

1 February 2017

Cratus Communications  
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Dear Cratus,

### **'South Oxford Science Village' Consultation Feedback**

Name: CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND (CPRE) OXFORDSHIRE BRANCH  
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#### ***Do you think the suggested area is sustainable and appropriate for development?***

Firstly, removal of land from the Green Belt is the very essence of unsustainability as it irrevocably deprives future generations of the benefit of the Green Belt in containing urban sprawl and protecting the countryside. This is especially the case at Grenoble Road where the benefit of the Green Belt in providing open countryside on urban dwellers' doorsteps is transparently clear in looking from one side of the road to the other.

Secondly, Oxford itself with its medieval street layout, crossed by Rivers and floodplains, is inherently unsuitable to be the centre of the kind of economic growth that is envisaged by the Strategic Economic Plan and which the proposed 'South Oxford Science Village' will add to.

Thirdly, this particular part of the City is poorly served with public transport and (as we show later) the Park and Ride if permitted will be of little benefit to any "local people" who might live in the "village". It will though make it more attractive to London commuters. This effect will be exaggerated if the Chiltern line extends to the site. It is well-known that the provision of in effect a direct line to London will attract commuters who can afford more than local people and thus push house prices even further from them. As this effect will also apply to the Leys, the effect will be to crowd out local people even more.

#### ***Ecology***

You describe the open agricultural fields as having "limited ecological value" and infer that the ecological value of the mostly built up site will be higher.

This is clearly a contentious proposition, as even if it was accepted that 150 hectares of open fields had only limited ecological value it is clear that its ecological capacity would be reduced by the development and conversely - as your presenter agreed at the consultation - the main "improvement" proposed, of maintaining and creating wildlife corridors could be more beneficially achieved by repairing the hedge lines on the site as it exists. This is of course easily within the capacity of Magdalen College and the other landowners and could be done at minimal cost.

Whilst one development can indeed be more ecological than another it is misleading to imply that open fields have little ecological value, and equally that the value of your development would be greater.

### ***Flooding and Drainage***

As you say yourselves, flooding and drainage is not an issue on the site in its present form, or for neighbouring settlements arising from it.

It is welcome that you intend to install a drainage system in your new development to ensure drainage problems the settlement itself might create, but you would in any case be required to do so by conditions, should the development be permitted, which we trust it will not.

### ***Sewage Treatment***

Your presentation had originally inferred that Thames Water would be making only £20 million from this development (an incredibly small fraction of the estimated £650 million to be made by the profit sharing partnership) AND that the greater part of that would be spent managing odour from the works. As it was clear in talking to Thames Water that there was no plan, much less a costed one, to do any work at all, this was amended on our insistence.

Although the odour envelope shown on the presentation exhibits is certainly impressive this represent only four complaints a year; local residents advise that complaints of smell from local residents are related to the fertilising material your clients allow to be spread on their fields.

Apart from the need with any industrial plant for careful day to day management, no solution could prevent all smells, except, as Thames Water suggested, encasing the whole plant in a concrete dome, which is not remotely feasible.

Since smells are at an insignificant and probably irreducible level already, and Thames Water has identified no practical method of reducing them in the way your exhibit shows, other than encasing the plant or shutting it; and since the extra houses were they to be built would add insignificantly to the plant's throughput, it is very misleading to infer - as you plainly do - that only millions of pounds released by the development can remove the toxic cloud which would hang over the area.

In truth, proper management of the plant is the only way of containing smell, and it is Thames Water's clear duty to do this whether or not it profits from development.

### ***Masterplan***

It is an illustrative layout for presentational purposes and not worthy of detailed comment. You accepted at the consultation that what might or might not be done should outline permission be granted would depend on circumstances at the time.

One of our concerns about this development is that rather than addressing Oxford's (as yet unquantified) housing shortfall it will instead bring in new people as a result of job creation in a City which already has full employment, thus exacerbating any lack of housing that may exist. This might be partially addressed by ensuring that jobs on the site and educational opportunities go only to current residents, although it is doubtful whether this would be legal or practical.

### ***Park and Ride***

The purpose of Park and Ride is to capture incoming private vehicle traffic and channel it on to public transport to relieve congestion. It is unlikely that any vehicular traffic would arise from the site to the proposed Park and Ride, and the proposed site should not be used to attempt to justify one's creation. In fact as stated earlier by far the most likely result of a Park and Ride should one be created, would be to make the site more attractive to London commuters, pricing local people out and exacerbating any local housing problems which may exist.

It is an illustrative layout for presentational purposes and not worthy of detailed comment. You accepted at the consultation that what might or might not be done should outline permission be granted would depend on circumstances at the time.

### ***Green Infrastructure***

It would obviously be welcome if as much of the already existing green infrastructure as possible is retained. Nothing is proposed which could not equally be done with the site undeveloped, and leaving it as it is would clearly and transparently be the optimum green outcome.

It is entirely wrong to destroy relatively untouched open fields on the edge of the City to create at best artificial green enclaves within an almost totally built environment.

### ***Sustainable Transport, cycling and walking***

No. If that is an objective a far better solution would be to increase built densities within the City itself to accommodate any unmet need that may in future be quantified at such time as the City has prepared and had tested a new Local Plan.

### ***Public Transport***

We do not wish to see the development.

If there are local transport issues apart from those your project would create they should be addressed by the City and County Councils.

### ***General Comments***

Your email inviting comments asked for agreement that your presentation had been clear and balanced.

It was neither.

It was not clear because the evidence for its claims was at best sketchy if not non-existent.

It was not balanced because it presented only selected points which (you believed) supported your client's case, and did not at any point address the case against, either in principle or in detail.

The most glaring of these omissions, apart from the misrepresentations detailed above, were that although the Green Belt was referred to in the text of one exhibit, its purposes and benefits were not mentioned much less detailed, nor the need for 'exceptional circumstances' to justify development; and that whilst your opening board gave the clear impression that the development was acceptable to the Authorities, it failed to advise that the relevant Local Planning Authority (South Oxfordshire) was totally opposed to it.

Nor did you mention that the only proper opinion survey conducted had established that three quarters of the population of Oxford, and of its main subsets, including Oxford residents and those without houses, opposed all development in the Green Belt and whilst recognising a general need for houses considered that housing development in the Green Belt was a threat not a benefit. (CPRE Oxford Green Belt Survey, April 1995)

You therefore gave an entirely one sided presentation on the supposed benefits your development offered and how some of the adverse effects it created would be mitigated, without presenting a full, clear or balanced - or even fair - picture in any way.

It is easy to understand why your clients - who between them would make some £650 million out of this scheme - would not have wished to address the case against, and understandable that you should not have done so.

But you were wrong to represent what was in fact a pitch as a balanced presentation.

It is heartening that despite the one-sidedness of your presentation, and the years of similar self-interested promotion to which the public has been subjected, a straw poll in the two main Oxford papers the following week, which accompanied a balanced article laying out both your case and our own, showed Green Belt development of the kind your propose opposed by two thirds of respondents.

Yours Sincerely

Michael Tyce