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## A bad day for Oxfordshire

Local group POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Planning and Transport Sustainably) have expressed deep disappointment at the government's decision to approve proposals for a major road running between the A34 near Didcot towards the Oxford-Henley road near Nuneham Courtenay.

POETS were a major participant throughout the 'call-in' Public Inquiry, giving evidence during the three-week hearing. Richard Tamplin, who organised much of POETS' evidence, described news of the decision as "a bad day for Oxfordshire".

He explained, "This huge, costly and risky road scheme is a 20th century attempt at a solution to the very pressing 21st century problems which need action to address traffic congestion, environmental protection, health and, not least, climate change. We doubt that it will work. On the County Council's own admission, the road will provide traffic relief for only 10 years – after which, it will be very much harder to combat the inevitable growth of traffic. There will also be impacts on the wider road network and pressures for further road building (reminiscent of the previously scrapped Expressway proposal), which have not so far been properly considered.

We need vision, not a reliance on tired, outdated ideas such as road building to "solve" the problems that road transport has caused.

Transport is now the major UK producer of carbon and Oxfordshire should be showing how to reduce its impact. The County Council has an excellent Local Transport and Connectivity Plan which sets ambitious policies for traffic and carbon reduction. But this 'HIF1' approval will add to emissions and make zero carbon more difficult to achieve.

At the Inquiry we proposed better ways of getting people about; improvements to bus availability, frequency and priority, off-road cycleways (including the proposed Didcot to Culham Garden Line), and better located and designed housing layouts to reduce traffic pressures and offer much healthier lifestyles sooner and for longer than HIF1. Nor would our ideas hinder housing provision, which in any event is outside the control of the County Council.

There is no requirement to build this road even now. Southern Oxfordshire could be the UK Dijon, a small French city region where public transport is everywhere and people are increasingly abandoning their cars as unnecessary, expensive, time hungry and polluting. And it has a better quality of life and attracts investment in research and light industry in locations closer to home than this county possesses.

The costs and risks of building HIF1 continue to rise – at present it may exceed £400 million and the funding to meet that cost is by no means assured. Nor has a decision yet been made on whether the County can acquire all the land needed to build the road. We believe that the current plans underestimate the difficulties of constructing expensive bridges, including over railway tracks. We do not want another Botley Road bridge debacle.

We hope the Council will take time to consider the risks - and the environmental impacts – involved. It can plod on with thoughtless roadbuilding, or choose a vision to give the people of southern Oxfordshire a better way of life."

ENDS.

***Note for Editors***:

A government decision has been announced following the Planning Inquiry into "Land Between A43 Milton Interchange, and B4015 North of Clifton Hampden Oxfordshire – 3326625" referred to locally as the Didcot HIF1 scheme.

The decision letter and Inspector's report can be found at:
*https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/called-in-decision-land-between-a34-milton-interchange-and-b4015-north-of-clifton-hampden-oxfordshire-ref-3326625-11-december-2024*

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