

PLANNING COMMITTEE COVERING REPORT			26/01833/CROWN
Case Officer:	Rob Duckworth		
Applicant:	Home Office (application made to the Secretary of State/MHCLG under the Urgent Crown Development procedure)		
Proposal:	Full planning permission for the temporary change of use of the former Defence Storage & Distribution Centre site (MOD Bicester A-site) in connection with the phased provision of non-detained asylum accommodation; retention and change of use of Building A6; demolition; new modular accommodation; associated health and welfare facilities, infrastructure, wastewater treatment plant, roads, access ways, security infrastructure, parking, staff facilities, open space and recreation, for up to 1,256 service users.		
Ward:	Launton and Otmoor		
Ward Members:	Councillors Dr Timothy Faltermeyer, Julian Nedelcu and Alisa Russell		
Reason for Referral:	To enable Planning Committee to consider and comment on the issues raised by the proposal and inform the Council's formal consultation response. Cherwell District Council is not the determining authority.		
MHCLG timetable:	Representation period set by MHCLG	Committee date:	16 September 2026

MOD BICESTER SITE A – URGENT CROWN DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION

Covering report published with the agenda on 8 September 2026

1. PURPOSE AND STATUS OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1** This report places the application before Planning Committee so that Members can consider and comment on the planning issues raised and inform Cherwell District Council's formal consultation response to the Secretary of State.
- 1.2** The Committee is not determining the planning application and is not being asked to grant or refuse planning permission. The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government is the determining authority. The Council's role is that of a local planning authority consultee.
- 1.3** A detailed planning assessment will be published as Appendix 1 on 11 September 2026, in advance of the Committee meeting on 16 September 2026. Members should read this covering report and Appendix 1 together.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** That **Planning Committee considers and comments** on the issues raised by the proposed development, having regard to this covering report and the detailed planning assessment to be published as Appendix 1.
- 2.2** That authority be **delegated to the Assistant Director - Planning, in consultation with the Chair or Vice-Chair of Planning Committee**, to finalise and submit Cherwell District Council's

formal planning consultation response to the Secretary of State / MHCLG by 17 September 2026 having regard to the committee's observations and any internal consultation responses received.

3. APPLICATION AND STATUTORY PROCESS

- 3.1** The Home Office seeks full planning permission for a temporary ten-year use of part of MOD Bicester Site A for phased, non-detained asylum accommodation for up to 1,256 service users, together with retained and new buildings, health and welfare facilities, transport and security infrastructure, wastewater treatment, parking, open space and recreation.
- 3.2** The Secretary of State accepted the application on 2 September 2026 as nationally important development required urgently. It is therefore being processed under the Urgent Crown Development provisions in sections 293B and 293C of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The accelerated procedure changes the decision-maker and timetable, but it does not remove the need for a planning assessment against the development plan, national policy and other material considerations.
- 3.3** The Secretary of State's screening direction dated 26 August 2026 concluded that the proposal is not environmental impact assessment (EIA) development. That procedural position is acknowledged for the purposes of the Council's response. Appendix 1 will identify any points on which the Council should request clarification of the screening reasoning or underlying evidence; this is not proposed as a stand-alone ground of objection.

4. REPORTING TIMETABLE

- 4.1** The application was accepted under the urgent procedure shortly before the Council's agenda publication deadline. The submission is substantial and the Council will also allow its planning, highways, environmental, community-safety, health, legal and other internal observations, together with external consultee advice, to be considered before its response is finalised.
- 4.2** This covering report is therefore published with the agenda on 8 September 2026. The detailed assessment was not reasonably available at the point of agenda publication because the application documents and consultation responses are still being reviewed within the compressed timetable set by MHCLG. Appendix 1 will be published as soon as practicable, on 11 September 2026, with the reason for its later circulation recorded.
- 4.3** This approach enables the item to remain on the 16 September 2026 agenda while providing Members and the public with the full officer analysis before the meeting. Delegated authority is required so that any late technical advice or clarification can be reflected accurately in the Council's submission within MHCLG's representation timetable.

5. EMERGING DIRECTION OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

- 5.1** On the information presently available, the emerging officer position is that the Council is likely to raise an objection or holding objection unless the identified evidential gaps and planning effects are satisfactorily resolved. The final wording and status of the response will be set out in Appendix 1 and informed by the Committee's debate and outstanding internal consultation advice.
- 5.2** The assessment will give appropriate weight to the asserted urgent national need, the reuse of previously developed defence land and the potential advantages of a managed, purpose-specific facility. Those considerations must be balanced against the site-specific impacts and the need for necessary infrastructure, services and mitigation to be demonstrably deliverable.

The principal matters currently requiring examination are:

- **Principle and procedure:** the planning balance, the justification for use of the Urgent Crown Development route and the basis of the EIA screening direction.
- **Access and transport:** the isolated rural location, highway and pedestrian safety, construction and operational movements, and enforceable staff and service-user transport arrangements.
- **Local communities and services:** the relationship with Piddington and Upper Arncott; the scale of the proposed population relative to the nearby rural settlements; the pattern of movements away from the site into local communities; effects on local amenity, public spaces and community facilities; the ability of the surrounding settlements to absorb additional needs (despite the self-sustainable aspect of the proposals); and arrangements for community-liaison
- **Water and environment:** foul and surface-water drainage, flood risk, the proposed wastewater treatment system, potential hydrological effects on Arncott Bridge Meadows SSSI, ecology, protected species, trees and biodiversity net gain.
- **Amenity, safety, and infrastructure:** noise, air quality, lighting, utilities and site security design, overhead high-voltage power lines, fire and emergency access, contamination and unexploded-ordnance risk.
- **Application clarity and controls:** inconsistencies in the submitted parameters and the need for enforceable phasing, occupancy, duration, restoration, management, transport and mitigation requirements.

5.3 The response will remain focused on material planning considerations and objective evidence. It will not rely on the nationality, religion, sex or immigration status of prospective occupiers, generalised fear, or the number of expressions of opposition. Legitimate land-use effects on nearby communities and services will, however, be assessed fully and proportionately.

6. APPENDIX 1 TO FOLLOW AND NEXT STEPS

6.1 Appendix 1 will contain the detailed planning analysis; an update on consultation responses; the emerging planning balance and proposed consultation response; and reference to the Leader's letter dated 29 July 2026 insofar as it provides relevant background or raises material planning matters. It will identify clearly the concerns, information requirements, mitigation and any requested conditions to be raised with MHCLG.

6.2 Following the Committee meeting, officers will finalise the Council's response in accordance with the Committee's resolution and the delegation at paragraph 2.2, and submit it to the Secretary of State/MHCLG within the prescribed timetable (17th September 2026).

7. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- **Legal and procedural:** the Secretary of State is the decision-maker. The Council must confine its formal response to material planning considerations and comply with its public-sector equality and human-rights duties. Democratic and Legal Services should confirm the late-appendix arrangements before publication.
- **Risk:** the accelerated timetable and outstanding evidence create a risk that the Council's response could be incomplete. Publication of Appendix 1 before the meeting and the limited delegation in paragraph 2.2 are intended to manage that risk.

- **Financial and service implications:** no planning decision is made by this report. Potential infrastructure, service and mitigation implications arising from the proposal will be addressed in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1: Detailed Planning Assessment and Draft Consultation Response – to follow on 11 September 2026