

Pre-Application Engagement - Revised Proposal

In 2020, the applicant revised their original proposal and now propose to bring forward a smaller scale single-storey data centre building along with a two-storey data centre as originally envisaged. Given the passage of time and the revised, smaller scale of the proposal, a second round of public consultation is proposed.

“Preview” copies of a leaflet and website, outlining the revised proposals were sent to a large number of members of the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Council, members of Didcot Town Council, members of Sutton Courtenay Parish Council and the local MP David Johnston on Monday, 18 January 2021, so that they could view these ahead of constituents.

The leaflet (**Appendix IV**) is being distributed on Friday, 22 January 2021 through to Sunday, 24 January 2021 to some 2,900 homes closest to the site, namely Foxhall Manor Park, Mendip Heights, Dida Gardens and a large number of roads in Great Western Park as far south as Barn Owl Way, all within Didcot’s All Saint’s ward. The purpose of the leaflet is to inform residents that due to the coronavirus pandemic, the communication medium for consultation will be online at www.didcotdatacentreconsultation.co.uk . This website enables local residents and other stakeholders to obtain detailed information on the proposals and post their views on a questionnaire. There was also a helpline for stakeholders to ring with questions and a dedicated email address - enquiries@didcotdatacentreconsultation.co.uk - for questions, requests for hard copies of material or any other queries. In view of the coronavirus pandemic, the leaflets were carefully coated with an antimicrobial film that kills 99.9% of harmful micro-organisms that help to spread bacteria and viruses.

With the consultation being virtual, TFA has arranged for telephone and online meetings with local councils including Didcot Town Council and Sutton Courtenay Parish Council and Great Western Park Residents’ Association during February and March 2021 to inform these bodies of the proposals and for members to ask questions.

An appendix of this next stage of consultation will be sent to both South Oxfordshire District and the Vale of White Horse Councils once the consultation period has ended but prior to a decision made by both councils.

Conclusions

The central purpose of a Statement of Community Engagement is to illustrate that applicants have consulted with the public and listened to their concerns and further show how these issues have been addressed.

Willow Developments LLC have listened to the comments made by the public. The revised application includes a number of changes to the original scheme, including the reduced height of Unit 1, retaining trees at the eastern end of the site and reducing car parking by 30 per cent. The number of standby generators is also reduced from 54 to 34.

Many residents said they favoured such a use, and it was “good to see some employment rather than more housing.”

Responses to the public’s comments on key issues have been examined following the public engagement. They are:

Question 1

The data centre will be provided with electricity from the National Grid. Today, this is not acceptable for a project of this size, particularly with an asset as power-hungry as a data centre. The developer should be identifying ways of providing sustainable, clean electricity to power the data centre or, failing that, demonstrating what it is doing in tangible terms to offset the carbon footprint of the data centre.

Response: The operator for this site is actively addressing these concerns through Corporate Purchase Power Agreements (CPPA’s) that support the production of more renewable energy. Please refer to Response 2 for more details.

Question 2

I'm sure you'll be aware that the data centre industry is currently a large user of electricity and a major contributor to carbon emissions in Europe.

"Already, data centres have mushroomed from virtually nothing 10 years ago to consuming about 3 per cent of the global electricity supply and accounting for about 2 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions. That gives it the same carbon footprint as the airline industry".

<https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/global-warming-data-centres-to-consume-three-times-as-much-energy-in-next-decade-experts-warn-a6830086.html>

You may also be aware that there are ways to minimise these impacts; by use of new approaches to cooling operations, for example, and by use of sustainably produced electricity. Your (i.e. TFA's) website tells me that you "deeply care about the world in which we live" and "ensure that [you] promote sustainability through all areas of [y]our business". So, I'm surprised that the new website, doesn't seem to include Willow Developments' plans for ensuring their "new beginning" for Didcot A Power Station site will help us tackle the climate emergency rather than fuel it.

Response: The operator recognises that human-induced climate change is a real and serious threat and action is needed. This operator has a commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2040, ten years ahead of the Paris Agreement. To meet this commitment, the operator has set aggressive goals, such as being 100% powered by renewable energy by 2025.

The operator at the Didcot data centre has world-wide experience of renewable energy schemes and accepts that major investments in renewable energy are a critical step toward addressing the carbon footprint globally. As of December 2020, the operator has announced 14 new renewable energy projects in Europe, in the form of unsubsidised Corporate Power Purchase Agreements (CPPAs). These renewable wind and solar projects will deliver clean energy onto the grids in Ireland, the UK, Sweden, Italy, France, Germany and Spain, without additional costs to consumers in any of these countries. The Operator has invested in 127 renewable energy projects globally as of the end of 2020.

Question 3

The noise and visual impact on the northern neighbourhood of Great Western Park and the new development of Dida Gardens off the A4130 should be considered.

Response: All external noise generating equipment will conform to strict acoustic criteria set by the local authorities with compliance demonstrated in the extensive background surveys and reports included in the application. Emergency Generators are individually containerised within enhanced acoustic enclosures, specifically engineered for greater sound attenuation. These only operate at times of testing or in the rare occurrence of a Utility power outage. The application is supported by both a noise assessment and visual impact assessment, which will demonstrate that the proposal will not have significant impacts and set out mitigation measures if applicable.

Question 4

A barrier of trees along Milton Road is not going to be sufficient to obstruct the noise or view from the hill on which Great Western Park sits.

Response: Please refer to Response 2 for more details on noise. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) accompanies the planning application. Views of the proposed development from the Great Western Park have been carefully considered in the proposed development. The revised proposal includes a much-reduced height for the first building - Unit 1. As seen in the LVIA, Unit 1 and 2 will not be visible in summer views. Unit 1 and Unit 2 will be mostly screened/filtered by intervening vegetation in winter.

Question 5

What provision has been made for improving cycle routes? The site is close to the N5 cycle route which is poorly maintained and difficult to follow.

Response: The proposed layout has safeguarded land along the Milton Road frontage, this may be adopted by OCC in order to implement a cycle/footway as part of their ongoing plans in this area. A total of 20 cycle parking spaces will be provided on site (alongside changing facilities etc) to encourage cycle use.

Question 6

With Didcot now having Garden Town status, will you be ensuring that the landscaping includes plenty of trees?

Response: A comprehensive landscaping and management scheme will be submitted as part of the application which includes retention of existing and provision of additional trees, hedgerows, shrubs, herbaceous planting and grasses.

Question 7

How high are the data centre buildings compared with the cooling towers and the chimney which was demolished in February 2020?

Response: The full application for data centre 1 (Unit 1) will consist of a building that is 12 metres high with generator flues going up to 15 metres. Data centre 2 (Unit 2) will be 22.5 metres high with generator flues taking it to 30 metres. These buildings will be considerably less intrusive than the previous power station that once occupied the site. The former turbine hall at Didcot A Power Station was 10 storeys high. The cooling towers were circa 114 metres (375 feet) high and the main chimney, demolished on 9 February 2020, was circa 200 metres (655 feet) tall, as high as the HSBC Tower in London.

Question 8

It sounds an interesting scheme but the only thing that worries me is the construction period. You mention directing the construction traffic from the A34 to the A4130. Didcot residents are only too well aware of the huge amount of traffic already using the A4130.

Response: A Construction Code of Practice (CCoP) accompanies the planning application, this will ensure that construction traffic will be directed from the A34 to the A4130 and it will leave this road near the Power Station roundabout on Milton Road and Basil Hill Road. This will ensure that construction traffic will not go through local villages but remain on these major highways. A construction traffic management plan (CTMP) has been prepared and will be conditioned through any consents. The aim of the CTMP is to ensure that construction works are organised and delivered in a manner that safeguards the highway impact, highway safety and amenity of the surrounding area.

If the scheme is given planning approval, the construction period for the first building will be 10-12 months (with the second anticipated to commence 3.5 years after building one is fully operational) and once built the amount of traffic using the two data centres will be low because the total number of jobs on the site will be 100 (max.). This is considerably less than the previous uses - the Ordnance Depot and the Didcot A Power Station and less than an earlier plan which would have included residential housing.

In so far as traffic on the A4130 is concerned Oxfordshire County Council voted in October 2019 to agree to projects in the Didcot area which is part of the £218 million Oxfordshire Growth Deal where Government money is coming to Oxfordshire because the county's five districts and the county council have agreed to extra growth in housing and jobs.

Under this deal, the A4130 will become a dual carriageway from the A34 to a new Science Bridge over the Great Western Railway west of Didcot and west of the entrance to Great Western Park and Dida Gardens. This Science Bridge is likely to take the bulk of the HGVs onto the northern section of the A4130 towards the Didcot A Power Station site to neighbouring industrial sites which attract HGV movements. The road will continue northwards to a new river bridge over the Thames between Sutton Courtenay and Clifton Hampden bridges. This was reported in *The Didcot Herald* on 23 October 2019 and this is shown in **Appendix III**.

Question 9

Can you reassure us that the car parking spaces will only total 100 for the two data centres? In the approved scheme data centre scheme in Harwell Road, Sutton Courtenay the number of parking spaces is considerably greater.

Response: The parking provision has been established based on the projected vehicles, including staff and visitors taking into account shift patterns. In the earlier scheme a total of 100 car parking spaces were to be provided. The revised scheme allows for a total of 89 parking spaces. A Travel Plan encouraging cycling, walking and car sharing is submitted with the planning application. There will also be electric vehicle charging on-site for 10% of parking spaces with all spaces future proofed for the inclusion of charging points.

Question 10

The leaflet showed attenuation ponds. What ecology measures will be incorporated on the site?

Response: Extensive landscaping is proposed which includes appropriate planting and management of the pond areas to encourage biodiversity. Overall, the proposal to develop this brownfield site will result in a biodiversity net gain being achieved on the site.

Question 11

What are the air quality implications of the development?

Response: An air quality assessment has been undertaken and will form part of the application submission. Impacts during construction (e.g. dust, vehicle emissions) will be of short duration only and mitigation measures will be in place to reduce effects – this includes wheel washes and water damping to minimise dust creations. Once operational, the key source of emissions to air are the emergency back-up generators; as these will be rarely utilised, the conclusion of the assessment, taking into account changes in pollutant concentrations are predicated to be 'negligible' when the generators are in use.

Question 12

With the climate change emergency, will you be encouraging employees to drive electric vehicles or at least hybrid vehicles?

Response: Yes. The applicant is proposing 10% of the spaces to have active charging points with passive provision (i.e. the cabling) for future implementation for the remaining 90%. This represents an active provision in line with policy requirements.

Question 13

What will the on-site security measures be?

Response: The site will not be publicly accessible, and all visitors will have to go via the main security point off Milton Road. Security fencing will be provided to the perimeter of the buildings and around the site.

Question 14

Will the site be floodlit?

Response: The site will need to be lit in times of darkness for both safety of site users and security requirements. All lighting will be appropriate for its location around the site to minimise impacts and some areas will be triggered by movement so only coming on when necessary. Boundary lighting and car park lighting will be required dusk - dawn; these will be on standard lighting poles to a maximum height of 8m. A lighting strategy will be submitted as part of the application, which will include light spill details and demonstrate there will be no significant impacts from lighting.

Question 15

What percentage of the building will be offices?

Response: The administrative & support space accounts for ~15% of the building's space. The consent being sought is data centre use meaning that there would be no permitted development rights for conversion to offices at a later date.

Question 16

What are the timeframes for construction of the data centres?

Response: If planning permission is granted during 2021, it is intended to commence construction in mid-2021, completing in 2022. Unit 2 construction is currently planned to begin approximately 3.5 years later.

Question 17

We need to stop car use. Will the employees be able to use the bus service from Didcot Parkway to Milton Park?

Response: A Travel Plan accompanies the planning application, this sets out to encourage the use of public transport and other sustainable means of transport including cycling/walking. The operator will maintain and update this travel plan throughout the lifecycle of the building. There is a bus stop on Basil Hill Road, approximately 650m from the site which provides access to the Milton Park Shuttle service and others (X2 and X32/33/X33).

Question 18

Routing construction traffic along the A4130 is a concern, particularly for any residents of Dida Gardens which is only planned to have an exit onto this main road. Increasing traffic flows with heavy construction plant will make, particularly, the unregulated right turn out of Dida Gardens increasingly dangerous. Speed limits along that stretch of road appear to be infrequently observed by all forms of traffic and increasing the traffic flow along with introducing a potentially busy residential access road (even with planned re-modelling agreed as part of the Dida Gardens development) increases the risk of a severe traffic accident. Alternatively, the construction of a second access route into Dida Gardens from the Great Western Park Estate should be reconsidered.

Response: A similar question was answered in response 8. The construction of a second access route into Dida Gardens from Great Western Park is be a matter for the developers of that scheme.

Question 19

I would like to know if there are any plans to erect 5G masts because I for one totally object to this.

Response: There are no plans to place 5G masts on the data centres.

Question 20

Apart from regenerating an existing employment site, what other benefits will the data centre bring to the local community?

Response: The operator is committed to making a positive impact in the communities closest to where their employees live and work. This will consist of a range of community engagement activities such as sponsoring local organisations, arranging employee volunteering activities, delivering educational events for students of local primary and secondary schools to introduce them to the basics of cloud computing.