

UPDATE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT CULTURE & SPORT
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 26th April 2017

ITEM NO. 12
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Ward: Out of Borough

App No.: 170075

Address Thames Valley Science Park Land North Of Cutbush Lane, East of Shinfield
Eastern Relief Road.

Applicant: University of Reading

RECOMMENDATION

That Wokingham Borough Council be informed that Reading Borough Council raise an OBJECTION to the proposal for the reasons set out in your main report.

Additional Information

- 1.0 Members are advised that as the planning application (Wokingham's reference 163609) is to be considered at Wokingham Borough Council's Planning Committee this evening a copy of our committee report and officer recommendation has already been sent to the Wokingham Borough Council's case officer.
- 2.0 The report for Wokingham Borough Council's Planning Committee records your officer's draft objections with the following note:
Officers are satisfied with the level of assessment undertaken and are satisfied that subject to the implementation of the South of M4 Bus Strategy the site will be appropriately served by public transport to mitigate the wider impacts of the development upon the highway network.
- 3.0 The Wokingham Borough Council's case officer has also provided the following response to comments made in our committee report:

....WBC Officers remain of the opinion that sufficient assessment has been undertaken for this outline application and that in granting outline permission WBC will retain sufficient control through the RM applications to ensure that the transport impacts of the development will not be severe. The application therefore will be reported to our Planning Committee this Wednesday evening with a recommendation of approval. Unless I hear otherwise from you, we will apprise our Members of your continuing concerns when we present the application.

Trip rates – they are artificially low given the site in TRICS has considerably less parking than the application site.

The traffic modelling carried out for the Science Park had full B1 trip rates applied for what was then 55,000m² of development. This was a very worst case and the Eastern

Relief Road and associated junctions, notably the Black Boy, were designed to accommodate this level of trip making in the peak hours in 2026.

However, the specific nature of the proposals at the Science Park are bespoke and will not reflect typical business park developments which more often contain ordinary B1 office use. This is evident from the initial occupiers that have been secured within Phase 1 of the Science Park which include the provision of Proton Beam Therapy which will be among the first of its kind to do so within the UK.

The TRICS database largely comprises sites with more conventional high density office uses and therefore the amount of comparable up-to-date information is limited. Considerable discussions have been undertaken between the developers and WBC to ensure the trip rates are not underestimated and the trip distribution is appropriate. It is in recognition of this that the trip generation appraisal was validated through the use of a 'first principles methodology' based on the likely employment densities. This demonstrated that the trip rates used for the Transport Assessment represent a robust approach. It is of course the employees that will generate the car movements, not the parking spaces. Deriving the trip generation based on the employment densities is therefore an entirely appropriate approach to take. Overall, the accepted trip rates identified for the Science Park mean that trip generations for the total proposed 76,000m² GFA were fairly similar to the higher B1 trip rate when considering the phase 1 55,000m² GFA.

Parking provision - equating to 1.33 spaces per employee, which will not promote alternative modes of travel and will encourage more staff to travel by the private car.

WBC would not be securing a development inclusive of 2,523 car parking spaces. This is only an outline application and the exact number of parking spaces will not be determined until the time of the Reserved Matters applications; at which time greater knowledge of the end users of the development will be known and appropriate levels of car parking can be fixed to reasonably serve the development without undermining the public transport strategy that is coming forward in the area.

As set out in the Transport Assessment Report and Framework Travel Plan, the take up of the parking spaces during the phased build out of the development is a key element which will be monitored as part of the travel planning process. This will enable the parking situation to be reviewed throughout the Phase 2 build out to ensure that no more parking is provided than is actually needed. This process will ensure that car parking will not be provided in excess of the demand or in a way that would undermine or prejudice the public transport strategy for the site. Prior to first occupation of Phase 1 a Travel Plan will be submitted and this is expected to be an important and binding document tied in with the 'Gateway Strategy', along with the secured Parking Management Plan.

The impacts of the development on junctions within Reading should be assessed given the existing congestion along both the A33 and A327.

The Science Park is an allocated development. The trip generation of this committed use has been allowed for within both the Wokingham Strategic Transport Model (WSTM) and the Reading Transport Model for many years. The quantum of trips that would be generated for the Phase 2 proposal is comparable to that which has been allowed for within these models, refer to Trip Rates above. The Transport Assessment Report demonstrates that the traffic increases within Reading would amount to less than 5% when compared to background traffic and hence would lie within the typical day to day

variation of traffic flows. We do not concur that increases in traffic of such magnitude would result in severe impacts along the road networks in Reading, particularly given that significant public transport enhancements have been secured to help mitigate the traffic increases.

It should be noted that the WSTM took account of the cumulative transport effects when assessing development proposal within the South of the M4 (SoM4) Strategic Development Location (SDL), and therefore also included CS policy 16 (Science Park and an Eastern Relief Road), 18 (Arborfield SDL), and 19 (SoM4 SDL) within assessments. Reading Borough Council has accepted this model and the developments contained within it when agreeing to the Shinfield West planning application, where a financial contribution was agreed between the applicant and Reading Borough Council prior to the commencement of the associated planning appeal.

Bus services reducing - bus routes serving the application site will be reducing from 24th April 2017, as noted on Reading Buses website and therefore the public transport provision as stipulated in the South of the M4 SDL dated Feb 2017 are currently not being secured.

You make reference to existing bus services that operate along Hollow Lane through Shinfield. However, of more relevance to the proposed development is the level of service that that will be in place when Phase 2 of the Science Park becomes operational. In this respect, the Public Transport Strategy would deliver a new service operating directly to the Science Park to coincide with Phase 1 becoming operational. This requirement is already secured within the existing S106 Agreement for Phase 1 of the Science Park and is being reinforced within the S106 Agreement being prepared for the Phase 2 development. On occupation of Phase 1 (probably January of 2018) two buses per hour are expected to operate along the A327 and within Shinfield via the Science Park. By 2020 this is likely to increase to 4 buses per hour, linking to both the A327 and A33 corridors.

Of course patronage that would be generated by the new residents of the circa 2,500 dwellings that are currently being built out within the South of M4 SDL will in time contribute to the viability of the service after initial subsidy. Moreover, the Public Transport Strategy has been derived on a comprehensive basis in conjunction with Wokingham Borough Council and Reading Buses and sufficient S106 funding has been secured to deliver the future bus services throughout the build out of the South of M4 SDL and the Science Park. Further contingency funding is also being secured from the applicant which can be made available for use as and when required to ensure the high quality bus services are delivered as envisaged.

- 4.0 Reading's Transport Development Control Manager comments are that:
"It has been confirmed that Wokingham Borough Council would not be securing a development inclusive of 2,523 car parking spaces for the whole site (Phase 1 and 2) and that the exact number of parking spaces will not be determined until the time of the Reserved Matters applications. It is appreciated that at the time of the reserved matters application greater knowledge of the end users of the development will be known, however following a review of the reserved matters application for Phase 1 of the Science Park (Wokingham Planning Reference 162818) it is noted that it was permitted with a parking ratio of 1 space per 33m².

The agreed parking ratio for Phase 1 therefore conflicts with Wokingham's comments that the specific nature of the proposals at the Science Park are bespoke

and will not reflect typical business park developments which more often contain ordinary B1 office use.

Wokingham have stated that the Transport Assessment Report and Framework Travel Plan, will monitor the car parking provision for the site during the phased build out of the development to ensure that no more parking is provided than is actually needed. This process will ensure that car parking will not be provided in excess of the demand or in a way that would undermine or prejudice the public transport strategy for the site. However both the Transport Assessment and the Travel Plan clearly state that the development will be provided based on a car parking ratio of 1 space per 30m². It is also acknowledged that the Framework Travel Plan states the following:

5.27. It is not considered appropriate to use a reduction in parking availability as a measure to influence travel patterns as this often can lead to overspill parking on roads in the wider area. Such a situation is inappropriate and therefore any forced reduction in spaces at the Science Park will not form part of the suite of measures that would be employed by the Travel Plan Coordinator. Nevertheless, there are a number of measures that can be undertaken to influence the use and management of parking spaces if needs be.

It is therefore clear from the applications for Phase 1 and the Transport Assessment and Travel Plan for this application that it is the intention of the developer that a car parking ratio of 1 space per 30m² or close to it will be provided.

As per my previous consultation response it is recognised that the trip generation appraisal was validated through the use of a 'first principles methodology' based on the likely employment densities, but as previously stressed this identifies a reduced requirement for car parking and does not constitute a robust approach. I would be happy to accept a trip generation based on the employment densities if the parking ratio was also assessed in the same way, but this is not the case.

Although the parking ratio will be for Wokingham to determine, the trip rates should be determined based on this intended higher parking provision as this will encourage increased car journeys on the network. This would not only constitute a worst case scenario but based on the Phase 1 application and the comments in the Transport Assessment and Travel Plan this would appear to be a more realistic assessment.

The Science Park is an allocated development and the trip generation of this committed use has been allowed for within both the Wokingham Strategic Transport Model (WSTM) and the Reading Transport Model. Although this is the case this would not assess the direct impacts on Reading's network and in particular specific junctions along the A33 and A327.

The Transport Assessment Report demonstrates that the traffic increases within Reading would amount to less than 5% when compared to background traffic and hence would lie within the typical day to day variation of traffic flows. However, this does not comply with the DfT's requirements within the document "Guidance for Transport Assessments". This states the following at Paragraph 4.92:

"In congested areas, the percentage traffic impact that is considered significant or detrimental to the network may be relatively low (possibly below the average

daily variation in flow), and should have been determined in discussions with the relevant highway authorities. For the avoidance of doubt, the 1994 guidance regarding the assessment thresholds of 10 per cent and 5 per cent levels of development traffic relative to background traffic is no longer deemed an acceptable mechanism, since it creates an incentive in favour of locating development where high levels of background traffic already exist."

Although the percentage increase would be low along these corridors this would still have a detrimental impact on the junctions within Reading given the levels of congestion that already exists and therefore must be assessed.

It is still the opinion that the proposed car parking provision would not encourage modal shift sufficiently but it is acknowledged that additional monies will be secured from this application towards Public Transport if required.

However, following the above transport objections still remain as previously reported.

- 5.0 In summary, your officer recommendation remains to object to this planning application as set out in your main report.

Julie Williams
South West Area Planning Team Leader