

Hinxton Parish Council’s response to the May 2019 amendments and additional information of SmithsonHill/O’Rourke’s outline planning application S/4099/17/OL as appealed ref:APP/W0530/W/18/3210008

These comments should be read in conjunction with our response (submitted 22 January 2018) to South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) to the initial application and also our subsequent response (submitted 24 October 2018) to The Planning Inspectorate which drew attention to additional evidence when the applicants appealed against SCDC’s refusal. The following comments relate to the amendments and additional information which Terence O’Rourke Ltd submitted on behalf of SmithsonHill on 7 and 15 May 2019.

Their main substantive amendments are: (i) proposed additional traffic mitigation, primarily by the installation of traffic lighting at three points on the A505; (ii) the withdrawal of the promise of availability of new facilities (‘gym, restaurants, crèche etc.’) to local residents. The bulk of O’Rourke’s additional information consists of reports, written by the developers or the consultants they have hired, to suggest that the environmental impact is not as adverse as it might have been. We have given these amendments and additional information due attention.

There is nothing in them that significantly alters the substantial material objections we have already given:

1. **The application does not comply with the SCDC 2007 Local Development Framework, or the SCDC 2018 Local Plan, or the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework**, for all the reasons we have previously stated. It also contravenes Hinxtion’s specific designation as an ‘Infill Village’ (LP S/11).
2. **The SmithsonHill business plan and stated objectives have no credibility.** None of the additional material alters this conclusion. There is no evidence of any substantial commitment by any significant enterprise to move to the site. There is no scientific expertise driving the purported commitment to confine the site to ‘agri-tech’; the specified use classification of B1, B2 and B8 leave it open to being a general purpose business park. There is no scientific or commercial reason why the proposed development should be sited in Hinxtion, or why it should be built on open arable farmland as opposed to a brownfield site. There is no reason to suppose that the future tenants would make any contribution at all to the high ideals of improved food production under which the application is being marketed. The additional material reports that 14 alternative sites received detailed consideration (the earlier application had named 6¹), but, as the landowners themselves, the role of the Smith family in initiating the proposal suggests retrospective rationalisation.
3. **The application’s traffic analysis and prescriptions have no credibility.** The applicants have had to revise their earlier analyses which failed to acknowledge the severe peak congestion on the A505 and A1301. Our previous criticisms remain valid in terms of the applicants’ continued failure to model credibly:
 - a. The present situation. As with the original model, their revised version still does not predict the well documented long queues at peak times on the A1301 approaching the McDonald’s roundabout from the south (See Appendix with our local survey results, augmenting those we provided previously). This is with present traffic, irrespective of the business park’s additional burden.
 - b. The likely number of vehicle journeys of 4000 employees living elsewhere and the substantial commercial traffic associated with the proposed business park.

¹ T O’Rourke, Planning Statement, November 2017, pp 81-91

- c. The increase in local traffic as a result of other impending or possible developments on the same roads (notably Sawston Trade Park, Huawei at Whittlesford, housing growth at Haverhill, Wellcome Genome Campus expansion, North Uttlesford Garden Community)
- d. The likely growth in through traffic on the A505 and A1301 over time as a result of growth in the regional economy.

The proposed new mitigation measures also lack credibility. Apart from the widening of approach arms to the four junctions on the A505 from the McDonald's roundabout to the M11, they propose traffic-light controls on the Moorfield Road and Hunts Road junctions with the A505 and on the Junction 10 roundabout on the M11. The modelling fails to deal adequately with the narrowing of the A505 to single lanes for much of this stretch. It fails to acknowledge that this, combined with the three new sets of traffic-lights, would lead to severe interactions and grid-locks with traffic backing-up at peak times. It ignores the fact that so large a site, with 4000 employees and associated traffic, would substantially increase 'rat-running' through Ickleton, Duxford and Hinxtton so long as the A1301 and A505 have their capacity as constrained as at present.

4. **The environmental impact of the proposal would be adverse and contrary to regulations.** There is nothing in the additional material that significantly alters this objection. The placing of large buildings of up to 13.5m in height, employing 4000 people on 102ha of rising, open arable land can only have a landscape effect, day and night, that is 'substantial', 'adverse', 'significant', and 'permanent', in the words of the application itself². The attempt to conceal this by 2 kilometres of earth embankments up to 3.5m in height along the A1301 and Tichbault Road, augmented by trees, is absurd; it would increase the extent to which this business park would dominate and oppress the surrounding South Cambridgeshire countryside. The computer simulations and wide-angle images provided in the additional material only confirm this. It would be massively in breach of SCDC's 2018 Local Plan Policies NH/2, NH/3:1, E/12, E/13, E/16 and E/15:1
5. **The consultation process followed by SmithsonHill has been fundamentally flawed.** The extent to which the local communities have been deliberately misled by the developers in the preparation of this application was documented in our earlier submission. In these amendments they have now withdrawn their major 'selling point', which was that local residents would have access to the facilities of the proposed 'mixed use centre that will contain facilities such as a café/takeaway, crèche/day nursery and gym/leisure uses'³. This confirms that the approach that SmithsonHill have adopted towards the local community from the start has been cynical and contemptuous.

The amendments and additional information of May 2019 do not alter our conclusion that the proposed SmithsonHill Agri-Tech business park is misdescribed, misconceived and misplaced. Its impact on the traffic and the environment of the locality is grossly underestimated and any proposed mitigation measures are inadequate and under-financed. It is strongly opposed by Hinxtton Parish in which it would be placed.

William Brown (Chair and on behalf of Hinxtton Parish Council)

27 May 2019

² J. O'Rourke, Environment Statement, November 2017, 9-15

³ As above 5.69. Also J.O'Rourke, Planning Statement, November 2017, 6.28

Appendix

Data collated by Hinxtton Parish Council on traffic queuing time and number of vehicles in each queue at the McDonald's (A505/A1301) roundabout for Nov 2017-Jan 2018 and Dec 2018-Jan2019

- Hinxtton Parish Council asked participants to collect data on the length of queue time and the number of vehicles in each queue at the McDonald's/BP roundabout between late November 2017 and January 2018⁴ and between late December 2018 and late January 2019, at peak times of weekdays.
- These data demonstrate that the roads around McDonald's roundabout typically reach capacity during peak hours with substantial queues that can reach in excess of 70 cars from the southern approach and queue times in excess of 20 minutes. Similarly, queues are often observed that stretch along the A505 for substantial distances both to the east and west from the McDonald's roundabout.
- Comments by the volunteers show that there is currently active avoidance of the McDonald's / BP roundabout if long queues are observed by a car driver or suggested online by Google map traffic data. These comments demonstrate that there is rat-running through local villages of Ickleton, Duxford and Hinxtton to avoid these queues, and this is taking place with the current level of traffic on our road network. For example, a Hinxtton resident observed 41 cars within 15 minutes at 08:30 on 23rd Jan 2019 using the single track road that passes through Hinxtton ford to avoid main road queues.
- Around 20 volunteers during winter 2018, and 13 volunteers during January 2019, recorded data for the queue time, number of vehicles in the queue and the direction of approach to the McDonald's / BP roundabout. The data were recorded during weekday peak hours (between 7am and 10am, and 4pm and 7pm). The volunteers lived in Hinxtton, or commuted to the Genome Campus by bus or car, travelling past the McDonald's / BP roundabout on a regular basis.
- Results show the queue time and number of vehicles in each queue, sorted by the direction of the approach to the around McDonald's / BP roundabout and the date and time of day.
- Note that there are fewer data collated on number of vehicles in each queue than for the queue time to reach the McDonald's / BP roundabout. This is simply because a vehicle driver can more easily monitor the time taken waiting in a queue to reach the roundabout, than count the number of vehicles in the queue especially if the queue is long and goes out of direct line of sight. Also, many of the queue lengths were measured by driving away from the roundabout and counting the number of vehicles in the queue waiting on the approach to the roundabout.

⁴ submitted in response to SmithsonHill AgriTech planning application S/4099/17/OL