

WNP report to WPC and HPC August 2018

At the end of 2017 it was directed that the Draft WNP be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment. The resulting Environmental Report arrived on 20 August 2018.

Wheatley NP Area is rich in sites and landscapes of historic, natural and scientific interest. It is a major schools hub and a GP / NHS Teaching Surgery which serves well beyond the NP Area. Considerable small industry and trade also flourishes here too. The 25 statutory bodies to whom we sent the Draft WNP during Public Consultation (May - June 2017), included Historic England, Natural England and the Environmental Agency. All three concluded that an SEA - ER was required. Our District Council Planning Advisor, Ricardo Rios, says the resulting Environmental Report from AECOM, confirms that the Draft WNP Plan 'is backed by environmental considerations' and that alternatives to WNP proposals have been considered carefully. Welcome advice is offered to the WNP Committee on how better to re-phrase or include other points.

The ER document is clearly written. I want to put it in your hands immediately and will not attempt an 'Executive Summary'. However, please note Section 3 which tables the wide range of the SEA considerations, including Air Quality which locally has been an official concern since 2006. Also, Section 7 on which WPC as Qualifying Body will have to cast its vote. It summarises the Options discussed in the main Report. It supports the Draft WNP in the Option it chose, in preference to other ways forward which WNP rejected. Since May last year, the published Draft WNP has supported in principle the Draft Local Plan Strategic Site at OBU, while remaining free to comment as the LP is still in Draft form. The WNP Committee was not bound to recommend anything new in Wheatley itself, but from listening to the community and from its own 28 hours of workshops (November 2016 - May 2017) came up with proposals for 'enhancement'. This would be at Littleworth industrial site (housing), at 'Ms Tombs' Field' south of lower London Rd, (mixed housing, Green Space and beneath the pylons, some existing established Wheatley businesses. Space for a burial ground would also be made. The small bungalow community behind the ASDA petrol station has also discussed minor expansion and enhancement with WNP.

WNP Committee has not wasted its quiet time. We have met approximately every 6-8 weeks since last year. Individuals and small groups have worked on the Sites Criteria, applying them to possible Sites and had these choices confirmed (or advised against) by outside advisers. Several Committee members have consulted at Didcot with the District Adviser, on average every 3 weeks. Others have drawn up the Statutory Consultation Statement, commissioned the SEA, Viability and Basic Conditions Reports from outside bodies, run our finances and of course are constantly noting the improvements necessary for the next and final Draft WNP. The Evidence Base website is also being weeded and re-planted. I should mention the 'background hum', notably the difficulties encountered by the Draft Local Plan, the unsettling rumours of the Cambridge Expressway being routed in our direction and the public uncertainty since June 2016 about a buyer for the OBU site. We do not know what might go on the built-form of the present college, nor how much it might impact the historic Park environment. We have ignored most rumours since January 2016, which is why we are still

standing. We also acknowledge the advisory support from Ricardo, whom the NP Committee have grown to trust.

John Fox
Chairman WNP
23 August 2018