

DIDCOT TECHNOLOGY PARK

LDO STATEMENT OF REASONS

APPENDIX D

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DIGITAL REEF

Statement of Reasons

1. Introduction

Established in 2011 following a successful bid by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership ("LEP"), Science Vale UK is an area of southern Oxfordshire that is specifically identified as an area of growth. It is considered to be the UK's leading centre for science, technology and innovation, with the ambition of creating a globally significant 'hot-spot' for enterprise and innovation.

Within Science Vale UK are areas which are afforded official Enterprise Zone status, comprising Harwell, Milton Park and the Didcot Growth Accelerator (within which the LDO Site falls). The purpose of the Science Vale Enterprise Zones is to provide the support networks necessary to garner a culture of innovation, and to capitalise on the status of the Science Vale as home to the highest concentration of science R&D facilities in Western Europe.

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals will be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

1.1 VWHDC Development Plan (and other documents)

The adopted Development Plan relevant to the LDO Site is the following:

- a. The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (the LPP1)
- b. The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2 (the LPP2)
- c. Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy
- d. Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan 1996 saved policies

Supplementary planning guidance in the form of the Vale of White Horse Design Guidance SPD the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance are also a material planning consideration.

The Council is preparing a Joint Local Plan covering Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire, which when adopted will replace the existing local plans. Currently at Examination, the Joint Local Plan has limited weight when making planning decisions. The starting point for decision taking will remain the policies in the current adopted plans.

The LPP1: Strategic Sites and Policies (2016) emphasises the presumption in favour of sustainable development and indicates the importance of the economic role of sustainable development to contribute to building a resilient, responsive and competitive economy through delivery of land in the right locations to support growth (Core Policy 1 and the strategic objectives).

The LPP1 acknowledges that overall demand for employment land in the District is strong, due to a combination of the quality of environment, high-quality research and science facilities, a large catchment of skilled labour, and the growth aspirations of

the existing provision. Demand for growth is expected to remain buoyant throughout the Development Plan period. The LPP1 makes clear that employment provision within the District is led by Science Vale UK, within which the LDO Site falls.

Core Policy 6 of the LPP1 makes provision for around 218 hectares of strategic employment land for new employment development in accordance with the assessed needs, set out in the Employment Land Review. It is anticipated that this will deliver approximately 23,000 jobs between 2011 and 2031. Proposals for employment related development on unallocated sites will be supported in accordance with Core Policy 28: New Employment Development on Unallocated Sites.

The new Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (OMWLP) comprises the Part 1 – Core Strategy and Part 2 – Site Allocations (Part 2 is now being prepared). The Core Strategy Part 1 provides the planning strategies and policies for the development that will be needed for the supply of minerals and management of waste in Oxfordshire over the period to the end of 2031.

Policy W11 sets out the types of site that will be safeguarded. Sites that are allocated for waste management development in the Site Allocations Document under policy W4 will also be safeguarded. Policy W11 provides that there should be a presumption against development that could compromise the future use of a safeguarded site for waste purposes.

The LDO Site is identified as a safeguarded site “Hill Farm (the former J James Ltd)” (Ref 144) for recycle and/or transfer facility which no longer occupies the site. Proposals for development that would directly or indirectly prevent or prejudice the use of a site safeguarded for waste management will not be permitted unless:

- the development is in accordance with a site allocation for development in an adopted local plan or neighbourhood plan; or
- equivalent waste management capacity can be appropriately and sustainably provided elsewhere; or
- it can be demonstrated that the site is no longer required for waste management.

The LPP1 sets out the Spatial Strategy, ‘Building on our Strengths’ to help shape where new homes will be built, where opportunities to provide new jobs will be created, and where new infrastructure and services will be provided. Core Policy 15a of the LPP2 also allocates an additional site to deliver 400 homes within the Science Vale area to provide continuing support for economic growth, to support the delivery of strategic infrastructure and facilitate comprehensive master planning. The LPP2 policies are structured into the four thematic areas as set out in the LPP1. These are:

- Building Healthy and Sustainable Communities
- Supporting Economic Prosperity
- Supporting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility
- Protecting the Environment and Responding to Climate Change.

The Council will consider the impact of development proposals on amenity in accordance with Development Policy 23: Impact of Development on Amenity.

Development will not be permitted if it is likely to be adversely affected by existing or potential sources of noise, emissions, pollution and dominance of visual intrusion.

Development Policy 25: Noise Pollution seeks to ensure that development proposals set out a scheme of mitigation, where noise-generating development would otherwise result in an unacceptable impact on neighbouring uses, environment or biodiversity. Developers should also take into account Core Policy 44: Landscape in the LPP1 if proposals are likely to impact on the landscape. Paragraph 199 of the NPPF is clear on the importance of taking into account the potential impacts of air quality when assessing development proposals. Furthermore, legislative limits are set for concentration of major air pollutants that may impact on public health, amenity and local biodiversity, such as airborne particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide.

Development proposals demonstrate within the Air Quality assessment they consider the Council's Air Quality Action Plan in accordance with Core Policy 43: Natural Resources. Proposals will comply with Development Policy 26: Air Quality.

Development Policy 27: Land Affected by Contamination requires developers to address all land contamination risks to the development, environment, controlled waters and adjacent land associated with the development. Development Policy 27: Land Affected by Contamination will be used by the Council to assess and determine the suitability of development proposals by considering the potential implications of any existing contamination for the new development, environment, controlled waters and adjacent land, and to also ensure that developers are able to demonstrate that the proposal will prevent unacceptable risk from pollution in the future. Where development, redevelopment or re-use is proposed on or adjacent to land that is suspected or known to be contaminated, proposals should be accompanied by an appropriate level of information in the form of a Contaminated Land Preliminary Risk Consultant Report.

National Planning Policy Framework

Paragraph 8 of the December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") identifies the purpose of the planning system as being to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, particularly economic, social and environmental objectives.

Paragraph 85 of the NPPF seeks to build a strong and competitive economy, and advocates planning decisions that create conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. The importance of Britain becoming a global leader in driving innovation, is emphasised. Paragraph 87 of the NPPF also directs planning decisions which recognise the locational requirements of different sectors, including clusters or networks of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high-technology industries, as well as storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales.

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that development should only be refused on highways ground if there would be a severe unacceptable impact. At paragraph 124, it promotes the effective use of land, including the development of 'previously developed' or 'brownfield' land. At section 12 it encourages developments which are well designed, visually attractive as a result of good architecture and layout, with appropriate and effective landscaping. The NPPF requires the consideration of

climate change, including flooding, along with the natural environment, pollution, and energy usage.

2. Planning History

- 2.1 Whilst the Site is predominantly undeveloped, the area subject to this LDO and the immediate adjoining land has an extensive planning history. However, the primary permission of relevance to the principle of development was the waste recycling facility at Hill Farm which was granted planning permission in July 2011. Application reference P11/V1528/CM granted planning permission for a "*wood recycling facility-repair and recycling wood pallets*".
- 2.2 The planning permission was issued subject to conditions in September 2011 but did not include any definition on the Use Class permitted by the decision notice. The delegated report also makes no reference to any particular Use Class, but it summarises the activities that took place and have also subsequently been extended through later permissions. Used wood pallets were brought onto the site (presumably having been discarded as unusable) and either repaired and resold as pallets or, if they could not be repaired, they were subject to another process, or series of processes, that transformed them into chips which were sold for equestrian use to dress exercise yards and trails (i.e. to provide a safe and compliant surface). The creation of the wood chips were the making of an article and therefore the activities fall within Use Class B2 (general industrial).
- 2.3 The other main permission of relevance is the various planning permissions relating to the Sutton Courtenay Landfill Complex to the north of Didcot Power Station. Planning permission was originally granted in January 1997 for the extraction of sand and gravel and restoration controlled by landfill (Application reference P85/V00028). This mineral extraction and landfill operations has been extended by multiple planning permissions over the years and predominantly is confined to land outside of the area covered by the LDO. However, the relevant planning permissions included a restoration condition to create a wet woodland habitat which has now been fulfilled. The wet woodland habitat falls within the area subject to the LDO.

3. Development Assessment

3.1 Principle of Development/Land Use

The Science Vale is a centre for science, technology and innovation, with the ambition of becoming a globally significant 'hot-spot' for enterprise. The site is explicitly identified for redevelopment as part of the Didcot Growth Accelerator Enterprise Zone, within the Science Vale growth area.

The LDO proposals reflect the ambitions of LPP1 Core Policy 1, which indicates the importance of the economic role of sustainable development to contribute to building a resilient, responsive and competitive economy, through delivery of land in the right locations to support growth.

Through its role in supporting the knowledge and digital economy, the proposed Uses within the LDO will contribute to the ambitions of Science Vale to attract business and enterprise in the fields of science and technology.

It is anticipated that during its operational phase the Uses forming the LDO will be a significant generator of full time and high skilled jobs and will contribute to the high-skilled labour pool within the VWH and Science Vale area. Furthermore, the proposals will provide a valuable injection into Science Vale through spill-over effects arising from the clustering of high-tech operators, high value activity to the supply chain of products and services. The Data Centre use in particular will also meet the needs of other businesses by providing essential support for the digital economy nationwide. The proposed B2 General Industrial floorspace will deliver much needed space in a sector which is 30-40% lower than elsewhere as directed by the Didcot Enterprise Zone. The battery storage Uses on the Site will allow the storage of renewable energy at a time of oversupply allowing for peak shifting of the power requirement of the data centre while additionally allowing participation in National Grid balancing market to boost the Site's green credentials.

The proposed LDO development is further supported by the NPPF, which (at paragraph 85), requires that planning policies and decisions should *"...help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development."*

The principle of the LDO and the proposed land uses including B2 general industrial, Data Centre and, battery storage Uses, which are uses within the technology sector, is clearly supported by the Development Plan and NPPF policy and represent a strong benefit. The LDO Site is not allocated as an employment site in LPP1 and therefore Core Policy 28 'New Employment Development on Unallocated Sites' applies.

Core policy 28 states that proposals for new employment development (Use Classes B1, B2 or B8) will be supported on unallocated sites in or on the edge of, the built-up area of Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Larger and Smaller Villages provided that the benefits are not outweighed by any harmful impacts, taking into account the following:

- i. the effect on the amenity of nearby residents and occupiers*
- ii. the provision of safe site access for pedestrians and cyclists and for all types of vehicles likely to visit the sites, and measures to promote the use of sustainable modes of transport where possible, and*
- iii. the scale, nature and appearance of the employment development and its relationship with the local townscape and/ or landscape character*

In the first instance the area covered by the LDO is directly adjacent to the built up area of Didcot and therefore fulfils the gateway test of Core policy 28.

It has been demonstrated in the supporting technical information submitted in conjunction with the LDO - such as the Environmental Noise Survey Report, Air Quality Assessment, Landscape Visual Impact Assessment and Transport plan - that the amenity of nearby residents and occupiers will have no or insignificant affect by noise, air quality or disturbance. Furthermore, these elements will also be suitably controlled through the use of conditions within the LDO which will require further details and evidence relating to noise impact and control of emissions.

The LDO includes extensive pedestrian and cycle routes throughout the LDO Site and into the surrounding network coordinated with the proposed Didcot to Culham River Crossing proposals by Oxfordshire County Council that passes through the proposed site. Multiple crossings will be provided for safe access and movement within the Site. These new pedestrian and cycle routes will also provide connections and ability for future connections into wider network of surrounding residential areas, Didcot town centre and the railway station to create a highly accessible development by a range of public transport options and healthy living alternatives.

The LDO is accompanied by a number of parameter plans which control the scale and massing of the permitted development which has been informed by a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment. The Landscape and Visual Appraisal looked at the landscape setting and context of the site and examined the baseline condition and key factors that are important, and which contribute to the character, condition and quality of the landscape. The analysis of the landscape and visual factors has been used to inform the process of defining a set of parameters for the site in terms of potential development and which has resulted in a lower maximum height threshold for the northern parcel of the LDO to respect its slightly more sensitive location.

The Appraisal concluded that the site's susceptibility to change is low and therefore the overall sensitivity is low noting the context of a number of large scale industrial uses and landscape detractors. Overall the LDO site is well located for the type of development proposed and will not cause unacceptable harm to the surrounding landscape or to visual receptors. The parameters within which the site will be developed have been considered with landscape and visual impacts in mind and together with addressing the landscape strategy, the appearance and design of the buildings will seek to minimise any impacts. Overall, the landscape and biodiversity proposals will achieve a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain in terms of green infrastructure and habitat creation and will therefore enhance the landscape.

The LDO therefore complies with Core Policy 28 as an exception policy to allow new employment development on an unallocated site.

The LDO site is not allocated in the Local Plan for any purpose. The previous temporary waste recycling facility at Hill Farm, is a safeguarded site in the OMWLP and therefore has explicit recognition in the plan as a compliant site with a permitted recycling operation that provides recycling capacity in the county. It is considered that the former Use Class of the Hill Farm facility falls within Class B2 however the activity/use is no longer active on site due to the former occupier (J James Ltd) having vacated the site.

Policy W11 of the OMWLP provides that proposals for development that would directly or indirectly prevent or prejudice the use of a site safeguarded for waste management will not be permitted unless:

- the development is in accordance with a site allocation for development in an adopted local plan or neighbourhood plan; or
- equivalent waste management capacity can be appropriately and sustainably provided elsewhere; or
- it can be demonstrated that the site is no longer required for waste management.

In this instance, the LDO masterplan parameter plans would necessitate the relocation of the former waste management facility as the development zone is located on the same site. However, the LDO provides for 5,000 sqm of B2 floorspace and it is proposed that an equivalent capacity for the former waste management facility can be provided within that floorspace allowance.

The benefit of realising key objectives of the LDO in the public interest, most notably the socio economic benefits in investment in the science, technology and innovation section of the Vale. Indeed, data centres are integral infrastructure to delivering the Council's ambition of creating a globally significant 'hot-spot' for enterprise and innovation.

Data centres generate high value-add technical and engineering jobs and provide the kind of cloud operations and services that will enable our transition to an efficient, digitally enabled future. A single data centre can provide the IT function for thousands of businesses.

Data centres drive significant investment in local communications infrastructure which in turn draws in other businesses. Without the catalyst of the data centre the network infrastructure would not be upgraded.

The LDO also includes battery storage facilities to store renewable energy at a time of oversupply, allowing for peak shifting of the power requirement of the data centre while additionally allowing participation in National Grid balancing market and help stabilise the grid. The battery storage provision contributes to the other energy efficiency measures of the buildings to offer a cleaner and adaptable solution to energy use.

A strategic aim of the Local Plan is to support economic growth in the area and meet the needs of businesses by ensuring suitable sites are available to meet employment growth. The inclusion of B2 General Industrial floorspace helps support the continued development of the wider Science Vale and science-based research through much needed alternative floorspace that supports this economy. The ability to include B2 floorspace as part of the LDO masterplan will deliver much needed business space to help the District meet a range and variety of business needs to meet the full economic potential of the Enterprise Zone as there is currently an identified shortfall of this form of general industrial Use. In addition, a portion of this B2 floorspace will be dedicated as a replacement waste recycling facility of equivalent capacity or value as the former facility on the Site in complete accordance with Policy W11 of the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy

The LDO also secures funding via Section 106 agreement for elements of road and pathways to connect routes across and provide access to the site from the proposed Didcot to Culham River Crossing road infrastructure and wider area that has been safeguarded through the Local Plan in the Culham to Didcot Link road. In order to deliver the growth in the South East Vale Sub-Area and the wider Science Vale area, the Science Vale Area Strategy has identified highways infrastructure to mitigate the impact of the planned growth across Science Vale and secure the future economic viability of the area. The funding of these transport connectivity elements to the A4130 link proposed Didcot to Culham River Crossing road and wider area is a

significant public and sustainable transport benefit derived from the LDO that would not be forthcoming in the immediate future without this investment.

In conclusion, the overriding public benefits and driving forces to support this LDO is due to achieving the three strands to sustainable development as identified in the NPPF as follows:

- Economic:- Funding of infrastructure, inward investments and promotion of economic growth.
- Environmental:- Enhanced biodiversity, sustainable transport routes on and off site, energy efficiency and renewable energy commitments and inclusion of battery storage use to store clean energy and decarbonise the grid.
- Social:- socio-economic benefits include job opportunities, skills, training together with new public realm and arts strategy encouraging outdoor activity for the local community.

3.2 Transport and Access

The proposed LDO is located within easy reach of existing public transport, including bus stops on Avon Way and Lyndene Road within 10 minutes' walk and Didcot Parkway train station within 20 minutes' walk or 7 minute cycle from the site with transport links locally and nationally. In addition, a pair of new bus stops will be delivered in the centre of the site as further detailed below, and has adequate provision for loading, circulation, turning and parking (as shown in swept-path drawings provided in the Transport Assessment). The proposals accord with the requirements of LPP1 Core Policy 33 and Core Policy 35.

The LDO will facilitate via a Section 106 agreement and land dedication in conjunction with Oxfordshire County Council the delivery of a section of the Didcot to Culham River Crossing road and a variety of sustainable access points to the proposed site including two new bus stops, cycling and pedestrian parallel crossings and extensive routes through and into the site via the new and existing road network including safeguarding of land to the east of the site for a future railway crossing. Further cycle and pedestrian paths, and via bridleways will be provided under the LDO site works to connect each development plot and wider off-site connections including Sustrans NCN5 cycle route. Furthermore, each Development Zone will deliver a high ratio of cycle parking spaces to car parking spaces, with cycle parking to be located in prominent locations near building entrances and accompanying showering and changing facilities. To promote sustainable modes of transport, a Green Travel Plan is required prior to occupation of the development. In accordance with, Core Policies 33 and 35 of the LPP1, Development Policy 17 of the LPP2 and the NPPF.

The proposed LDO will have no impact to the existing use or character of Appleford Level Crossing to the north of the site. All existing roads leading from the proposed development site North to Appleford Level Crossing will remain private and prohibit public use until access is removed as part of the Didcot to Culham River Crossing Road being delivered by Oxfordshire County Council. See prevention measures detailed under Condition B25.

The LDO will facilitate via a Section 106 agreement and land dedication in conjunction with Oxfordshire County Council the delivery of a section of the Didcot to

Culham River Crossing linking onto the junction of the A4130 together with the upgrading to the roundabout and cycle network. This is in accordance with Core Policy 17 for the delivery of Strategic Highway Improvements which directly mitigates the impact of the planning growth across the Science Vale. It also accords with Core Policy 18 which safeguards land for this transport scheme as updated by Core Policy 18a of the LPP2.

3.3 Design, Landscape and Visual Impact

The proposed LDO Plan 4 Landscape Strategy, LDO Plan 5 Infrastructure and supporting Design Guide has been designed from the outset as a high-quality and well landscaped environment. An extensive scheme of new planting and water features is incorporated throughout the proposed masterplan, which reflects the relationship of the site to character of the surrounding area.

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (including landscape masterplan) concludes that the proposed development will not notably influence the character of the landscape to the north of the site, and that the degree of visual change will not be significant (particularly given the developed context). The Landscape Visual Impact Assessment has informed the supporting parameter plans which have imposed maximum building heights across the masterplan relevant to their sensitivity and views from surrounding areas.

The proposed LDO has been subject to a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment which accords with LPP1 and Core Policy 37, relating to design and setting. It accords with LPP1 Core Policy 45, which seeks an uplift in green infrastructure. The lighting scheme in the accompanying Design Guide reflects the requirements of LPP2 Development Policy 21. The proposals similarly reflect the approach set out in the adopted VWHDC Joint Design Guide, and the approach to good design required by Paragraphs 131-141 of the NPPF and Development Policy 23 of LPP2.

3.4 Ecology

An extensive network of vegetation, species-friendly planting, refugia and water features are proposed across the LDO Site, representing a significant programme of habitat creation for fauna and wildlife. A Biodiversity Net Gain assessment has been completed using Defra Metric 3.1 in support of the LDO and which suggests that based upon the parameter plans and design guide the scheme could achieve a 10% net gain in both habitat units and hedgerow units using Defra Metric 3.1. Furthermore, the LDO includes condition A13 requiring a biodiversity net gain management and delivery plan. The LDO therefore accords with LPP1 Core Policy 46, which requires that development conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity.

3.5 Flood Risk and Drainage

The site is in Flood Zone 1 which is the preferred location for development in flood risk terms. The Flood Risk Assessment addresses the approach to flood risk across the LDO Site, and presents the strategy for managing surface water run-off (including SUDS) and the approach to foul drainage. The proposals therefore accord with LPP1 Core Policy 42 and NPPF Paragraphs 170-182, which (inter alia) seek to direct new development to areas with a low probability of flooding.

3.6 Amenity – noise and air quality

The Noise Assessment addresses the potential for noise impacts on 'noise sensitive receptors', the nearest of which is a single residential dwelling (Hartwright House), taking account of the noise attenuation measures set out in the Design Guide and controlled by LDO Conditions. This concludes that the proposed LDO is unlikely to result in adverse impacts on the nearest noise sensitive receptors, in accordance with the appropriate British Standards.

The LDO Site is not located in an Air Quality Management Area and is not located in an area identified as having a high background concentration of pollutants. The LDO includes a condition which requires an Air Quality Assessment prior to commencement of development in accordance with Core Policy 43 of the LPP1, and advice contained within the NPPF. It is noted that the proposed uses will generate significantly fewer traffic movements than a conventional B8 scheme and the vehicular emissions will consequently be low.

4. Overview of permitted uses

To achieve the objectives of the Enterprise Zone, the following primary land uses are allowed within the LDO area subject to the specific restrictions on location and floorspace set out in the LDO:

- B2 General industrial
- B8 Data centre
- B8 Battery storage