ARBOCULTURAL CONSULTATION COMMENTS

From: Wharton Natural Infrastructure Consultants on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council

Application: MW.0028/18

Development: Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS).

Site: North of the A420 Botley Road to south of the A423 ring road, running predominantly between the A34 to the west & the Oxford to London railway line to the east, including land between the A4144 Abingdon Road to the to the west & the River Thames.

Development Description: A flood alleviation scheme to reduce flood risk in Oxford, comprising:

- Construction of a new two stage channel from the confluence of the Botley and Seacourt Streams, extending south easterly to north Kennington;
- Floodwalls to the north of Botley Road, at Seacourt Park and Ride and adjacent to Bullstake Close allotments;
- Floodgates at Helen Road, Henry Road and Seacourt Park and Ride;
- Flood defences at New Hinksey between Abingdon Road in the west and the River Thames in the East, Ferry Hinksey Road and north of South Hinksey;
- Control Structures at Bulstake Stream, Eastwyke Ditch, Hinksey Pond, Redbridge Stream and Cold Harbour;
- Bridges and culverts to cross highways and footpaths maintaining access routes; Spillways, embankments, low flow control structure, modifications to Seacourt Stream, ford crossings, channel clearance, ditch widening and deepening, removal of weir and installation of telemetry cabinets;
- Repairs to existing walls along Osney Stream and in Hinksey Park.

The creation of new and improved habitat for flora, fauna and fisheries, and change of use of land to provide exchange for existing open space.

Recommendation: No Objection subject to Conditions
The principal author of this response is Sam Hobson BSc(Hons). MArborA, Arboricultural Consultant at Wharton Natural Infrastructure Consultants Ltd. The Principal Author is a Professional Member of the Arboricultural Association (AA) and Associate Member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) and is therefore required to uphold the professional and ethical standards within the AA and ICF Code of Conduct. The Principal Author is LANTRA certified to undertake Professional Tree Inspections.

The report is approved by Peter Wharton BSc(Hons) FArborA MICFor (Chartered Arboriculturist), Director at Wharton Natural Infrastructure Consultants (WNIC). Peter is a Fellow of the Arboricultural Association, a Professional member and registered consultant of the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) and Professional member of the Consulting Arborist Society. He is also a member and licensed user of Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) and is LANTRA certified to undertake Professional Tree Inspections. Peter also sits on the ICF’s Council Board and is an examiner for the Professional Membership Examination process, he sits on the Arboricultural Associations Consultants Working Group and Midlands Regional Branch Committee. Peter was previously a board member of the Midlands Tree Officer Association. Peter has previously been employed as an arboricultural officer for Oxfordshire County Council, Birmingham City Council and North Warwickshire Borough Council. During this time he worked in the street scene teams and planning department, dealing with both major and minor planning applications, tree legislation and public inquiries.

The response is submitted by Wharton Natural Infrastructure Consultants on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council.

This response should be read in conjunction with previous arboricultural consultation comments and a request for further information, submitted by Wharton Natural Infrastructure Consultants on 9th July 2018 (ref: 180709 0775 LBR V1).

Whilst the impact of the development proposals upon trees is a consideration in other responses including ecology, biodiversity and landscape consultations, this arboricultural response considers trees from an amenity perspective, on an individual basis and as an element of the wider tree population. It must be noted that due to the size and scale of the scheme, the resulting cumulative effect of proposed loss of individual trees and groups, and proposed mitigation planting at a local level, brings about landscape scale impacts that will be considered in detail in other responses.

Having now reviewed the most recent submissions of the revised Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) (Rev F – November 2018), Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) and Tree Protections Plans (TPP) (Rev G – November 2018) and Applicant’s Response to Regulation 25 request (Dated November 2018), these have sought to clarify and respond to points previously raised in the requests for further information. In response to the points previously raised in the initial response, I am now satisfied to have received clarification with regards to most of these points and have made any further observations in my response below.

**Tree Removals**

Previous discrepancies between documents resulted in differing numbers of tree removals being stated. The latest AIA, AMS and TPP are in line with one another, now stating a total expected removal of 284 individual trees, 45 groups of trees and partial removal of a further 62 groups of trees. As a result of additional work to clarify the total of number of trees to be removed, this is now estimated to be approximately 2000 trees in total.

In line with current best practice and taking into account the nature of the site, the blanket removal of Category U trees across the site has also been addressed, with these trees being retained where possible. U category trees do not necessitate tree removal, as declining and dead trees can provide significant other habitat value.
Furthermore, these revisions now retain trees in a key area to the east of North Hinksey Lane, reducing the adverse impact on amenity in this area.

Further justification explanation has been provided, including the explored design alternatives and balance of competing conservation objectives, against the needs and constraints of the proposed development. I am satisfied that the current proposals have sought to reduce tree loss as far as is practically possible.

It is recognised that a number of the mature willow pollards are characteristic of the area and character of riparian planting in general, several having large stem diameters and some characteristics which can be found associated with veteran trees. Due to the effects of management techniques and susceptibility of the wood to decay, willow trees of this size, with stem decay and structural defects are relatively commonplace. With reference to guidance documents and in my professional opinion, these trees would not be considered so significant as to meet the criteria for a veteran tree as described within the NPPF and elements of Policy C7 of Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy (2017).

The response to Regulation 25 request and AIA discuss the opportunities to further reduce tree loss when a contractor is appointed. The AIA states that this will be in temporary working areas while the Applicant states that these opportunities will be identified and taken wherever possible. It is critical that identification and protection of additional trees for retention takes place before any tree removal takes place. Should permission be granted then a suitable planning condition should seek to clarify and secure these matters including the phasing of tree removals.

**Tree Protection**

The revised AMS and TPP gives clarification on tree protection measures, setting out location and type of tree / ground protection, which is considered to be appropriate for the nature and scale of the development proposals. The report also gives clarification and detail on the appointment of the Arboricultural Clerk of Works (ACoW) or Project Arboriculturist). Again, due to the size and scale of the development, the role of the ACoW will be critical to ensuring the successful retention and protection of retained trees on site.

Should permission be granted then a suitable planning condition should seek to clarify and secure a scheme and full details of arboricultural supervision throughout the duration of the development.

**Mitigation Planting**

The Landscape Masterplan Overview (Rev 13) shows extensive woodland planting, predominantly away from the main areas of development which does serve as mitigation for tree / canopy cover as a whole if they become well established. Individual tree planting is also detailed on the masterplan to strengthen mitigation in key areas. Where possible the mitigation planting would benefit from increased planting of individual trees to maintain the density of existing tree cover in several key areas of localised impact, namely:

- North of West Way
- East of North Hinksey Lane
- Willow Walk
- Adjacent to Old Abingdon Road / Kennington Road

The species selection for mitigation planting reflects the current native species found in these locations and notably benefits from the later addition of native black poplar (*Populus nigra* Subsp. *Betulifolia*) on recommendation of Oxford City Council consultation comments.
The woodland mix and individual tree species selected for mitigation planting rely on a relatively narrow palette of native species, some of which are threatened by increased occurrences of pests and diseases and will come under additional pressure taking into account the likely effects of climate change. Drought, extreme weather, increased temperature and pest and disease outbreaks have the potential to negatively impact upon the tree population across the site. Fungal diseases such as *Phytophthora* are soil and water borne and are expected to become more prevalent.

Should permission be granted then a suitable planning condition should request a detailed Tree Planting Scheme to take account of future climate projections and biosecurity implications for the tree population. The tree planting scheme should seek to diversify species and genetic material to provide a resilient urban forest. Timing of mitigation tree planting should take into account opportunities for advance planting where possible, to mitigate for loss of tree cover and amenity at the earliest possible time.

**Summary**

Based upon the reasoning set out within this response, it is my professional opinion that the development proposals will result in a short to medium-term adverse impact from an arboricultural perspective, however, with correct implementation of mitigation planting and through compliance with the attached planning conditions, the long-term impact has the opportunity to be beneficial in providing increased canopy cover and diversity to the existing tree population.

Should Oxfordshire County Council be minded to approve the proposed development, I have **No Objection**, subject to the following conditions:

- Upon the appointment of a contractor and prior to the commencement of any works on site, a revised Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS), detailed Tree Protection Plan will be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Taking into account any changes in design and required alterations to tree protection, the AMS should also give details on the phasing of tree removals and make provisions for the retention and protection of additional trees throughout the course of development, to be agreed between the contractor and Project Arboriculturist, as detailed with AIA (RT-MME-124555-03 Rev F) and Applicants Response to Regulation 25 request (November 2018).
  
  **Reason:** Required to safeguard and enhance the character and amenity of the site and locality and to avoid any irreversible damage to retained trees pursuant to section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in accordance with Policies C5, C8 and C11 of Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy (2017).

- Prior to the commencement of any works on site, a scheme of arboricultural site monitoring will be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This scheme will be appropriate to the scale and duration of the works and will include details of:
  a) Induction and contractor personnel awareness of arboricultural matters including tree protection
  b) Identification of individual responsibilities and key personnel.
  c) Timing and methods of site visits and record keeping, including updates
  d) Procedures for dealing with variations and incidents
  e) The scheme of supervision shall be carried out as agreed
  f) The scheme of supervision will be administered by a qualified arboriculturist instructed by the Applicant and approved by the local planning authority.

  **Reason:** Required to safeguard and enhance the character and amenity of the site and locality and to avoid any irreversible damage to retained trees pursuant to section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in accordance with Policies C5, C8 and C11 of Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy (2017).
• No works or development shall commence until full details of all proposed tree planting has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This will include:
  a) Tree location, species (including provenance), size, nursery stock type
  b) Planting and maintenance specification including cross-section drawings, use of guards or other protective measures
  c) Statement of best practice regarding biosecurity and sourcing of planting material. Tree stock should be sourced from a domestic nursery that retains its trees for a minimum of one year within the UK before sale.
  d) All tree planting shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details. Any trees that are found to be dead, dying, severely damaged or diseased within five years of the completion of the construction works OR five years of completion of the landscaping scheme (whichever is later), shall be replaced in the next planting season by specimens of the same size and species in the first suitable planting season.

Reason: To comply with the duties indicated in Section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to safeguard and enhance the amenity of the area, to maximise the quality and usability of open spaces within the development, and to enhance its setting within the immediate locality in accordance with Policies C5, C8 and C11 of Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy (2017).

• Prior to the commencement of any works on site, a long-term landscape and habitat management plan will be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The plan should include full details of the long-term (minimum 25 years) management and maintenance of the existing site-wide tree population and proposed new tree and woodland planting.

Reason: To prevent deterioration of existing retained trees and to secure the long-term retention and maintenance of mitigation tree and woodland planting.

I trust that the above assists in providing an informed planning decision, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Kind regards,

Sam Hobson BSc(Hons) MArborA
Arboricultural Consultant
Wharton Natural Infrastructure Consultants