

Climate Team's Planning Consultation Response

Reference: PL/2023/09142

Address: Land at Junction 16 (M4), Swindon

Proposal: Outline application (with Access to be determined) for development of a new Motorway Rest Area (MRA) to provide up to 241 car parking spaces; up to 63 Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) parking spaces; coach and caravan parking; amenity building; fuel filling station; new roundabout access from B4005; and associated landscaping, infrastructure and ancillary works.

Applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the relevant policies of the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise (ref: Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004). Section 19 of this Act places a legal duty on development plan documents, taken as a whole, to include policies designed to secure development that contributes to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change.

Development Plan:

At paragraph 1.3 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) key principles that underpin the strategy to help build more resilient communities are identified including:

- *“Providing for the most sustainable pattern of development that minimises the need to travel and maximises the potential to use sustainable transport.”*
- *“Managing development to ensure that jobs and the right infrastructure are delivered at the right time to ensure that out commuting, in particular to areas outside of Wiltshire, is not increased”*
- *“Working towards lowering Wiltshire’s carbon footprint through the appropriate location of development, and through renewable energy and sustainable construction.”*

Paragraph 1.10 states: ***“The overarching priorities are to help build and protect resilient communities through..... tackling the causes and effects of climate change”***

Paragraph 2.10 states: ***“Climate change is a central issue to be addressed by the WCS..... The basis of this strategy is to achieve sustainable patterns of development in order to reduce carbon emissions.”***

The WCS sets out that addressing climate change as a strategic objective stating at paragraph 3.5 that: ***“Climate change is possibly the greatest long-term challenge facing the world today.”***

Paragraph 6.32 sets out that the strategy will contribute to tackling climate change through a number of different areas of policy, such as:

- focusing growth at the larger settlements to help minimise the need for travel,
- ensure new development can withstand future changes in climate and add minimally to carbon emissions,
- provide a network of green infrastructure; and
- ensure more sustainable forms of transport.

Core Policy 41 seeks to help to reduce Wiltshire’s contribution to climate change through improved design and construction methods. The policy states that: ***“New development, building conversions, refurbishments and extensions will be encouraged to incorporate design measures to reduce energy demand. Development will be well insulated and designed to take advantage of natural light and heat from the sun and use natural air movement for ventilation, whilst maximising cooling in the summer.”***

The policy goes on to set out that all non-residential development will be required to achieve relevant BREEAM “Excellent” standard. Furthermore, major development will need to provide a Sustainable Energy Strategy.

Core Policy 60 sets out that *“the council will use its planning and transport powers to help reduce the need to travel particularly by private car, and support and encourage the sustainable, safe and efficient movement of people and goods.”* It sets out a number of means to achieve this including planning development in accessible locations, and promoting alternatives to the private car. These aims are further supported by CP61, CP62, CP63, CP64, CP65 and CP66.

In addition, the Wiltshire Core Strategy contains specific policies in relation to **biodiversity (CP50), green infrastructure (CP52), high quality design (CP57), flood risk (CP67) and water resources (CP68)**. These all relate to reducing Wiltshire’s contribution to climate change and/or adaptation. To be compliant with these policies regard should be had to the implications of the development on climate change. As set out previously climate change is the central issue to be addressed by the development plan.

Finally, Wiltshire’s communities have produced and continue to work on a number of **Neighbourhood Plans**. Once made these form a part of the development plan for the designated area. Many of these documents include relevant policies to mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. Proposals must be determined in accordance with these policies unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Other material considerations:

As set out above planning legislation establishes that **other material considerations** should be taken into account in the determination of planning applications. As such, these need to be kept in mind as developments are planned and formulated. Other material considerations may include other local planning policy and guidance, the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan Review, UK government legislation or Written Ministerial Statements and national planning policy and guidance such as the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Council is carrying out a **Local Plan Review**. A draft version has now been approved by cabinet and full council to proceed to the [Regulation 19 stage of public consultation](#). This consultation has commenced. A suite of ambitious new and replacement policies to further reduce Wiltshire’s contribution to climate change and foster better community resilience to impacts from climate change are now emerging. The direction of travel is reflective of wider strategic policy already adopted by Wiltshire Council, such as the [Wiltshire Climate Strategy, adopted February 2022](#). This builds on the Council’s February 2019 resolution to acknowledge a **climate emergency and subsequent commitment to seek to make the county carbon neutral by 2030**.

To further underline this the **Climate change act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019** raised the **duty of the Secretary of State to ensure that the net UK carbon account for the year 2050 is at least 100% lower than the 1990 baseline** (previously 80%).

The **National Planning Policy Framework (September 2023)** (NPPF) sets out the UK government’s position on planning in England.

Paragraph 7 of the NPPF states: *“The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development”* and paragraph 8 makes it clear that **mitigating and adapting to climate change is a core planning objective**.

Paragraph 152 states: *“The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate.... It should **help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions**, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.”*

Paragraph 154 states that: *“**New development should be planned for in ways that:**
a) **avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change.** When new development is brought forward in areas which are vulnerable, care should be taken to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures, including through the planning of green infrastructure; and
b) **can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as through its location, orientation and design.** Any local requirements for the sustainability of buildings should reflect the Government’s policy for national technical standards.”*

Paragraph 157 goes on: *“In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should **expect new development to..... take account of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption**”*

In terms of transport paragraph 104 states that “transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals, so that..... opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued”.

In terms of the future national direction of travel the **10 Point Plan, Net Zero Strategy, Heat and Buildings Strategy**, the **Sixth Carbon Budget** and **Powering Up Britain** are very clear. The intentions include:

- More journeys by public transport, walking and cycling;
- More electric cars; and
- More renewable energy and storage technologies.

Specific comments on the submission documents:

It is 12 months since I previously commented on pre-application proposals for the site. At the time the climate team was at an early stage in developing its thinking and capacity to comment on proposals. This has developed and is maturing, as has the policy context with the new suite of local plan policies around climate change emerging. Fundamentally though the climate team continues to actively and strongly encourage developers of all scales to put the mitigation of and adaption to climate change as a golden thread to run through their development project. This will mean different things depending on the scale of the project, but to support the transition to a low carbon future, radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions over the existing status quo will be required.

Previously I have left the assessment as to the principle of development with the planning team, and I would remain consistent with that approach. Nonetheless, this assessment is of key importance in assessing the suitability of the development against the climate change objectives of the development plan.

I would however, like to offer support and encouragement for the principle of providing important infrastructure that will support the transition to low carbon transport whilst maintaining social mobility. The use of roads for the movement of goods and people is engrained in how our society functions and so whilst the climate team would support the principles of ‘avoid’ and ‘shift’ from private vehicle use, the principle of ‘improve’ is also important. ‘Improve’ might mean a shift from petrol and diesel vehicles to ultra-low emission vehicle alternatives such as electric vehicles (EV), biofuel HGVs/coaches and green hydrogen HGVs/coaches.

Part of this proposal is about providing new infrastructure to support that transition. Recognising that this is a transition the continued provision of a petrol filling station is in all likelihood a commercial reality to be accepted. However, noting that only circa 20% of the parking spaces will be provided with EV charging at first use, I would like to have further detail on:

- Provision of EV charging at the caravan spaces
- Future proofing of wider spaces (not just their size, but those that will become EV spaces need to have cable routes provided)
- Future proofing of the parking for HGVs/coaches so that the site will be suitable for likely low-carbon alternative fuels.

It is imperative that future-proofing opportunities are acknowledged at the concept design stage so that they can be realised at technical design stage.

I have reviewed the BREEAM Pre-Assessment and note that credits to meet and slightly exceed the minimum threshold for BREEAM “Excellent” are targeted. They have also indicated the potential to score “Outstanding”. At this stage, the project is being made in outline only and technical design is only likely to be developed in the future. Therefore, subject to a condition to secure BREEAM Excellent certification post completion of the development then the proposal will satisfy this element of CP41. I would also note that the proposal would be likely to satisfy emerging policy in relation to BREEAM.

Turning to the Sustainable Energy Strategy I consider that this addresses the requirement of CP41 to outline the low carbon strategy for the proposal. Given that this is an outline application and the scheme is at concept design stage, it is proportionate and appropriate. It sets out a degree of ambition with a commitment to be an electrified building, taking a fabric first approach to minimise energy and also looking to use low carbon and renewable technologies. The strategy also sets out positive suggestions and possibilities in relation to ensuring the scheme is low in embodied carbon.

I would request a condition to require a further Sustainable Energy Strategy to be submitted concurrently with any future reserved matters applications. This needs to set out in greater detail how the scheme will be ambitious and commit to set targets. It needs to be concurrent with the reserved matters so that the final planning drawings reflect the energy strategy e.g. details of building plant like air source heat pumps, solar PV panels etc. I would encourage this to work towards net zero carbon in operation, low embodied carbon and high levels of water efficiency. Any future strategy / detailed design might want to be recognisant that we have emerging policies in the local plan review that will require net zero in operation and embodied carbon assessments that look at the substructure, superstructure and finishes of the scheme (expressing the carbon levels in kg/m²).

I have also reviewed the indicative masterplan for the site. There is much to be positive about here and I would welcome a detailed proposal at reserved mature stage that incorporates, and hopefully expands on key climate change adaptation features as well. Drainage and overheating are the principle issues to be addressed and the scheme looks like it is targeting these issues with a nature-based approach so as to obtain co-benefits of positive climate action. This is what we want to see.

However, I remain concerned that the area for HGVs remains large and could be broken up with some additional planting to help reduce any potential heat island affect. A further suggestion for the reserved matters is that a solar PV canopy could be introduced in the car park area. This would provide shade over some parking spaces, be a visual promotion of the sustainability credentials of the scheme and provide additional on-site renewable energy.

Additionally, if it does not damage biodiversity net gain goals, the field to the east could incorporate a ground mounted solar array. This can possibly work alongside biodiversity net gain depending on the type of habitat that is being proposed for this area.

Climate change is the central issue to be addressed by the development plan and the direction of travel since its adoption in 2015 is very clear with the Council's adopted Climate Strategy in 2022 setting a framework for reducing carbon emissions in Wiltshire and for making the county resilient to climate change. Furthermore, the NPPF is clear that planning needs to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Suggested conditions:

- *Within 6 months of the development being first brought into use a final Certificate shall have been submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority certifying that the "Excellent" BREEAM standard (or any such equivalent national measure of sustainable building which replaces that scheme) has been achieved by the development. REASON: To ensure that the objectives of sustainable development set out in policy CP41 and CP57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy are achieved.*
- *Prior to the commencement of any development and concurrently with any future reserved matters application(s), Sustainable Energy Strategy(ies), including coverage of operational energy, embodied carbon and climate change adaptation measures shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details. REASON: To ensure that the objectives of sustainable development set out in policy CP41 and CP57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy are achieved.*
- *Prior to the commencement of any development and concurrently with any future reserved matters application(s), further details of the proposed ultra-low emission vehicle charging and future proofing measures shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This shall include plans to show the location and detail of what is proposed and a proportionate supporting statement to explain the rationale. REASON: To ensure that the objectives of sustainable development set out in policy CP41, CP55, CP57 and CP60 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy are achieved.*
- *No development shall commence until final details of cycle parking has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. REASON: To ensure that the objectives of sustainable development set out in policy CP41, CP55, CP57 and CP60 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy are achieved.*

Date: 22 November 2023

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