

**South Area  
Planning Committee**

**14 February 2002**

01/00662/OUT

**Begbroke - Begbroke Business And Science Park Sandy Lane  
Yarnton**

28.03.01

**Proposed new research buildings (long term phase of site  
development)**

For : University Of Oxford c/o P M R Hill MA MICE Surveyor To The  
University The Malthouse Tidmarsh Lane Oxford OX1 1NQ

**RECOMMENDATION :**

**Approval**, subject to :

- (i) The finalised comments of Oxfordshire County Council as strategic planning authority
- (ii) A legal agreement concerning the implementation of a green travel plan and off-site highway improvements and to restrict the "business" floorspace to a maximum of 20% with appropriate controls over occupancy
- (iii) Departure procedures, and
- (iv) The following conditions:-
  - 1 That no development shall be started until full details of the design, layout and external appearance of all buildings and landscaping of the site (hereafter referred to as the reserved matters) have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Reason - This permission is in outline only and is granted to comply with the provisions of Section 92 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Article 3(1) of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995.
  - 2 1.1 Outline:Duration Limit RM (RC1)
  - 3 1.2 Outline:Dur Limit Start Dev (RC1)
  - 4 That the proposed development shall be constructed as single or two-storey buildings only. Reason - To ensure that the proposed development is in scale and harmony with its neighbours and surroundings.
  - 5 The buildings on this site scheduled for demolition shall be demolished in accordance with a phased scheme to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of any development on the site. Reason - In order to achieve a satisfactory form of

- development and to ensure that the site is not overdeveloped.
- 6 2.15 Floor Area Limit Outline (RC8) - 21,067 square metres
  - 7 3.5 Presrv and Protect Ex Trees (RC10)
  - 8 That the phasing of the advanced planting shall be begun not later than the expiration of five years beginning with the date of this consent. Reason - In the interests of the visual amenities of the area, to provide an effective screen to the proposed development.
  - 9 That prior to the commencement of development of that floorspace over and above that allowed by 01/00664/OUT the new roadway approved under 01/01872/OUT shall be constructed and be available for use. Reason - In the interests of highway safety and to ensure a satisfactory standard of construction and layout for the development.
  - 10 That upon the opening of the roadway required under Condition 9 above the existing access onto Sandy Lane shall be stopped up in accordance with details to be first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority so as to prevent its use by motorised traffic. Reason - In the interests of highway safety.
  - 11 Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a detailed scheme for the surface water and foul sewage drainage of the development shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme which shall be completed before the development is first used or occupied. Reason - To ensure satisfactory drainage of the site in the interests of public health and to avoid flooding of adjacent land and property.
  - 12 6.15 Use Class (Specified) (RC40) - B1 and D1(c) only
  - 13 That prior to the commencement of development a Green Travel Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out and operated in accordance with the approved plan at all times thereafter. Reason - To accord with recent Government policy aimed at reducing travel by the private car.
  - 14 That full design details of the proposed lighting arrangements shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details. Reason - To ensure the satisfactory appearance of the completed development.
  - 15 That full design details of the proposed fencing arrangements shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development. The development shall be carried out in

accordance with the approved details. Reason - To ensure the satisfactory appearance of the completed development.

### CONSULTATIONS/REPRESENTATIONS

The comments of the County Council as strategic planning authority are awaited. It is understood that provided they are satisfied with the very special circumstances case made (in particular the assessment of why alternative sites are not satisfactory) that they will raise no objections to the proposal despite its position in the Green Belt, and subject to a satisfactory green travel plan being negotiated.

As Highway Authority the County Council comments as follows:-

The applicant submitted a Transport Assessment and a draft Green Travel Plan for the site. They carried out a traffic survey of the existing traffic generated to the site and then predicted the traffic generation for the development stages based on pro-rata the floor area. They then applied a reduction factor of 20% in car trips to represent a realistic target reduction required by a Travel Plan. These are shown in column 3 in the table below.

am Pk	Floor area GFA	No. Vehs in am Pk Hr based on existing	No. Vehs in Hour assuming B1
Current	6,500 sqm	50	122
Interim Phase	12,148 sqm	80 @	227
Final Phase	21,236 sqm	144 @	388

@ = predicted assuming pro-rata against floor area with reduction factor

The applicant tested the predicted vehicle generation in the peak hour factored on the floor area against that predicted assuming general B1 use and this is shown in column 4.

A traffic survey was carried out in Sandy Lane in December 2000 which recorded 1187 vehicles in 18 hrs with a peak flow of 201 vehicles in the period 8.00 to 9.00 a.m.. The maximum number of vehicles on site at any one time was 91 which

occurred in the period 15.00-16.00 hours and the car parking capacity of the site is 140 spaces.

It is acknowledged that the width of Sandy Lane is below modern standards and the alignment is poor. As part of the housing development on the opposite side of the road a footway is being constructed along Sandy Lane to the A44.

The applicant proposes that a new access would be constructed for the final phase of the development and the existing access used for the interim phase.

There is an issue that the access would be on Green Belt land and may encourage further development which is undesirable. There is therefore a balance to be struck between resisting the use of the Green Belt for the road and minimising the impact of the development on Sandy Lane.

In view of the relatively modest increase predicted during the interim phase it is considered that use of the existing access would be appropriate. However there is a risk that the traffic generation will be higher than predicted and this is indicated by column 4 in the above table.

It is therefore recommended that if planning permission is granted it should be on the condition that if the peak hour generation to the site during the interim development exceeds 80 vehicles (including cars delivery, mini buses etc) averaged over any one working week then the applicant will be required to construct the new access road ahead of the long term phase.

The development is predicted to have a relatively low traffic generation which implies that staff and visitors will use public transport. The public transport accessibility to the site is not good. There is a regular bus service along the A44 but it is very difficult to cross the A44 from the bus stop. In order to improve this it is recommended that the applicant be required to provide a signalised crossing of the A44 near Springhill roundabout.

The applicant is prepared to construct a cycle link between Yarnton and Kidlington via Sandy Lane and the existing access road as part of the interim scheme. Cycle and pedestrian facilities would be provided along the new access road in the final phase. Where a footway can be

constructed on the applicants' land or highway land there should be a requirement to construct a footway along or parallel to Sandy Lane. This would certainly include a footway from opposite the termination point of the footway currently being constructed for the new housing development to the access to the applicants' site. This should be included in a section 106 agreement.

The requirement for a travel plan should be a requirement of a section 106 agreement and for the final phase there should be requirement for a contribution to improved public transport facilities including bus and train.

Summary of requirements for a section 106 agreement.

Phase 1

Footway and cycle way construction

Signalised pedestrian crossing of the A44 near Springhill Roundabout

Monitoring of peak hour traffic with requirement to construct new access road if traffic exceeds specified limit

Travel Plan

Final Phase

Contribution to public transport facilities

Travel plan

Footway and cycle way construction integral with new access

Begbroke Parish Council initially raised no objections to the interim or long-term phase of the proposals but then commented in October with regards to the road application (see 01/01872/OUT which follows):-

1. The Parish Council were invited by the University of Oxford to a presentation of the two previous applications Nos 01/00662/OUT and 01/00664/OUT. The proposed scheme of landscaping and the upgrading of the existing buildings was explained. Particular emphasis was placed on the fact that the University intended to keep the traffic flow to the site to a minimum. This is to be

achieved by restricting parking spaces, providing a mini bus to take staff in and out of Oxford and a willingness to support the proposed reopening of Kidlington station. The University are very anxious to minimise the use of the private car. Therefore, we cannot see the need for a new road based on the traffic flow to and from the University site. The proposed road would require the University to purchase green belt land for building.

2. The road if built would be undesirable development in the Green Belt.
3. There is no evidence of increase in traffic due to the long term proposed development as set out in the previous applications. As stated above, the University intend to keep traffic flow to a minimum.
4. The proposed new road would create more traffic on the A44 and Begbroke Roundabout.
5. Permission was granted for the new road, there is no guarantee that the amount of traffic would not increase if the site were sold at a later date.
6. The access from the A44 would create hazards for drivers using the A44 southbound.

The Parish Council feel very strongly that the University are being penalised for the Bellway Housing Development in Sandy Lane. This development should not have been given approval before Sandy Lane had been up-graded to take the increase of traffic such a development was bound to create.

The Parish Council wish to see this application refused."

and more recently:-

"We are extremely concerned about the safety of the proposed junction, bearing in mind the A44 is a dual carriageway and major trunk road with an unrestricted speed limit. The stretch of road between Begbroke roundabout and the Sandy Lane roundabout is very fast and the Council are concerned that traffic entering or leaving the junction would be a danger to those using the A44 with an unrestricted speed limit. There is mention in the application on page 62 item 7.3.2 of a walkway and kerbing or pelican crossing at the point of the proposed new road which the Parish Council feel would be extremely dangerous for any pedestrian using it.

If planning permission is granted it is essential that the whole stretch of dual carriageway from Langford Lane to the Cassington Road roundabout have a restricted speed limit which must be policed by cameras in order that traffic has slowed to a safe speed at the proposed new junction.

Under page 55 item 5.2.3. item 2, there is mention that Yarnton Nurseries Garden Centre may be allowed access to their site from the proposed new road. Should this be the case, the amount of traffic would significantly increase from that reported in the application. The Parish Council are extremely concerned that the residents of Begbroke would have serious problems gaining access to the roundabout at peak times due to the amount of traffic on the roundabout generated by the proposed new road. It must be pointed out that the roundabout is the only point of entry and exit into the village for **all** residents.

Now that the Stagecoach I inquiry is complete and permission granted for their new bus depot at Langford Locks, and bearing in mind that they have been advised to use the A44 rather than Kidlington, this will also put added traffic pressure on the A44.

At no point in the information given with the application is there any forecast of when the proposed road may be built should permission be granted.

The Transport Assessment does not indicate that the University will generate a substantial increase in traffic movements should they be given permission to develop the site. The Council therefore feel there are no grounds for providing an alternative route.

It is noted that in the application there is no mention of the new footpath which has been built in Sandy Lane to the new housing development. It should be noted that this footpath could be extended on the other side of the road to the University site as the land belongs to them.

In view of the above the Council feel the application for a new road should be refused and object strongly to the application."

Yarnton Parish Council ask if the contractors' access could be from

the A44 across the allotments rather than via Sandy Lane as during the Bellway Homes construction the road has been blocked and disrupted with damage to the road surface and verges. With respect to the new road they believe it would create a hazard for drivers travelling southbound on the A44. They consider that for safety reasons and to prevent additional use of the Begbroke roundabout that traffic lights or a new roundabout should be installed at the proposed new junction. They ask if access to the new road could be given for Yarnton Nurseries as this would ease traffic flows in Sandy Lane.

Kidlington Parish Council did not object to either the interim or long-term proposals providing that the following points are taken into account.

- Concern on the amount of staff and visitors travelling to and from the site.
- Concern of generation of traffic on the narrow Sandy Lane over the railway crossing and canal bridge into Kidlington
- There is no public transport to the site. Pedestrian and cycle safety is a major concern. There are no foot or cycle paths in Sandy Lane.
- That a green travel plan be implemented with contributions to the proposed railway station and cycle/pedestrian routes to the site.

More recently they have commented that they welcome and encourage use of the university mini-bus, commitment to cycling and walking and employing locally based people. They express some concern about the new road in the Green Belt, however improvements to Sandy Lane through reductions in traffic to the site may provide the planning gain and special circumstances. They wish to see a limit on development to the long-term size.

The County Archaeologist reports that field evaluation has been undertaken at the applicants' expense of the main application site and that this has been successful in determining that the proposed development area does not contain significant surviving archaeological remains and that no further investigation is required. They do, however, request a "watching brief" condition on the new roadway.

The Council's Chief Engineer raises no objections but notes that the

road may cross a public sewer and that consultation with Thames Water is therefore necessary.

Thames Water Utilities raises no objections to either application.

The Environment Agency makes no comment on any of the applications.

English Nature does not consider that the proposal will have an impact on Rushy Meadows SSSI.

CPRE consider that this is a major increase in footprint in this proposed major developed site and that the proposal would therefore be contrary to policy and is also concerned that the proposal may extend beyond the limits of the existing site. The large increase in employment on site and the consequent increase in traffic and the proposal to build a link road will all be contrary to current Green Belt policy.

The Oxford Green Belt Network acknowledge the importance of science-based industry but point out that the University would have been aware of the Green Belt restrictions when it acquired the site and would therefore question the argument that the need is sufficient to override Green Belt policy. They are conscious of the considerable pressures now being put upon the Green Belt in the vicinity of Begbroke/Yarnton/Kidlington and fears for the future of the Green Belt unless the Local Planning Authority adheres strictly to its policy.

Cllr Mrs Ganter has written three letters on these proposals. Her initial letter was quoted in the Committee report on 18th October 2001. More recently she has written:-

“This application has been the subject of two very well attended meetings in Begbroke. The residents of the village are against it for a number of reasons. The traffic survey which has been requested from the applicants by the District Council would appear to be seriously flawed. I, for one, do not believe that on Wednesday 12th December 2001 between the hours of 8 and 9 a.m. no vehicular traffic was observed entering or leaving Spring Hill Road.

The extra traffic that would be generated by the proposed road at the woefully undersized Begbroke roundabout would cause more chaos. Residents have enough difficulty in crossing the dual carriageway as it is. Any increase in traffic

at peak travelling times would mean that vehicles travelling along the A44 would be almost stationary at this point.

The result of the appeal by Stagecoach for a new bus garage in Langford Lane has now been allowed. All buses to and from the garage are directed to use the A44. This will increase traffic chaos at peak times without a further road 'left only' road junction between the villages of Yarnton and Begbroke causing additional traffic.

Unless the University can keep the amount of vehicular traffic likely to be generated in the long term by the proposed development of the Science Park to that which can use Sandy Lane safely then the original application for development in its present form should be refused. It must be borne in mind that at the present time traffic approaches the Science Park at Begbroke Hill from both the junctions with Sandy Lane at Yarnton and at Kidlington. There is a choice.

If the proposed road scheme receives planning consent then ALL vehicular traffic to and from the Science Park will enter and leave the site via the A44. This is a retrograde step and would further increase the volume of traffic on this dual carriageway.

The application for the new road, demanded by the District Council, proposes to site it within the Green Belt between the villages of Yarnton and Begbroke. Those landowners whose property adjoins this proposed road will, in the long term, make applications for residential development along it. The land may well be in the Green Belt but this will not hinder the likes of Bellway Homes.

This application should be refused. It would well be described as backland development within the Green Belt. Other methods of dealing with any extra traffic should be explored if it is considered to be necessary for the long term development of Begbroke Hill Science Park. The up-grading of Green Lane adjacent to the Turnpike Inn in Yarnton is one proposal that should be carefully considered by the County Highways Department. If this work was carried out traffic from Yarnton to Kidlington could use the lane as opposed to travelling along Sandy Lane.

Whilst I would agree that the development proposed by the University is of national importance I do not consider that its

implementation should be allowed to cause an increase in traffic chaos and danger to the residents of the village of Begbroke.

It is well to remember that this is a time when we are all being asked to use public transport. For many of us it is not possible to gain access to public transport because of the dangers of crossing the A44 dual carriageway.

I would urge the South Area Planning Committee to refuse these applications and to ask the University to consider seriously the views of the local residents when resubmitting them."

She has also written in a similar vein as Chairman of the A44 Action Group.

Thirty two letters of objection have been received from Begbroke residents, eighteen of them being specific in only raising concerns about the road proposals. Eight of the letters also request a deferral of the application for the scheme to be further assessed. The grounds of objection include the following:-

- Condemning the use of Begbroke roundabout by additional traffic having to come from Oxford and then turn south. They draw particular attention to the A44 already being difficult and dangerous to cross and difficult for traffic to join the A44 from Fernhill Road/service road. A pedestrian footbridge is proposed by some.
- Querying the safety of the junction for southbound traffic and predicting accidents.
- Suggesting that the improvement of Sandy Lane would be a better alternative.
- The very special circumstances advanced are not considered to be sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.
- The proposal is very large, modern and high and will impact upon the countryside.
- Precedent for further development.
- The employment density will be higher than proposed, hence more traffic.

- Doubting the accuracy of the traffic survey.
- Will cause additional traffic congestion on A44.
- Concern about possibility of Yarnton Nurseries joining onto the road.
- The construction of the road will be harmful to the Green Belt.
- Suggesting alternatives including
  - closing Sandy Lane to through traffic
  - signal controlled or roundabout junction instead of T-junction
  - use of service road from Sandy Lane
  - new road to Cassington Road roundabout
  - speed limits on the A44
- Danger to cyclists at junction.
- Concern about safety on Sandy Lane roundabout.
- Concern about impact of security precautions - lights, fences etc.
- Querying effectiveness of the Green Travel Plan.
- Understands that the road is being forced upon the applicant by Cherwell District Council.
- Encroachment of main proposal into Green Belt?
- Adequacy of proposed screening?
- Impact on local drainage?
- Compounds impact on A44 of Stagecoach appeal decision.
- Seeking guarantee on not building on adjacent land.

Yarnton Nurseries raise no objections providing they can take advantage of the access - if they can't they would strongly object.

The Secretary of Begbroke WI asks to register their objection due to present difficulty for pedestrians crossing the A44. This proposal will

increase traffic on the roundabout worsening the situation.

### **HPDS' ASSESSMENT**

#### The proposal

This report seeks to cover the three related applications:-

- The interim proposal (01/00664/OUT) for 1.2 hectares which proposes an additional 6,182 sq. metres of floorspace for academic research (adding to the 5,966 sq. metres already on the site).
- The long-term proposal (this application 01/00662/OUT) of which the interim proposal is a subsumed part, which would take the floorspace on to 21,067 sq. metres (i.e. 15,101 sq. metres more than presently).
- The proposal for a new link road to the A44 which the applicant proposes to serve the long-term proposal and seeks to persuade Members that it is not necessary in the interim proposal.

Extensive supporting statements dated March and December 2001 fully explain the proposal and are available in the Members' Room.

#### The Issues

##### Green Belt Policy

The site is in the Green Belt and all proposals clearly fall within the PPG2 and Development Plan definitions of inappropriate development. Approval of the proposals would therefore be a significant departure from the Development Plan and could only be supported if very special circumstances exist and are convincing. The second applicants' document seeks to address initial deficiencies in this respect.

The site lies within the area covered by Policies GB1 of the adopted Local Plan and Policies GB1, GB5 and GB6 of the deposit draft Local Plan and Policies G4, E3 and E4 of the Structure Plan.

Whilst the interim phase proposes development largely within the proposed "major developed site" in the draft local plan it will still lead to a major increase in floorspace. The long-term proposal extends beyond the existing developed area and proposes a

quadrupling of floorspace. Clearly the proposals do not comply with the policies.

As a consequence the applicant has been asked to be more explicit about the very special circumstances, explaining the uniqueness of the proposal and the specific need for it to be located at Yarnton, the consideration of alternative sites and also the controls to be exercised over the commercially lettable space.

The applicant has explained that the proposal is driven by the new area of science known as 'nanotechnology', which is the manipulation of individual atoms and molecules to manufacture machines and devices. Oxford is a world leader in this pioneering area of science. The interim phase provides for the establishment of an Institute of Nano Technology and for an innovation centre to provide accommodation for the spin-off business which will flow from the research. The long-term proposal provides for two further academic institutions dealing with related technology and provides for still further innovation space and the re-provision of the existing innovation centre. There are clear obvious academic and economic benefits from the co-location of these activities as a cluster - a form of business/research development which is being encouraged by the Government.

The University has been involved in a review of its estate and its capacity to accommodate the growth required and has concluded that this cannot be provided within the City. To achieve the right level of 'critical mass' a site of approximately 10 acres is required (the Begbroke site is 3.3 hectares or 8 acres). They say that within the Oxford ring road the sites tend to be smaller than 10 acres. There is strong competition for these sites from house builders and they are usually unable to compete in this sort of market. They have acquired the Radcliffe Infirmary site but this is seen as being vitally important for providing growth for those parts of the University that are particular to the collegiate nature of the University, such as arts and humanities, which have to be close to libraries and collections.

The applicants have volunteered to accept constraints upon the extent of the B1 innovation centre space and also to agree leasing arrangements which will support the incubation/start-up phase of business growth, with accelerated rent increased beyond an initial term, thereby encouraging growing established business to move on to appropriate commercially provided floorspace.

Overall the Head of Planning and Development Services is

convinced that the very special circumstances advanced by the applicant are of sufficient weight and merit to outweigh the normal presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

### Visual Impact

The site is set well back from the A44 and Sandy Lane. It is an island of development within a flat field landscape. Existing trees provide only a partial and in some cases ineffective screen of the existing buildings. The size of the scheme allows for an advance perimeter woodland planting belt of 15-20 metres to be provided on all sides. The buildings will be a maximum of two storeys. It would be wrong to assume that the buildings will in the long-term be hidden but they will be situated in a well-treed site and need not be damaging to the landscape, albeit that they will be visible. Clearly this is a narrow sensitive part of the Green Belt, and this is an important issue, but on balance the Head of Planning and Development Services considers the scheme will be acceptable from this point of view. Matters such as fencing and lighting are important but the HPDS is confident that these can be dealt with satisfactorily at the 'reserved matters' stages.

### Traffic

A transport assessment has been submitted with regard to the traffic flows, a) existing; b) those that could be generated under existing permissions; c) those predicted for the interim phase taking into account the green travel initiatives, and d) for the final phase, again taking into account the green travel proposals.

Members will recall that when this package of applications was considered in May 2001, whilst expressing sympathy with the proposal, they voiced concerns about the ability of Sandy Lane to cope with the envisaged traffic flows (this was without the benefit of the transport assessment which was only submitted in December 2001). As a consequence the Head of Planning and Development Services invited the applicant to consider whether it was possible to propose an alternative route of access. The Head of Planning and Development Services recalls that Members believed at that time that the alternative road would be needed for both the interim and the long-term phases.

It will be seen that the County Council as local highway authority have concluded that the predicted (relatively low) flow levels for the interim phase could be accommodated on Sandy Lane. They do, however, note that there is a risk that the prediction is too low

and hence seek a mechanism to ensure that the new road would be provided even for the interim phase if the peak hour flow exceeded 80 vehicles. (See intended condition 9 on 01/00664/OUT). For the assessment of the road and its impact please see the report on 01/01872/OUT. The conclusion of that report is that the road will be acceptable in Green Belt, congestion and safety terms. It shall be noted that the Head of Planning and Development Services considers that without the road the long-term proposal should be resisted as the alternative of Sandy Lane (even with further minor improvements) is unviable.

### Green Travel

A number of sustainable transport measures are proposed as part of the interim and long-term expansion proposals. These measures are complementary to the access proposals in the long-term proposal. The aim is to reduce car dependency by improving the availability of alternative forms of transport.

In the interim scheme the applicants propose the construction of a cycleway to Kidlington. It is also intended to increase the frequency of the existing University Bus hourly service between this site and Oxford City Centre. As part of the long-term proposals it is intended to consider the repositioning of bus-stops on the A44 to ensure maximised usage. This may now be combined with the A44 pedestrian crossing facility required by the County Council. It is acknowledged that the proposed Kidlington railway station could provide obvious benefits to the Begbroke site. It is anticipated that the County Council will be requiring a financial contribution towards the provision of the station.

### Conclusion

This is a significant proposal which must be the subject of departure procedures. In the Head of Planning and Development Services' opinion it is almost inevitable that the application will be called-in and the subject of a public inquiry. However, the Head of Planning and Development Services considers that the very special circumstances are convincing and that given the County Council's conclusions on transport matters the package of applications, including the roadway, is considered supportable.