



# Watlington Parish Council

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## **Watlington Parish Council** **Planning Application P20/S2134/O - Chalgrove Airfield**

Watlington Parish Council strongly objects to this outline planning application for a residential-led mixed use development at Chalgrove Airfield.

### **Introduction**

Firstly, this application is in contravention of national and local planning policies. It is not justified by an identified need for local housing on the scale proposed. Nor is it justified by an unmet need within the city of Oxford. The location of the site, an active former military airfield in rural Oxfordshire, is by its very nature isolated from Oxford and the larger towns in South Oxfordshire. It is served by B-Class rural roads that connect the local network of small towns, villages and hamlets. These roads are not capable of carrying the weight of traffic that this development would generate, both during construction and upon completion, without extensive upgrading of the highway infrastructure in addition to the bypasses proposed. Furthermore, the impact of the additional traffic has not been fully assessed alongside the traffic being generated by the already approved and proposed developments within the immediate (7 mile) radius of the airfield for example at: Wallingford; Benson; Watlington; Stadhampton; Chinnor and Oxford.

Secondly, the impact of a development of this size has not been properly assessed in terms of its bearing on the local economies of the neighbouring villages and small towns. The planned commercial centre of the new 'market town' has the potential to have a very real detrimental effect on the businesses in Watlington. Watlington is the service hub for many of the smaller villages and hamlets in the area and relies on the custom generated from these locations to ensure its commercial survival.

Thirdly, the development has not been fully assessed in terms of its impact on the local ecology and environment. The site sits within a predominantly rural agricultural area bounded by Oxford to the north, the Chilterns AONB to the south and the M40 to the east. The area is rich in wildlife and natural habitats with many Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Areas of Ancient Natural Woodland within the local vicinity. A development of this size and the growth in population and traffic that will ensue has the potential to disrupt wildlife and permanently alter the local ecosystems not just within the boundary of the site but much further afield.

### **National and Local Policies**

The following comments are in relation to the specific national and local policies which this application fails to meet.

#### **NPPF**

##### **Rural Housing**

**NPPF 77. In rural areas, planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support developments that reflect local needs.**

This part of South Oxfordshire is wholly rural and it is SODC policy that local housing need is met via neighbourhood plans. All the villages in the local area have made neighbourhood plans and all meet their obligation to provide both affordable and market housing to meet the identified housing need. Therefore, it

cannot be claimed that the development at Chalgrove Airfield is required in order to address a local housing need.

**NPPF 78. To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.**

In the case of Chalgrove Airfield, it is likely that it will have a harmful impact on Watlington. There is no evidence to show that the Chalgrove Airfield development will bring any benefit to Watlington – certainly no evidence that it will enhance or maintain its vitality.

**NPPF 170. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.**

There has been no assessment of the impact of the proposed bypasses at Cuxham, Stadhampton and Chislehampton on the landscape and the setting of these historic villages. The infrastructure which is needed to enable this development to proceed is disproportionate to the character of the surrounding countryside and will make changes which are harmful. In addition, there has been no assessment of the contribution that the development, plus the enabling infrastructure, will make to the increase in greenhouse gasses and climate change. There is no indication that the construction and eventual use of the new town will be carbon neutral.

**NPPF 180. Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment. .... In doing so they should:**

- a) **Mitigate and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impacts resulting from noise from the new development – and avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and the quality of life.**

The proposal to build a new runway in very close proximity is in direct contravention of this national policy. The runway and adjacent areas would be used for test flying and the proving of explosive devices. The runway and manoeuvring areas would also be used by the RAF helicopter fleet from RAF Benson for training. These activities constitute a direct threat to the residents of the development both in terms of safety and excessive noise pollution.

## **South Oxfordshire Core Strategy**

### **CS1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development**

This policy states that new proposals can be approved where they ‘achieve sustainable improvements in the economic, social and environmental conditions in South Oxfordshire’. This should apply not just to this development and its impact on Chalgrove but to the many villages and hamlets in the surrounding area. HE has neither fully nor satisfactorily assessed the economic, social and environmental impact of the proposal on the wider area. It is clear that the building of such a large new ‘market town’ will have a detrimental impact across the area rather than contributing to the present and future economic, environmental and social sustainability of the neighbouring villages.

## **Rural Communities**

### **CSR1. Housing in Villages**

**All development should respect national designations such as Green Belt and should conserve and enhance the natural beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Suitably designed and located development at an appropriate scale that facilitates the economic and social well-being of such areas, especially in the larger Villages.**

**Local character and distinctiveness will be protected and the requirements of relevant development plan [including NPs] policies will be met.**

The location, scale, design and layout of the proposed development at Chalgrove Airfield fails to meet the basic requirements outlined above. It does not respect the local environment and will have a detrimental impact on the views from the Chilterns AONB across the Oxfordshire Plain. The scale and design of the development does not protect the local distinctiveness of the village of Chalgrove nor does it conform with policies in the Chalgrove NDP. The development is not required to meet an identified local housing need. In short, this proposal far exceeds the intent of CSR1

### **CSR2 Employment in Rural Areas**

**Planning permission will be granted for proposals which support the economy of the rural areas.**

This policy is designed to ensure the survival and enhancement of the agricultural economy in rural areas through agricultural diversification, support to agricultural production and support to tourism based on the character of the area. It is specific. However, the proposed employment opportunities are very much based around town based commercial enterprises and small-scale business and industrial units. The development at Chalgrove Airfield does not comply with or address this policy.

### **CSR3 Community Facilities and Rural Transport**

**Proposals which result in the provision of facilities and services in the rural areas will be encouraged, those which result in the loss of services and facilities will be resisted.**

**Rural transport initiatives that improve movement particularly to access services and employment will be encouraged.**

SODC acknowledges that 'sustainable means of transport are more difficult to provide in rural areas and access to service and employment can be difficult for rural residents who do not have access to a car'. The proposal does nothing to address access to sustainable transport and connectivity between the communities in this part of South Oxfordshire. Better bus connections are proposed to Oxford and Didcot, however, these do not address a wider need for rural bus services. Also, these new connections would seem to be at the expense of existing timetabled services. Cycleways are mooted without a detailed analysis of how they would connect communities and provide a sustainable commuting alternative to use of the car. It is evident that the proposed transport plan has not taken into account the impact of this development on the wider community transport needs and has the potential to result in an inferior (loss of) service to more isolated communities.

### **Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan**

The development site sits beyond the boundary of the Watlington Parish however, several policies in the Watlington NDP have direct relevance and are therefore applicable to this proposal.

#### **Policy P2b. Transport**

**Proposals for development should demonstrate how the additional traffic generated can be accommodated in a satisfactory way in the highway network.**

Although the new Watlington edge road is likely to be in use before construction work begins on Chalgrove Airfield, the level of traffic using it as a result of the development will be significant, especially during the years of construction and when the site is fully developed. The need to retain the character of the edge road as part of a rural 'B' classified road is essential to protect the character of Watlington and this part of the Chilterns AONB. There has been no assessment of the impact of the traffic generated by the development on Watlington should the edge road not be delivered. This assessment must be carried out.

#### **Policy P3a. Conserve and Enhance the Natural Environment**

**Views of and from the Chilterns AONB are to be protected especially from public viewpoints on the Watlington Hill National Trust land and the White Mark.**

The development will be a new, significant change to the views and will have a considerable impact on the landscape. Existing views of the Oxfordshire plain are of an agricultural landscape with scattered settlements. The new town would change this part of rural South Oxfordshire irreparably. No amount of tree planting or landscaping of the site will mask the bulk of the development or the height of the proposed 4 storey blocks of flats (which are completely out of character with local buildings in the area).

**Policy P6. Enhance Watlington as a Service Centre**

Watlington currently serves as the local hub for surrounding villages for services and facilities. This enables the town and surrounding area to be economically sustainable. The town depends on the wider population to sustain the High Street and local shops. The Retail Impact Assessment provided in support of the application is dismissive of any impact on Watlington. It concentrated on the impact on the Co-Op and not on the whole High Street and facilities such as the Library. No useful assessment has been made of the balance between harm and benefit and this is needed. It is clear that the development at Chalgrove Airfield is designed to be a new market town. It is too close to not to draw business away from Watlington.

In addition, the move of Icknield Community College to the new town would be a significant loss to Watlington. It currently provides employment for local people and contributes to the local economy. It also provides facilities for community use which contribute to the social sustainability and the vitality of the town. The loss of all these benefits will have an adverse impact on Watlington. The impact of the loss of the school has not been evaluated by Homes England.

**Policy P7. Employment**

The threat to local businesses in Watlington and the proposed move of the Icknield Community College will have a detrimental impact on the employment opportunities in Watlington. Once businesses have been lost, there is a very strong likelihood that they will not be replaced and that the hard-fought regeneration of the town centre, and what is now a thriving business community, will fall rapidly into decline.

**Policy P8. Physical and Social Infrastructure**

There is no information at all about improvements to connectivity via walking and cycling routes or for improved bridleway routes – this is a rural area and benefits for horse riders, cyclists and walkers should be considered. At this stage, there is no benefit for Watlington from the proposals to provide improved services from Chalgrove to Oxford and Didcot. The site is not currently connected to the surrounding area except by road and the local roads are not suitable for walking or cycling safely. Many of the proposed green routes for cycling are impractical for daily commuting and rather than encourage the greater use of bicycles will ensure that cars remain the mode of transport of choice for commuters.

**Conclusion**

This application should be rejected. A development in this location and of this scale is not required in order to address an identified housing need within this local rural community. Nor is it required to address Oxford City's un-met need. Its potential detrimental impact on the local environment and economy has far reaching consequences across the wider community. The impact of increased traffic on the already pressurised highways infrastructure and the villages in this part of South Oxfordshire has not been assessed fully and has the potential to change the character of the area for the worse.

Just because the land at Chalgrove Airfield is owned by HE does not mean that a new 'market town' should be built without proper consideration of the impact it would have on all aspects of rural life. To approve this application based on the ownership and availability of the land would fly in the face of both national and local planning policies.

Dated 28 August 2020