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BLACKTHORN PARISH COUNCIL

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SCANNED

Bob Duxbury
Case Officer
Cherwell District Council
Development Control & Major Projects
Bodicote House, Bodicote
Banbury, Oxfordshire
OX15 4AA

Dear Mr Duxbury

Ref: Planning Application 08/02511/F Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) – Piddington

As a consultee and affected parish, we write in response to the referenced planning application. **Blackthorn Parish Council (BPC) formally object to the application** and make the following observations;

1. **Traffic & Transport: Impact of additional (and potentially speeding) traffic through Blackthorn** – traffic speed and load through Blackthorn have been problematic for many years, a situation that the Highways Agency, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and Cherwell District Council (CDC) are well aware of, yet neither agency to date has supported the village in its endeavours to stem such problems.

Blackthorn will undoubtedly be used as a “rat-run” by construction, operational staff, visitor and support service generated traffic. This additional burden, which is not appropriately considered in the application (particularly when considering the likely employment catchment relative to Oxfordshire demands as a whole and limitations of “paper policies” such as the green travel plan and staff transport policies referenced) will lead to saturation of the simple, rural road network through Blackthorn, particularly Station Road.

The additional information (WSP traffic report) subsequently issued on behalf of UKBA acknowledges the negative impact that such a development will

impart in traffic terms, to the point that a commercial bond is proposed. We not only question the robustness of the report (as there seems to be a reliance on **vague assumptions of staff sourcing and related travel arrangements**, most of which are unenforceable) in its forecasting of additional traffic loading but suggest that the time delayed commercial bond is in itself recognition of problems yet to be realised. Should such a major development be granted planning permission, both **active and passive traffic calming and re-routing measures should be implemented before operational commencement of the facility.**

Significant numbers of staff (and one assumes legal & social visitors) **vehicular movements** (upto 187 between the hours of 9-10pm) are envisaged across day and night periods (we note the specific avoidance of the term “night/ nighttime” in the application) none of which can be appropriately controlled by UKBA through the measures proposed ie, staff shuttle buses, traffic routing policy and the travel plan, neither of which are proposed for example, to be actively monitored through continued use of number plate recognition cameras through the operational phase to test the effect of such passive policies and UKBA’s **commitment to sustainable rural communities.**

We draw your attention to Policy T8 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan (see pg 2 of the Travel Plan) which states that “**Proposals for development should be permitted only if they provide adequate access and mitigation of adverse transport impacts**”. We are of the opinion that scant regard has been paid to the concerns raised by the parish council during the fragmented consultation to date (this also includes similar concerns across Lower Rd). BPC seek the belated support of OCC, CDC and Highways Agency following years of heightened concern which will only be exacerbated should this development be approved without further commitment to mitigating measures.

Page 58, 6.13.2. of the Transport Assessment suggests that only 15 additional vehicles/ hour (from a total of 1,182 new journeys) will be routed through Blackthorn and that no capacity problems have been observed. We find this statement most disturbing, as the assumptions used to assimilate such data output (staff sourcing, operational hours & patterns, success of travel plan, traffic problems on A41, staff adherence to travel policy/plan, etc) are unsound and unproven, to the point that detailed operational policy is not included in the application or supporting documents. Any reasonable person would also conclude that the **narrow carriageway within the 30mph zone of Station Road does represent a capacity problem**, particularly when considering residents parked cars on either side, the entrance & exit from Harlan Industries which regularly receives articulated vehicles (supposedly limited to 7.5t) and **continued lack of speed awareness of a high proportion of road users** (approximately 50% according to a 2008 survey commissioned on behalf of BPC. Additionally, a high proportion of Station Road users are generated by HMP Bullingdon presently, a point which has been recognised by OCC representatives) which can be validated by our Community Police Officer, WPC Caroline Brown.

Obvious safety concerns abound in this regard when considering the realistic (over theoretical) scenario Blackthorn will be faced with from additional traffic generated by the IRC. Added to this, **Blackthorn allotments** (a much loved community and

family resource) are situated along the western side of Station Road, requiring regular crossing of the road at that point by tenant families (including elderly and toddler family members). Additional traffic flow and the probable related speeding, will **increase the potential risk of personal injury or even worse, fatality at this crossing**, a point that has been brought to the attention of both OCC and CDC for some years now in the hope of support to calm traffic along Station Rd. We hope, following many years of campaigning including at District Councillor level, that all stakeholders to this application recognise the increased risk of harm to residents should the application be granted permission without a **condition to mitigate this concern prior to operational commencement**.

Inconsistencies in the approach adopted for traffic matters across the application are manifold including reference to the HMP Bullingdon Travel Plan, a suggested "blue print" in this context however this document refers to a **high percentage of single occupancy car drivers**. Further, in IRC Travel Plan page 1, 1.2.4 cost savings, it is suggested that "..... **Bullingdon is not in an ideal location forreducing vehicular transport....**". Also, at pg40 Table 5.18 of Transport Assessment, it states that **18.48% of HMP Bullingdon employees come from locations likely to use Blackthorn as a rat run** (Aylesbury, Marsh Gibbon and Buckingham) and it is clear that the proposal suggests an even higher percentage in aggregate would use this rat-run, we question again therefore the robustness of the traffic analysis in its conclusion that no mitigation measures are required.

Further inconsistency follows when considering traffic impact during the proposed construction phase, which is not clearly articulated through a detailed construction phase method statement (we would have expected to see such a detailed control strategy in place for such a major scheme). It is suggested that construction traffic will be routed away from villages but the community consultation states that "**.....it is not possible to dictate to staff which way they travel to work**", this being the case it suggests that UKBA are unable to accurately forecast traffic impact (both for sub-contractors and staff) through neighbouring communities as **active management of development and operational traffic is not committed to**.

Concern is raised regarding the operational policy of the IRC (which is not included as a full detailed document in the supporting information) particularly in this context with reference to shift patterns, social visit timings, professional and support visits and delivery requirements. It is clear that the IRC will generate considerable movements throughout every 24 hour period, the impact of which (noise, vibration, congestion, hazard etc) together with that already observed (generated by HMP Bullingdon) has not been appropriately considered by the application in its effect on a hamlet community, that bounds (to back of pavement line in most cases) the 4 core rural roads within the village.

Whilst supporting documentation recognises that employment is likely to come from Aylesbury, Banbury and Oxford as well as Bicester, the **realities of competitive tension in the employment market** were discussed during the private consultation between BPC and UKBA, particularly that Oxford's general "drain" on the employment pool will manifest itself in the main, in staff being recruited from the east of Bicester and further afield **where a reliance on travel by car will be evident regardless of employer sponsored transport**.

Reference to public transport has been made across the application, however **lack of simple checks on service type, route and frequency** (for example, suggesting that regular services run from/to Bicester Town Rail Station and incorrectly referencing bus routes) shows an appallingly lazy approach taken for a development of such magnitude and sensitivity for local communities. This approach is further evidenced by a **lack of partnership proposals with transport providers** such as Chiltern Rail or Stagecoach, again **demonstrating the lack of commitment by UKBA in alleviating the very real impact of such a large scale development on neighbouring rural communities who wish to retain their identity.**

The proposal is precise in its avoidance of committing to any effective traffic calming or re-routing measures. We feel that the traffic survey and analysis has been conducted with a pre-determined conclusion and without any real consideration of life in Blackthorn in the context of traffic. The application is void of simple solutions such as active and continuous speed monitoring, signage, traffic calming at key junctions or indeed *grasping the challenge* of consideration of traffic assistance at the junction of A41/ B4011, which is the key facilitator of appropriate traffic management for such a development. This is all indeed very disappointing, particularly as this is a scheme ultimately funded by the taxpayer.

For the above reasons, BPC object to the application in the context of insufficient provisions made to mitigate traffic impact across Blackthorn.

2. Drainage & Flood Management: Impact upon neighbouring designated flood areas –Local stakeholders are well aware of the regular surface water flooding that takes place across the affected neighbouring areas, due to the current **priority treatment of such flood waters across the River Ray and its tributaries**, through adjacent villages and across to Islip and beyond. The application is very generalised in its approach to both foul and surface water treatment and can not therefore be used to determine the impact of such a large scale facility in this context alone.

Whilst the development site is itself outside of the Environment Agency Flood Risk area, the implications of the development may amongst other things **effect the water table and thus spread the flood effect further**, particularly when considering the large footprint of the facility, effectiveness and capacity of roof drainage and the area to be paved/ covered for a car park of 300 spaces. Previous or current trial bore holes suggest that the water table is at a relatively high level across areas of the proposed site with observations of wet/saturated bore holes also.

Page 12 4.9 of the supporting documentation suggests that that **no public storm sewers are known to exist on or around the site and current drainage is via a ditch on B4011**, towards the River Ray. As local residents know, the surface water ditch system is ineffective and is already at capacity through wet months, which are increasing in number across the year (particularly when considering recent inclement weather observations across 2007/8). Insufficient detail is supplied with the application (particularly north of the site) and commitment to drainage design is not evident on this most sensitive of issues for local residents.

As for traffic impact, serious and very real drainage issues have not been given the respect that they demand. An opportunity exists, should this application be approved to **consider the whole surface water drainage network holistically** to ensure that storm water discharge and overflow is treated appropriately not only for the proposed site but also neighbouring communities who are now at heightened risk of flooding through this application.

For the above reasons, BPC object to the application in the context of insufficient provisions made for treatment of drainage and consideration of flood impact upon Blackthorn.

3 Operational Policy for IRC and Contingency Plans – insufficient detail has been provided through the application regarding the complete operation of the facility. We are **unable to visualise the “removal pathway”** from immigrant identification, through transfer to the IRC, case review, detention and daily programme, humanitarian governance, care access, family treatment, religious and culture specific support, legal representation through to removal etc and indeed related operational and staffing response to such needs (hours of operation etc).

We have sought to understand such issues for some time however sufficient details have not been forthcoming to enable an assessment to be made of the impact of such operations or for that matter, **whether such operations are compatible with applicable relevant human rights policy.**

Whilst outline shift patterns have been suggested the detailed specification for operational management of the facility, particularly **security** have not been issued (a specific request at the closed meeting between BPC & UKBA. We also note that the IRC is a category B facility however the perimeter fence is compliant to category C).

BPC raised the issue of the **recent escapes from the Campsfield Centre** and sought to understand how such occurrences could be avoided at the planned IRC. The response given (the Campsfield building is an old and refurbished centre....) was not satisfactory and to suggest that the condition of the facility was the root cause of the escape is simplistic and rather concerning if accurate. The robustness of the operational policy that the eventual Operator will comply with is at the core of such issues, and **lack of a contingency plan** (*for emergency matters such as escape, energy failure, death, viral pandemics etc*) is not helpful to affected communities who must understand how such facilities are operated before any level of comfort and support to such an application can be given.

BPC believe that such policy documentation should be produced and consulted upon before any consideration can be given to the application.

For the above reasons, BPC object to the application in the context of Operational Policy & Contingency Plans.

4. Proposed IRC Facility: Massing & Scale – the application presents a building of significant scale for the rural communities close by. Efficiency of the building

footprint relative to planned occupant numbers at full capacity manifests itself in a building that is some 16m high, visually buffered from neighbouring communities by an ambitious landscaping proposal.

The full effect of such a landscaping proposal will not be realised for many years, indeed **some of the species referenced may take up to a decade to mature**. Viewing cones/ sight lines from neighbouring rural communities indicate a significant visual impact for many miles and it is our opinion that reliance upon eventual landscape masking is insufficient for such a facility. It should be noted that the proposed height of 16m would be visible from approximately 2nd floor level of residential homes in Blackthorn.

The neighbouring rural communities have quietly enjoyed an unbroken and very natural landscape for over a thousand years, for this to be fragmented by a facility of such magnitude for a considerable period is unacceptable and indeed rides the edge of related policy. Given the extent of the land relating directly to and that adjoining the proposal, we believe that a building massing **“options appraisal” would be prudent** to consider amongst others things, reduction in storey height of the facility.

For the above reasons, BPC object to the application in the context of Building Massing & Scale and related impact upon Blackthorn.

5. Facility Lighting – whilst considerable concern is voiced over the building massing/ height proposed by the application, such concern is only exacerbated when considering the associated internal and external lighting which will be used throughout the night. Supporting documents focus on directional lighting however the Lighting Assessment Report, (which assesses a *“possible environmental impact”*) makes the following observations;

Page4, 3.1 *Location is a former Military Supply Depot, which up to several years ago had an extensive, if low level power installation* – it should be noted that the referenced facility has not been used for many years and such reference cannot be used to determine acceptance by neighbouring communities.

Page 6 3.6.2 *The wider view to the North (Blackthorn) is dark so any lighting in close proximity will impact more particularly if located on the north side of the development* – this clearly suggested the dramatic change that will be observed by Blackthorn residents.

Page 7 4.2 *All site lighting not to be switched off until 10pm* - exercise yards which face north towards Blackthorn will also be lit through evening hours including during winter will the real potential for significant levels of light pollution regardless of directional lighting (this is referenced in the conclusion to the report also).

Pg7 4.6 *Light columns on roadway at 6m and lights mounted on buildings at 8m height* – the perimeter security fencing is only at a height of 5.2m so all lighting will be visible above fencing.

For the above reasons, BPC object to the application in the context of Lighting & related light pollution upon Blackthorn.

6. Biodiversity & Conservations – based upon the appended reports residents of Blackthorn demand that the most mature of trees are retained to the north of the site to ensure that such minimal protection is maintained should approval be granted.

We note from the landscape report that should related mitigation plans not be implemented **the following would be subject to negative impacts; hedgerows, semi-improved neutral grassland, great crested newts, breeding birds, bats and invertebrates.** We do not believe that the plans suggested, appropriately protect such flora and fauna (particularly the species rich hedge), some of which are highly sensitive issues in the struggle between conservation and development.

For the above reasons, BPC object to the application in the context of provisions for the maintenance and protection of biodiversity and conservation.

7 Inconsistencies & quality of application and Conclusion: we feel, as stated earlier in our objection that the application is riddled with inconsistencies (distance from neighbouring towns, travel frequency & mode, prison references, staff numbers, operational hours, road references, village references, etc) and that the overall quality of the submitted documentation is below the level that one would expect for such a significant, publically funded scheme that is obviously contentious for local communities and one with significant and painful history.

The lack of depth of supporting information and clarity regarding impact mitigating proposals does not assist evaluation of the scheme and only **suggests a lack of commitment to neighbouring communities by UKBA and The Home Office.** The poor quality of the application can be characterised by the Community Consultation report which **remains dismissive of genuine concerns raised and is unreflective of the fragmented consultation undertaken to date.** BPC's particular concerns raised across the consultation (be those through closed sessions, open days, site visits etc) have not been fully recorded or addressed to our satisfaction and we **remain unconvinced of the feasibility of this proposal** when considering the conflicting objectives of immigration policy in practice and modern, rural community and space.

For and on behalf of Blackthorn Parish Council

Mr Adds Arshad
Chairman

CC: BPC & Clerk