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Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum (WNF) was first designated as a 'Neighbourhood Forum' in 2014, and was re-designated in 2019 and in 2024. It seeks to represent the views, in relation to planning matters, of residents in the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan area, located at its nearest point just 200 m south-east of the EXOq site, and stretching from the river Thames in the west to Cutteslowe Park in the east. Our Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) was approved overwhelmingly by residents in a referendum in May 2021 and was subsequently 'made' by Oxford City Council.

## **WNF OBJECTS to Cherwell District Council planning application 26/00720/OUT for the Exeter Oxford Innovation District (EXOq)**

We write as the Steering Committee of Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum (WNF), representing all of the several thousand residents of the WNF area, which at its closest point lies only 200 m from the site of development proposed in this planning application. We object strongly to the application, because of several adverse impacts it would have on the area we represent, listed below.

### **Reasons for Objecting**

#### **1. Mis-use of Green Belt**

In the current version of the Cherwell District Local Plan, the site targeted for EXOq is shown as lying within the Green Belt surrounding Oxford. There it performs a vital function of maintaining a green separation between Oxford City and the town of Kidlington. This function is now of extreme importance, because so many of the other neighbouring areas of Green Belt were removed in Cherwell District Council's Partial Review of its Local Plan, when it committed to providing an additional 4400 homes to help Oxford City satisfy its large unmet housing need. This need was deemed so urgent that it met the criterion of being in 'exceptional circumstances'. Prior to the Partial Review, one of the sites subsequently removed from the Green Belt, referred to as PR6b, was in use as a golf course (North Oxford Golf Course). Consequently, in the same Partial Review, the EXOq site (referred to there as PR6c) was *retained* within the Green Belt, and reserved for potential use as a replacement golf course. That remains the situation today.

The applicant claims that a replacement golf course is not needed, and proposes that PR6c is used instead for creating the Innovation District EXOq. This would clearly be a mis-use of Green Belt land. It would therefore require PR6c being removed from the Green Belt. We would strongly object to that. With all the other local developments planned for this area in the CDC Local Plan, PR6c (together with the adjacent Stratfield Brake) really will become the only surviving green space separating Oxford City from the town of Kidlington. Hence its removal would drastically change the character of the northern extremity of Oxford City, where all our residents are located. Moreover, this site could not be removed from the Green

Belt without violating the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF latest version, para. 145) which requires that Green Belt boundaries can be altered only where “..exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified..”. This planning application does not provide any evidence or justification for removing site PR6c from the Green Belt.

The case for withholding planning permission is especially strong because of the nature of the development proposed. Whereas the exceptional circumstances justifying removal of PR6b from the Green Belt was the requirement to meet an urgent need for 4400 more homes, the use of PR6c for EXOq would create 7100 new employees needing homes, and thereby greatly *worsen* the problem of shortage of homes, that the removal of PR6b from the Green Belt was originally intended to help solve.

## **2. Impact on local roads**

We are very concerned about the adverse impact of this development on local roads, especially on Frieze Way, which runs between the proposed eastern and western portions of the EXOq site, linking Loop Farm roundabout to Kidlington roundabout. Consolidating data from this planning application 26/00720/OUT (Land at Frieze Farm, EXOq) and the already approved application 24/00539/F (the adjacent OUFC football stadium) it is clear that the combined effect of both developments would be a significant increase in traffic, a slowing of traffic by the inclusion of multiple new road junctions, and increased air pollution from vehicles. This is demonstrated by considering all the new highway features being proposed for Frieze Way.

Travelling from Loop Farm roundabout to the Kidlington roundabout a driver would encounter:

- 1) The left-in access to EXOq western portion.
- 2) Bus drivers slowing to access the bus stop.
- 3) Signalised junction providing vehicular access into and out of the eastern portion of EXOq, with a toucan pedestrian crossing (the only way for those arriving by car or train to cross from the EXOq car park/Parkway station to the main (western) portion of the site).
- 4) Vehicles exiting the EXOq western portion from the left-only exit.
- 5) The new toucan pedestrian crossing for the stadium.
- 6) The entry and exit to Stratfield Brake sports ground.
- 7) The crossing for cycles near the roundabout.

Travelling from the Kidlington roundabout to Loop Farm roundabout a driver would encounter:

- 1) The cycle crossing across Frieze Way.
- 2) The toucan pedestrian crossing for the stadium.
- 3) The left-in access and then left-out exit from the stadium.
- 4) The restricted vehicle access at EXOq for the blue light facility.
- 5) The toucan crossing and signalised junction providing vehicular access into the eastern portion of EXOq.
- 6) Bus drivers slowing to access the bus stop.

EXOq and the stadium together would cause the amount of traffic accessing Frieze Way to increase substantially. The EXOq car park would provide 1700 spaces, and also there would

be 100 further parking bays on the western portion of the EXOq site. In addition, the stadium will provide 161 car parking bays. Hence there would be up to 1961 vehicles parked next to Frieze Way, and entering and exiting each day: potentially nearly 4000 movements a day.

Traffic can be expected to back up along Frieze Way heading towards the Loop Farm roundabout and onto the A44 leading to the Peartree roundabout, which is already busy at peak times. Air pollution from traffic would impact cyclists on the improved cycle routes. Travelling in the opposite direction, tail-backs on Frieze Way would impact the Kidlington roundabout and access to the Banbury Road, also providing increased air pollution.

A further potential problem is that the nearby A34 is widely recognised to be over-capacity, with notoriously frequent hold-ups and traffic queues caused by even minor accidents. With its proximity to A34 junctions at Peartree and Kidlington, Frieze Way often acts as an escape route for traffic held up on the A34. This will add to the congestion on Frieze Way.

Travel along Oxford Road will be slower because of the additional toucan crossing required by employees at EXOq arriving or leaving via Oxford Parkway; plans for an underpass having been scrapped. This will adversely affect journeys for residents of our area, between Kidlington and Cutteslowe roundabouts.

### **3. Impact on local surface water**

The Environment Agency have issued a warning that the EXOq site must not allow surface water to penetrate the ground, because of concern about potential water contamination, since the proposed EXOq site is a historical waste disposal site. In the application as submitted, the proposal is to use permeable SUDS ground coverings. This will clearly be unsatisfactory in the circumstances, and impermeable surfaces will be required. The application is therefore unacceptable, as it does not demonstrate how the resulting water run-off from the site will be controlled. We are concerned about the possibility of flooding being caused, that could impinge on the area that we represent, especially at Peartree.

### **4. Noise pollution**

Experience from the installation of large data centres in the USA is that the white noise they generate can be a severe nuisance to residents living nearby. The EXOq application proposes a large data centre in the eastern portion of the site. This will be located within only 500m of housing units on the EXOq site, and many hotel rooms (a) on the EXOq site, (b) at the stadium, and (c) at Peartree. From the USA experience, these sites could all be badly affected by the white noise nuisance generated by plant in the data centre. A notable feature of the application is that it does not address at all the impact that the persistent and very distinctive low frequency white noise from the data centre would have on people and wildlife near the site.

The planning application includes implausible claims that additional noise generated will not be significant. These are very speculative and cannot be trusted, since details of the equipment to be housed in the data centre are not yet decided.

## **Conclusion**

**For all the reasons given above, approval of this planning application would be seriously detrimental to the many residents that we represent. We therefore object strongly to it being approved.**

From Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum Steering Committee:

Paul Buckley (Chair), Mary Brown, Elaine Chaston, Tony Dale, Christopher Dawkins, Judith Haverty, Katherine Kaye, Richard Lawrence-Wilson, Andrew Leadbitter, David Stone.

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