

## WRITTEN STATEMENT - REASON FOR SCREENING OUTCOME

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (SSLUHC) has considered whether the Project, the proposed development at the Project site at Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) is likely to have significant environmental effects.

The Project is for permanent development as set out below:

Use:

- Continue use of the site as an Immigration Removal Centre, but increasing its capacity from 160 to 400 detainees
- Use of land for biodiversity enhancements.

Operational development:

- Refurbishment of existing buildings to provide accommodation for 160 detainees and erection of temporary structures and buildings
- Demolition of existing modular buildings, cold store and removal of fencing
- Erection of new accommodation buildings for 240 detainees and associated services to provide for health care, visitors, interview rooms, administration, drivers' rest area, kitchens, faith rooms
- Extension and alteration of existing buildings to improve thermal performance and provide new plant rooms
- Erection of additional 5.2 metre high perimeter fence
- Erection of internal zonal fencing, vehicular and pedestrian gates
- Provision of new site entrance gates and barrier
- Creation of internal road, hard surfacing and car parking
- Creation of ponds and swales as part of site drainage strategy
- Provision of bunds to re-use excavated materials, creation of biodiversity enhancements and landscaping
- Provision of external security lighting, CCTV, fencing and noise attenuation

Services and facilities:

- Healthcare
- Multi faith facilities
- Indoor and outdoor recreation
- Visiting facilities

The main new buildings will be a maximum of three storeys (approximately 16 metres in total height). The proposer has confirmed that the gross internal floor space will be similar to that proposed in the 2014 application, which was 9030.1 square metres

Anticipated number of staff will be 421, with approximately 220 on staff at any one time.

Total car parking provision will be approximately 205 spaces.

The existing Close Circuit Television (CCTV) and external lighting on the site will be retained and updated with light-emitting diode (LED) lights which will be designed to minimise light spill onto adjoining habitats and uses. Additional CCTV will be provided. Any additional external lighting will be LED.

The Project site will be managed by a service operator, contracted by the Home Office, who will retain overall responsibility for the site.

At decommissioning the new temporary buildings will be removed and replaced with permanent buildings, during the phasing of the overall Project. In addition, there will be a construction compound which will be removed at the end of the construction period.

The site has an established use as an IRC. It was closed in 2019 following an announcement in 2018 by the Home Office that it was part of their response to the Stephen Shaw Review, part of the then Home Secretary's commitment to cut the number of people detained at any given time and improve the welfare of detainees. The announcement stated that the use of immigration detention and the implications for the detention estate as a whole will be kept under review. Since then the site has been managed and maintained and has not been put to any other use and has remained in the ownership of the Home Office. It is reasonable to conclude therefore that its last use as secure residential accommodation provides the planning basis for the assessment.

The site previously accommodated up to 280 detained persons but following the findings of the Shaw Review in 2018 the capacity of the existing facility is considered to be 160 persons. In terms of the use of the site, the baseline for the purposes of the EIA screening is that the site is capable, with internal refurbishment, of accommodating up to 160 detained persons.

The EIA Screening Direction is made on the basis of the Project as described by the Secretary of State for the Home Department (SSHD). In view of the existing use of the site and the baseline capacity, the incremental increase relates to the new buildings to create additional capacity for 240 detainees and associated works, such as hard standing and car parking. The total site area is 8.42 ha and therefore above the 5 ha threshold for Schedule 2 development, but it is unlikely that the actual new building works will comprise more than 1 hectare of land. It is arguable therefore whether the proposed development does actually require a screening direction, but in view of the formal request on behalf of the Home Office the Project has been screened nonetheless for EIA development on a precautionary basis.

A number of mitigations have been referred to in the EIA screening request and additional information. Some of the documents that have been referred to as providing mitigations have been submitted. However, no reliance has been placed on the mitigations in the consideration of the EIA screening request.

The Secretary of State has therefore undertaken this screening taking into account the criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended) ("the 2017 Regulations"). This is on the basis that the proposed development falls within Schedule 2:10 (b) of the 2017 Regulations (Urban development

projects), exceeding the thresholds set out column 2 of Schedule 2 (i) of the 2017 Regulations (more than 1 ha of urban development that is not dwellinghouse development). It is close to a sensitive area, namely a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Rushy Meadows (outside the Project site to the south east).

In considering the information needed to undertake the screening (including seeking further information from the applicant) and in forming a view on the extent to which significant environmental effects are likely in order to make the screening direction, the Secretary of State has had due regard to the impact on persons with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, bearing in mind the nature of the potential effects associated with the Project and the nature of screening for significant environmental effects.

As noted above, the baseline for the purposes of the EIA Screening Direction is that Project site has a lawful use as an Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) that has not been abandoned. Taking a precautionary approach, the baseline of 160 detained persons with associated staff and activities has been adopted for the purposes of the EIA screening. It has been estimated that there were 252 vehicle movements a day associated with the use as an IRC and this forms the baseline traffic generation for the EIA screening.

The Secretary of State considers the main matters are as follows:

Potential effects on human health were considered, for detainees at the facility and for the existing population.

The Home Office has confirmed that it is an integral part of the Project that health services are provided for detainees from the outset and NHS England is legally required to provide healthcare within an IRC. In this case, NHS England intends to commission a discrete health service for the IRC, which is anticipated to have a limited impact on the local health economy. Access to secondary care within the local area is an integral part of the healthcare service within the IRC. It is therefore an integral part of the project that healthcare is provided for detainees and there are no likely significant effects in this regard in terms of human health.

Accommodation will comply with the relevant statutory requirements. The IRC is a secure environment that is close to a prison training site, dog training area and airport. These land uses may have negative effects on the emotional wellbeing of some detainees. It is acknowledged that rooms and communal spaces may be shared by individuals of different characteristics such as their nationality, ethnicity, background, religion or belief, personal experiences prior to arriving at the site. There may therefore be tensions between individuals however this in itself is not a significant effect; any such tensions would be managed by the Site Operator. Detainees will be health screened within two hours of their arrival at the site as to their suitability to be detained at the IRC and will have ongoing access to health services. There are therefore unlikely to be significant effects in terms of health of the detainees as a cohort. The health of individual detainees is a matter for the Home Office and site operator.

A risk of accidents was identified due to the possibility that the Project site may be the focus for protests and demonstrations, which could put human health at risk. As the site is self-contained and has a secure entrance, it would not be possible for unauthorised persons to enter the site lawfully, and detainees will not be able to leave the site except when released. Any such events would be a matter for the police and other relevant national and local services. Adverse effects from the risk of accidents are considered to be limited and localised and there will not be likely significant effects on human health that indicate that the Project is EIA development.

As healthcare provision is an integral part of the Project, and NHS England has confirmed that the provision would have a limited impact on the local health economy, there are no likely significant effects on the existing population in terms of access to health care. It is possible that the Project will give rise to a fear of crime/disruption/protests among the local population that could affect their mental health. However, the IRC is an existing use and the increase in capacity is unlikely to result in significant effects in terms of the health of the local population in this regard.

There is a risk of accidents due to the high to medium risk of unexploded ordnance being on site (UXO). However, as the risk has been identified, works on site will be carried out in accordance with standard practice to ensure that the risk of major accidents is minimised.

There is a risk of traffic accidents from construction and operational traffic, which may overlap, but in view of the baseline use of the site it is unlikely that there would be a significant increase in the risk of traffic accidents. As the site is already lit, it is unlikely that additional lighting would lead to an increased risk of accidents associated with Oxford Airport.

As service users are detained, there is unlikely to be significant demographic change as a result of the Project. It is possible that some detainees who are released to the community may stay in the area, but it is more likely that they will settle elsewhere in the UK, for example close to friends and family. It is therefore unlikely that significant demographic change will result. The site is close to large centres of population, so that it is unlikely that the staffing requirements of the Project will result in an influx of workers to the area. Likely significant effects are not therefore identified in this respect.

The site is at very low risk of flooding from rivers or the sea.

The site is not in close proximity to any designated ecological sites and no likely significant effects have been identified in this regard. There may be some effects on protected species during construction from site clearance/tree felling. There is no evidence that any effects on protected species that may be present would be significant.

The site is not in or close to any designated landscapes. There will be localised effects on the non-designated landscape but these are not likely to be significant effects. The development will have a visual effect on the appearance of the site, and this will be apparent in views from public rights of way, local

roads and residential properties. The effects will be localised and will not be significant effects.

The Project will result in the partial loss of greenfield land, but the land is already within the security fence and is a relatively small area. It is unlikely to affect other high quality or scarce resources on or around the site as existing site drainage will be used and oil interceptors will be installed into car parks. This is not likely to be a significant effect.

The Project will result in the release of pollutants to the air, in particular through increased traffic generation and construction works, which could affect sensitive receptors and Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). However, construction traffic will be temporary and limited. When compared with the baseline, the increase in operational traffic will be limited and is unlikely to result in significant effects on air quality, in terms of sensitive receptors or the AQMAs.

The Project will give rise to noise and vibration from various sources, including construction, traffic, activities on the site and the potential for noisy protests and demonstrations. However, in view of the baseline levels of noise generated by the site as an IRC, it is not likely that the Project will result in significant effects in this regard. The site is already lit, and is an area where there are various light sources and sky glow, including streetlights, Oxford Airport, residential and commercial uses in the vicinity of the site. The additional lighting on the site is not likely to result in significant effects.

The Project will result in physical topographical changes which will have limited localised effects. Natural resources will be used in construction and operation of the Project, including energy, construction materials and water. Excavated soil will be reused where appropriate and where not contaminated. Existing utilities to the site will be used. Due to the scale of the project the use of additional natural resources will not result in likely significant effects.

Potential negative effects from the production of waste, during the operation of the Project were identified. Nonetheless, there is a legal requirement to dispose of waste appropriately, including hazardous waste, which applies to the SSHD and there is no reason to doubt that the waste arising from the Project will be collected, stored, and disposed of in accordance with those legal requirements. There will not be likely significant effects that indicate that the Project is EIA development in this regard.

The site has some areas of land contamination, but there is very low likelihood of adverse effects on groundwater or the water environment due to the geological conditions. Construction workers will need to follow standard procedures for protection from potentially contaminated soil. Contaminated soil will not be suitable for reuse for any areas that could be used as for gardening or landscaping and this can be secured through the normal planning process. These are standard practices that are not controversial in this case and there is no reason to conclude that they would not be effective. No likely significant effects are envisaged in this regard.

The site is not close to any sensitive areas that are designated for their ecological or landscape significance. Natural England's response to the engagement by SSLUHC supports this. Site clearance and demolition may require supervision to ensure that there are no effects on protected species. If effects cannot be avoided, replacement habitats will be created on site and protected species will be relocated under the appropriate licence. There will be opportunities for biodiversity enhancements on the wider site. Trees will be retained where possible and where felling is unavoidable there is scope for replacement planting. New lighting will be designed to minimise light spill onto adjoining habitats and existing lighting will be upgraded to LED. Significant effects are not likely in relation to biodiversity and trees.

The site is not close to any features of cultural heritage value or interest and has low/modest archaeological potential.

There are several neighbouring land uses, which include agriculture, an airport, a hotel, a business park, residential properties, a children's nursery and an ambulance station. While there will be some effects on neighbouring land uses, including from noise, disturbance, lighting and air quality during construction and operation, the effects are not likely to be significant due to the limited scale of the Project. The site may be the subject of media attention due to the nature of the use. This may have effects on tourist attractions and facilities in the area. However, the IRC is an existing use and any effects are likely to be localised and temporary. There are no likely significant effects in relation to other land uses in the vicinity of the site.

The operation of the Project will result in an increase in traffic generation compared to the baseline. There is likely to be a degree of overlap between construction and operational traffic, due to the phased approach to the Project. The road network is considered suitable to accommodate the increase in traffic and the site has easy access to the main road network, as well as public transport facilities, footways and cycleways. The increase in traffic is likely to be spread out over the 24 hour period due to the shift pattern, with several peaks. It is therefore unlikely to be a significant effect. There are unlikely to be any significant effects on routes that are used by the public for access to recreation or other facilities.

There will be a cumulative effect with other planned and potential development in the area. This includes proposals such as the Botley West Solar Farm, the Oxford United Football Club proposal for a stadium, as well as large scale planned development. Cumulative effects include traffic generation, air pollution and visual/landscape effects. The contribution of the Project to this is however very limited. There are other Home Office sites in Oxfordshire which provide accommodation for asylum seekers. These are non-detained sites and are not comparable with the Project which is for detained sites. Likely significant effects were not identified in this regard.

There are sensitive receptors to lighting, air pollution, noise, and vibration in the vicinity of the Project site and it is noted that these may differentially affect those with protected characteristics. Due, however, to the separation distances

from the Project site and the low level of air pollution, noise, and vibration that will be generated by the Project, significant effects are not likely to occur.

As the Project site is in close proximity to large areas of population it is unlikely that there will be an influx of staff to the area. Any detainees released to the community are more likely to return to the area from which they were detained. As a result, the Project is unlikely to result in significant demographic change. A limited adverse effect may result from the limited opportunities for fostering good relations between detainees and the local population due to the self-contained nature of the Project. The Project is unlikely to result in significant environmental effects as a result of social change and there will not be likely significant effects that indicate that the Project is EIA development in this regard.

**Conclusions**

No mitigations proposed by SSHD have been relied upon in reaching a decision about whether the Project constitutes EIA development.

For the reasons set out above, after carefully assessing all the information before him, and having had due regard to the impact on persons with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, the Secretary of State has concluded that in the circumstances of this case, there are unlikely to be significant effects. As such, the Project is not considered to be EIA Development for the purposes of regulation 5(3) of the EIA Regulations.

<b>NAME</b>	Planning Response Unit
<b>DATE</b>	31 May 2023