Press Release

Issued on 29 January 2023

'POETS' call on County Council for a major rethink of the "Didcot HIF 1 scheme" road proposals in southern Oxfordshire

Locally based group POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably) has called upon Oxfordshire County Council to drop its proposals for a huge road across much of southern Oxfordshire.

The council's proposals involve construction of 9 miles of major road from the A34 near Didcot, including a new River Thames crossing near Abingdon, to Nuneham Courtenay on the Oxford-Henley road. They have previously drawn criticisms from POETS and other groups suggesting that it could be the start of a possible "Expressway by Stealth" with knock-on effects over much of southern Oxfordshire.

It is now the subject of a planning application due to be determined by the council's Planning and Regulation committee in February or March. Even if all went well, the cost of the proposals is likely to be around £300 million.

POETS have written to all county councillors warning that continuing with the current proposals would be a major strategic mistake. They have put forward a list of 10 reasons why the council should not go ahead, principally the dangers of increasing traffic capacity in the face of a climate emergency, and the high financial risks to the council - and not least to other transport funding.

POETS' Noel Newson explained, "We are very concerned that the county council still seems to be pushing ahead with this set of proposals. We very much welcomed the council's recent adoption of a forward-looking and well-argued Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). This included bold targets to reduce road traffic and carbon, but we are very disappointed to see that, at this first major test, it is apparently being ignored. Going ahead with this road building now risks undermining the credibility of that Plan as well as being a risk to the council's own resources".

A year ago the council resolved to authorise the development of a new Didcot area transport strategy and masterplan to meet the corporate priorities and agree to provide appropriate resources to support the development of the plan, but this seems to have sunk without trace.

The group is calling on the council to refuse the application and instead undertake a fundamental review of how best to plan for movement across south and east Oxfordshire in a way that is consistent with the council's stated priorities in the LTCP for encouraging active travel and increasing public transport use.

Added Noel, "There are also huge flaws in the Environmental Statement accompanying the planning application. Alternatives to the proposal (including those more compatible with the LTCP priorities) and the effects on nearby Abingdon have not been properly considered. It is quite possible that these failings leave the council open to legal challenge and consequent delay."

ENDS.

You can find POETS response to the planning application consultation at https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/poets-didcot-HIF1-scheme-planning-application-response-250123.pdf

Note for Editors:

Several other well respected environmental groups have expressed serious concerns about the council's proposals.

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