximise the opportunities for sustainable travel'*.

HarBUG believes planning permission should be refused on the following grounds:

- The High Street Link is important for the future of the town's cycle network and must be retained.
- The provision of facilities for cyclists need to be improved in order to provide a viable alternative to car use and change the balance in favour of sustainable transport modes.
- Traffic flows should be reviewed with respect to new housing developments to provide a realistic prediction of future growth.

Yours sincerely.

Kevin Wilkinson  
Chair, HarBUG