

Town & Country Planning (EIA) Regulations 2017
Secretary of State Screening Direction – Written Statement

Application name:	Former Defence Storage and Distribution Centre Bicester: Nettlefire – Site MOD015
SoS case reference:	PCU/EIASCRC3105/3378828
Schedule and category of development:	Schedule 2, 10(b): Urban Development

Full statement of reasons as required by 5(5)(a) of the 2017 EIA Regulations including conclusions on likelihood of significant environmental effects.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government ("SSMHCLG") has considered whether the Proposed Development as sought by the Home Office ("HO" or the applicant) at Ministry of Defence ("MoD") Bicester (Site A) is likely to have significant environmental effects.

She has undertaken this screening, taking into account the criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 ("the Regulations"). In doing so, she considers the main matters to be addressed are those set out in Planning Practice Guidance ("PPG") where the following are indicated as main matters relevant in the consideration of development in this category: physical scale of such developments, potential increase in traffic, emissions and noise. In addition, matters relating to ecology, drainage, land contamination and community impact are also considered to be main matters in this case.

The project is considered to be Schedule 2 development as it is a type of project identified in 10(b) of the Regulations.

Schedule 3 selection criteria for Schedule 2 development refers:

1 (a) – (g) regarding characteristics of development

The Proposed Development as sought by HO provides accommodation with 1,256 bedspaces for single male adult asylum seekers (hereinafter referred to as the Service Users ("SU")) in three phases. There will be approximately 130 staff to support the operation of the Proposed Development, including 108 staff for day-shift and 22 staff for night-shift. The Proposed Development will be operated as self-sufficient, with the on-site welfare support activities and services to be provided for SUs, as well as appropriate space for the delivery of healthcare to meet routine and primary care needs. The Proposed Development will be operated as a non-detained site, meaning that the SUs will be free to leave on foot or through vehicle journeys organised on their behalf.

All facilities will be located within newly constructed structures. No existing buildings will be renovated due to their poor condition, except an existing warehouse to be converted to a gym facility. A total of five existing Nissen Huts are proposed to be demolished, however the concrete slabs forming the base to the Nissen Huts are to be retained for future use. No demolition is proposed in Phase 1. Phases 2 and 3 will be built on new foundations with reinforced concrete slabs and suitable clay formation.

This assessment is carried out on the basis that the maximum height of the modular units is no more than 2-storey (i.e. 6m height maximum). The newly constructed structures will accommodate a range of facilities, including:

- 600 no. 2.4 x 6 m modular accommodation units;
- 92 no. 2.4 x 6 m modular WC units;
- 64 no. 2.4 x 6 m modular shower units;
- 192 no. 2.4 x 6 m modular ancillary units;
- 24 no. 2.4 x 6 m modular staff facility units;
- 12 no. 2.4 x 6 m modular site function units;
- Four electrical sub-stations;
- One water tank and pump house;
- 90 car parking spaces within Phase 1 and a further 57 for Phase 2; and
- Eight bicycle storage spaces.

Phase 1:

No demolition is anticipated in Phase 1 which introduces double-stacked modular accommodation buildings located in the northwestern zone. The modular accommodation will allow for 408 SUs, including standard accommodation for 384 SUs and 24 medical isolation units. To support the operation of the accommodation, Phase 1 includes a range of ancillary staff and welfare buildings, which are primarily single-storey. The Phase 1 facilities include the following:

- Kitchen and Dining Facility – incorporating kitchen storage areas and designed to serve the full capacity SU population, with capacity for approximately 350 SUs at any one time;
- Medical centre comprising eight consulting rooms;
- Reception building, including four interview rooms, a classroom and WC facilities;
- Multi-faith facility;
- Laundry and linen stores;
- Staff office and IT/Server building;
- Recreation building;
- Ablution blocks – toilets and showers;
- Infrastructure compounds, including: generator compound, cold water storage and hydrant tank; and
- Secure car parking with 90 spaces.

All the above buildings will be located within the existing hardstanding area, which is currently in use as a storage yard.

Phase 2:

Phase 2 will see the construction of accommodation for 216 SUs located in the central zone adjacent to the Phase 1 hardstanding. This will include standard accommodation for 208 SUs and 8 medical isolation units. The additional accommodation modules are proposed along with the following additional ancillary shared facilities:

- Ablution blocks – toilets and showers;
- Designated quiet room;
- Secure car parking with 57 spaces;
- Generator compound; and
- Gym facility within an existing building.

Phase 3:

Phase 3 provides double stacked accommodation for an additional 632 SUs (600 for SUs with 32 medical isolation units). In addition, the following amenities are also to be constructed in this final phase:

- Ablution blocks – toilets and showers;
- Designated quiet rooms – three rooms each located in proximity to a cluster of accommodation units;
- Outdoor recreation areas;
- Generator compound;
- Water attenuation for surface water management;
- Below-ground attenuation tanks providing additional storage capacity; and
- Surface water pumping station to manage discharge and drainage.

The three distinct development zones, brought forward in three phases will be connected via the existing road network and clearly defined pedestrian routes.

The primary and secondary accesses to the Application Site are off the B4011. The northern access, currently closed off access, will become the main operational access point utilising the same junction layout albeit with minor improvements. The access currently used will remain, but will be used during construction and for emergencies.

While limited site-specific operational phase information is available, based on the running of similar facilities and given the relative scales and that all staff trips to and from the site are made by single occupancy cars, this is considered as representing the worst case scenario. The operational traffic includes site staff commuting, SU vehicle movements, Minibus SU arrivals, Taxi SU departures and Shuttlebus transport for SU for use of off-site facilities.

Site staff commuting is estimated in three shift patterns and two of which overlap, totalling 260 vehicle movements in any 24-hour period. Service vehicle movements are estimated as 192 per day (including 43 Light Goods Vehicle and 53 Heavy Goods Vehicles in two-way trips). Minibus SU arrivals are estimated as 2 vehicles per day. Taxi SU departure will be starting after the first period of SU occupancy has expired from the site opening (occupancy likely set at 90 days), which will be up to 30 individual trips per day. Number of shuttlebus transport for SUs to use off-site facilities have not been estimated, but will include longer and shorter trips for SUs depending on which facilities are to be accessed.

Duration and phasing:

The **construction phase** programme and duration is unspecified at this time although the applicant intend for bedspaces to become available during 2026. Noting the build is modular and requires little intrusive groundworks, this part of each of the three phases will be relatively quick to complete.

The duration of **operational phase** is not specified but will be subject to review after an initial 10-year period. Following the first review at 10 years, the review frequency may change. Therefore, at a minimum, the Proposed Development is expected to operate for 10 years with the potential for this to be extended should the decision be taken to continue the established use.

There are no definitive plans for the decommissioning phase of the Proposed Development within an expected timeframe. For the purpose of this EIA screening, it is assumed that the Proposed Development operates permanently as a worst case scenario with any decommissioning impacts

broadly comparable to those considered with regards to those resulting from the construction phase. As such, the potential impacts during reinstatement will not be further considered in this assessment.

This EIA Screening Direction is made on the basis of the Proposed Development, as described above and is made by the Secretary of State for MHCLG for the HO.

Whilst the Proposed Development will inevitably comprise a minor physical change to the locality, given the characteristics of the development, the receiving environment and the nature of the likely impacts, the SSMHCLG does not consider that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of Schedule 3(1) of the Regulations regarding:

- (a) the size and design of the whole development;
- (b) cumulation with other existing development and/or approved development;
- (c) the use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity;
- (d) the production of waste;
- (e) pollution and nuisances;
- (f) the risk of major accidents and/or disasters relevant to the development concerned, including those caused by climate change, in accordance with scientific knowledge;
- (g) the risks to human health (for example, due to water contamination or air pollution).

2 (a)-(c) (i) – (viii) regarding location of development

The Application Site, where the Proposed Development is located, is on the 'Site A' of the former MoD Defence Storage and Distribution Centre (the 'wider site'). The area of the application site is approximately 10.1ha, which is within the northern part of a 50.5 ha wider site. The wider site was constructed between 1941-1943 and used to store military equipment with a small-scale storage of cars. The application site and the wider site will be vacated during summer 2026. The remaining land within the wider site will remain inactive and be unaffected by the Proposed Development, e.g., the railway and other historical uses.

The wider site is located approximately 6km to the southeast of central Bicester, and is bounded by the B4011 to the west, agricultural fields to the north, Widnell Lane and agricultural fields to the south. There is a belt of established woodland partly on the wider MoD site but straddling Widnell Lane and including the Jubilee Nature Reserve. A residential gypsy and traveller mobile home park (known as Hillside Park) is located to the south of Widnell Lane, which has been established and occupied. HM Prison Bullingdon is c. 307m southwest on the opposite side of the B4011. Further to the north, east and south, the wider site is surrounded by agricultural fields.

In terms of the wider site surroundings, the nearest settlements are Piddington (c. 250m southeast) and Upper and Lower Arncott (c. 1.5km west) and Blackthorn (c. 1.3km north). The three nearest settlements have limited community facilities with a single convenience store located at Arncott. Individual isolated residential properties are also present the nearest of which is located c. 296m north 'Wild Meadow'. Further residential uses are associated with New Farm and Bridge Farm (c. 500m north), Meadow Farm (c. 700m north), Cow Pastures Farm (c. 422m south) and Upper Cow Leys Farm (c. 900m northeast). No community facilities other than those that form part of the Proposed Development are on the wider site. However, Launton FC Garrison Sports Ground is situated

immediately opposite across the B4011 with a recreation ground nearby (associated with Widnell Park).

The application site is located off the B4011 where access is only convenient by private motor vehicle but benefits from good accessibility in this regard. The two primary access points lie off the B4011 which is subject to a 50mph speed limit and in the immediate vicinity has neither street lighting or a footway.

The majority of the application site falls within Flood Zone 1, indicating the lowest risk of flooding from fluvial sources. However, a small area in the northeastern corner falls within the area of Flood Zones 2 and 3, associated with the River Ray and an unnamed tributary of the River Ray, and indicating a medium to high risks of fluvial flooding.

The River Ray is situated c.1.1km to the north, the unnamed River Ray tributary flows northward and is located c.500m to the north and east of the application site. Both the River Ray and the unnamed tributary of the River Ray along the eastern border feature natural flood defence in the form of natural high ground.

As for the risk of surface water flooding, considerable areas of the site are located within areas of surface water flood risk, with flood risk ranging from high (>3.3% Annual Exceedance Probability "AEP") to low (0.1% - 1% AEP), particularly in central and western areas of the application site within the footprints of the existing buildings.

The entire application site is within Drinking Water Safeguard Zones (Surface Water). The application site is also classified as an unproductive aquifer with superficial drifts from a Secondary A aquifer.

The land across the application site is classified as Grade 4 agricultural land (poor quality).

There are 5 no. records of historical industrial land use onsite noted in the environmental database. These relate to unspecified depot (2 No.) 1982 to 1992, Railway sidings (2No.) 1982 to 1992, Unspecified Commercial / Industrial (2No.) 1982 to 1992, and unspecified Tank (2No.) 1982 to 1992. A historical electricity substation is located onsite 1978 to 1994. There are 2 No. further records of Unspecified Depot within 100m of the site boundary (47m to the west). There are no recorded pollution incidents within 500m of the site recorded in the last 25 years.

The application site is not within a Mineral Safeguarding Area or a Coal Mining Reporting Area.

The wider MoD site is not subject to any public access. There are no Public Rights of Way ("PRoW") within or connecting to the application site.

The nearest PRoW (321/1/20) is some 300m to the north of the application site and both the application site and wider site within MoD's land interest is not currently open to the public. There are a few PRoWs in the south and southeast and further afield to southwest with some around the hamlets of Blackthorn and Ambrosden to the northwest and Ludgershall in the east.

There are no statutory or non-statutory designated sites within the boundary of the application site. However, the application site falls within the Site of Special Scientific Interest ("SSSI") Impact Risk Zone.

The followings are the environmentally designated sites within relatively close proximity:

- Arncott Bridge Meadow SSSI, c. 1.8km northwest
- Muswell Hill SSSI, c. 2.5km south
- Whitecross Green and Oriol Woods SSSI, c. 3.9km southwest

- Rushbeds Wood and Railway Cutting SSSI, c. 3.3km southeast
- Long Herdon Meadow SSSI, c. 2.7km northeast
- Murcott Meadow, c. 5km southwest
- Otmoor SSSI, c. 5.5km southwest (with a RSPB Reserve site to its south)

There are several priority habitats within 1km of the application site, including lowlands meadows which are located c.170m south and further north of the site. Several parcels of deciduous woodland are located to the west, south and east of the application site. There are also several small parcels of ancient woodland to the southwest of the application site. The closest one is Piddington Wood, an Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland, located approximately 1km to the south.

The application site consists of grassland, hedgerows, scrub, ditch, trees. These are the habitats suitable for several protected and notable species, including badger, hazel dormouse, roosting bats, commuting and foraging bats, nesting birds, great crested newt ("GCN"), reptiles and invertebrates.

The wider site is in a rural location to the southeast of Bicester, Oxfordshire. The local landscape is influenced by military development associated with MoD Bicester, which dates back to 1942. No such areas are identified as present and the wider site is a considerable distance from any National Landscape, which is 29km from the nearby town of Bicester.

The wider site is however, located within the National Character Area 108 – Upper Thames Clay Vales. The topography of the immediate area is largely flat, associated with the plain of the River Ray. The topography of the landscape in the wider area is in comparison much higher, with notable ridgelines to the north and south.

Onsite and within the wider area, there are records of potential buried archaeological remains with possible evidence of historic field boundaries within the undeveloped area of the wider MoD site. The site was found to contain moderate to high potential for previously unrecorded archaeological remains relating to the Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval period activity of the area, due to the known evidence found of the application site and surrounding areas.

There are no Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, World Heritage Site, Registered Parks and Gardens, Registered Battlefields or Conservation Area within the site boundary or immediate adjacent to the application site.

There are 12 Listed Buildings within 1km of the application site, all located in the village of Piddington to the east. These comprise one Grade II* Listed Building, the Church of St Nicholas (c. 900m southeast), and 11 Grade II Listed Buildings. The nearest Listed Building is 'Barn approximately 100 metres North West of Brown's Place' (Grade II) c. 750m to the southeast.

The nearest Scheduled Monument to the application site is 'Moated site 110m south west of St Mary's Church', located c. 2.7km to the southeast. Other Scheduled Monuments are identified approximately 4km from the site. Wotton House, a Grade I Registered Park and Garden, is located c. 4km to the southwest.

The application site is not located within any Air Quality Management Areas ("AQMA"), nor is there any AQMA located within 500m of the application site.

3(a) – (h) regarding characteristics of potential impact

The Secretary of State has considered the likely significant effects of the development on the environment in relation to the characteristics of the development and the location of the development with regard to the impact of the development on the factors specified in regulation 4(2), taking into account—

- (a) the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
- (b) the nature of the impact;
- (c) the transboundary nature of the impact;
- (d) the intensity and complexity of the impact;
- (e) the probability of the impact;
- (f) the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;
- (g) the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development;
- (h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

The Secretary of State considers the main impacts to be the following:

Air Quality Impact

During construction, the proposed construction work mostly involves installation of prefabricated modular units on existing hardstanding area and demolition of 5no. existing Nissen Huts. A Dust Management Plan will be developed at the later stages of design when further construction details are known. The Proposed Development will generate construction traffic associated with the transportation of modular units, construction plants and materials, it is likely to involve the use of heavy goods vehicles ("HGVs").

Considering the scale and nature of the proposed construction works, air quality impacts arising from construction activities and traffic is of short term duration and not anticipated to be substantial. With the appropriate dust management measures in place and good site management practice, the construction emissions impact to on-site SUs and nearby air sensitive receptors will be mitigated and limited in nature.

Air emissions during operation phase are likely to arise from the on-site generator compounds and increased traffic movements. Considerations will be given to careful siting of the generators and selection of modern plants that meet emissions standards. Hence, air quality effects on SUs and staff have been minimised through mitigation measures and the design of the Proposed Development, the effects are unlikely to be significant.

In terms of operational traffic, it is estimated that there will be 70 two-way trips in AM peak hours, and 21 two-way trips generated in PM peak hours. The estimated percentage increase on the adjacent highway is 12.1% in the AM peak and 3.7% in the PM peak. It is considered that the change is nevertheless relatively small scale in comparison to the local population size and overall road network use in the locality. Therefore, emissions from traffic are considered to be limited and unlikely to result in a significant effect.

Noise Impact

The proposed construction works mostly involve installation of prefabricated modular units on existing hardstanding and some demolition works to dismantle five existing Nissen Huts. Groundworks are expected to be minimal and noisy construction activities are not anticipated. Any construction noise impact will be short term and temporary in nature. Good practice measures outlined in the CEMP will be implemented where appropriate, such as use of acoustic barriers where required and regular maintenance of machinery in accordance with manufacturers guidelines.

The Proposed Development will generate construction traffic. Vehicles engines will be turned off when not in use as a good site management practice. The expected number of construction traffic movement is currently unknown. However, considering the scale and types of the construction works, the volume of construction traffic is not anticipated to be substantial, and the associated traffic noise impact to on-site SUs and nearby noise sensitive receptors will be temporary and unlikely to be significant.

Noise impact during operation phase is likely to arise from SUs, generator compounds and increased traffic movements. The proposed development will be designed internally and externally to minimise noise impacts on private amenity areas, habitable rooms and nearby residential receptors. The generators will be located further from on-site noise sensitive receptors and temporary acoustic screening around generators would be installed where required to reduce the noise level within acceptable limits.

As stated in the air quality section, the increase in traffic movements is relatively small scale in comparison to the local population size and overall road network use. Also, given the existing background noise has been dominated by the traffic from B4011, it is considered that the magnitude of increase in vehicle movements due to the Proposed Development is unlikely to result in significant road traffic noise effect.

Land Contamination

The application site was utilised as an MoD base with storage of military equipment and for the storage of cars requiring bodywork repair. No fuel storage tanks were identified on site.

A third-party representation has been received concerning the contaminated land on site, which is based on the findings in the Land Quality Assessment dated May 2010 to support a planning application (11/01494/OUT). However, the applicant confirms that the Preliminary Geo-environmental and Geotechnical Assessment completed in 2026 supersedes the 2010 report.

The Preliminary Geo-environmental and Geotechnical Assessment identifies the two constraints in relation to the on-site ground conditions. The differential settlement due to poor quality of concrete and potentially variable ground condition would potentially result in damage to modular structures placed on existing hardstanding. Targeted investigation undertaken would determine the ground bearing pressure in areas of hardstanding that may be used to site modular buildings.

The other constraint is the presence of made ground potentially contain contaminants including asbestos-containing materials ("ACM"). An Asbestos Demolition Survey was undertaken by the HO appointed consultant in April 2026 and identified the presence of ACM. Targeted investigation should determine the presence and extent of contamination by undertaking targeted sampling in the areas of known made ground and the area where munitions were handled and stored. Prior to refurbishment, or any activity that disturbs the fabric of the building in these excluded areas, are to be subjected to a fully intrusive refurbishment asbestos survey, under controlled conditions where

appropriate. An appropriate Asbestos Management Plan will be implemented in accordance with relevant regulatory requirements.

In addition, a Preliminary Risk Assessment for Potential Unexploded Ordnance ("UXO") undertaken in 2026 stated that there was no evidence of Heavy Anti-Aircraft or military training activity. However, potential for the presence of UXO cannot be ruled out due to the fact that the site is MoD owned and has been in military occupation since WWII. The assessment concluded that the potential risk of encountering UXO will be 'low'. Due to the modular construction, there will be limited intrusive works and industry standard health and safety measures including the Construction (Design Management) Regulations 2015 will be in place. UXO / Explosive training is recommended and a further Detailed Risk Assessment may be required with clear lines of communication and responsibilities put in place and an Emergency Response Plan.

While there are potential risks of land contamination, the risk is not considered to be significant given the targeted surveys to be implemented prior to any construction activities take place and outlined mitigation measures during construction.

The potential sources of contamination during operation phase are likely to be spill and leaks from vehicles and creation of new pathways for the migration of contamination. The other site operational activities are considered to be low risk in terms of contaminating the underlying soils. Given the nature of the Proposed Development and its operational management practice (e.g. emergency and spill management plans), significant effects due to land contamination are unlikely.

Flood Risks

The majority of the application site falls within Flood Zone 1. Although a small area in the northeastern corner falls within the area of Flood Zones 2 and 3, the applicant confirmed that no modular units will be located within these areas, therefore effects due to flood risk are unlikely to be significant.

Sewerage

With the occupancy of SUs and staff introduced by the Proposed Development, there will be an increase in sewerage discharge from the operational activities.

Multiple foul water sewers within the application site boundary have been identified. These sewers are to discharge to a pump station located on the western boundary of the application site, situated between the two gated access points off the B4011.

The applicant states that whether the existing sewer has sufficient capacity to accept the sewerage generated by the Proposed Development is yet to be confirmed at later design stage. However, tankering of foul effluent will be implemented as an interim measure during initial phase (i.e. foul water will be stored in the cesspool and transferred into the tanker tank to be disposed to a licensed disposal facility). It is anticipated that the foul water could be taken to Bicester Wastewater Treatment Works, owned and operated by Thames Water, subject to confirmation that sufficient treatment and acceptance capacity is available. The applicant confirmed that the tankering process would be completed by a licenced wastewater vacuum tankering contractor and the tankered wastewater would not be discharged into the watercourses of the Arncott Bridge Meadows SSSI.

The potential risks of contamination during the tankering process resulting from accidental spillage and leakage have been considered in this screening assessment. With the appropriate operational

procedure and mitigation measures such as spill prevention and provision of alarm systems, the risks are considered to be minimised.

Natural England ("NE") has been consulted regarding the use of tankering as an interim sewerage management strategy and they are satisfied with the explanation and approach, without damaging the interest features for which Arncott Bridge Meadows SSSI was classified for.

The applicant confirms that any potential hydrological impacts would be mitigated by the treatment process, the operation of which would be agreed with the Environment Agency via the Environmental Permit process.

Given the tankered foul water will be managed by a licensed contractor and disposed to a licenced facility, and the implementation of appropriate measures in the event of any spillage and leakage, any impact pathway between the proposed development and Arncott Bridge Meadows SSSI is unlikely. Although the final foul water management strategy has yet to be confirmed, on the basis that the final strategy will be designed not to be detrimental to the interest features of the concerned SSSI, significant effect is unlikely in this regard.

Surface water runoff

The application site features a private surface water drainage network, including pipes and drainage ditches. There are several drains on the application site which drain from southeast to northwest.

The applicant states that surface water would be managed through the proposed drainage and mitigation measures. Although the refinement of the drainage requirements will be undertaken in later design stage following the hydraulic modelling and confirmation of the key design parameters, the applicant confirms that the surface water discharge rates will be designed to achieve a greenfield runoff rates and will not alter the existing hydrological regime. In addition, the proposed development does not introduce any additional hardstanding beyond that already present on the application site.

NE has been consulted in terms of the proposed surface water drainage strategy and they agreed that the proposed development would not be expected to increase runoff rates, alter the existing hydrological regime, or result in additional adverse impacts on the interest features of Arncott Bridge SSSI beyond those which already exist under the current site conditions.

In addition, the applicant states that the nature and magnitude of surface water discharge can be quantified by hydraulic modelling based on the finalised drainage design, which will be confirmed and agreed by the Lead Local Flood Authority.

Having regard to the design principles of the proposed drainage strategy, the absence of any new hardstanding areas, and NE's advice, significant effects due to surface water drainage are considered unlikely compared with the baseline conditions.

Ecological Impact

The proposed construction works mainly involves installation of prefabricated modular units, intensive construction activities are expected to be minimal and short in duration. The applicant states that site clearance will be avoided wherever possible and kept to a minimum where necessary. Effects on identified ecological sites will be further minimised through the implementation of a CEMP incorporating ecological controls, hence the effects are unlikely to be significant during construction

phase. No areas of Priority Habitat or otherwise designated sites will be lost or harmed due to the proposed development.

The application site falls within the SSSI Impact Risk Zone. NE has been consulted and advised on 23 July 2026 that *'the proposal could have potential significant effects on Arncott Bridge SSSI'*. NE noted the hydrological connection between the site and the SSSI cannot be ruled out and advised that the proposed development will need to demonstrate that it will not alter the existing hydrological regime and therefore risk impacting the interest features of the downstream SSSI.

NE also noted that the proposed development will be designed to achieve greenfield runoff rates which are lower than existing runoff rates. NE further advised that the sufficient treatment trains to be incorporated into the drainage design to prevent any degradation in water quality and subsequent impact to the Arncott Bridge SSSI's interest features.

NE subsequently clarified on 11 August 2026 that their advice on the Arncott Bridge SSSI is focused on ensuring that water quantity and water quality are appropriately managed through the final drainage design. NE also responded on 13 August 2026 that they are content for the proposed development to move forward without damaging the interest features of the concerned SSSI.

As detailed in the above sewerage and surface water runoff sections, although the final foul water management and surface water drainage strategy have yet to be confirmed, the final strategies will be designed on the basis that not to be detrimental to the interest features of the concerned SSSI, as well as no to alter the existing hydrological regime, the proposed development is therefore unlikely to result in additional adverse impacts on the interest features of Arncott Bridge SSSI beyond those which already exist under the current site conditions. As such, and given the interim measure that will be in place, significant effects on Arncott Bridge SSSI are considered to be unlikely.

The Proposed Development falls outside of the Otmoor SSSI Impact Risk Zone. Otmoor SSSI has not been identified within the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal to be a risk with any proven hydrological or other pathway linking to the RSBP Reserve. Hence, the Otmoor SSSI and its RSBP site are not considered likely to be subject to significant effects.

In terms of the impacts on other identified ecological sites, NE has not provided any comments in this regard. Considering the separation distance, potential connecting pathways and the operational nature of the Proposed Development, the interactivity between the Proposed Development and these sites are limited and any direct or indirect impacts would be negligible.

Highways Impact

The two primary access points lie off the B4011, with the northern access to be the main operational access point and the current access to be used during construction and for emergencies.

Considering the characteristics of the proposed development which mainly involve installation of modular builds, it is anticipated that there will be a short peak of modular units deliveries together with the equipment by HGVs at the early construction phase. The subsequent fitting and finishing is unlikely to generate a large amount of vehicular movements. All arrangements will be agreed and set out in a CEMP and Construction Traffic Management Plan.

It is anticipated that there will be some increase in vehicle movements during operational phase, due to the lack of accessible public transport options. However, the submitted Travel Plan sets out sustainable transport, incentives for car sharing, bus travel and cycling aimed at staff.

The comparative figures based on the running of similar facilities and relative development scales provide estimates on the operational traffic flow. The estimated percentage increase on the adjacent highway is 12.1% in the AM peak and 3.7% in the PM peak, taking into account the configuration of shift patterns. Given the route characteristics and that no particular sensitivities such as problematic congestion have been identified, the resulting impacts is below tolerance in terms of change and therefore below the level of significance in EIA terms.

While there will be an increase in trips generated compared to the baseline at each stage of development, given the short term nature of the construction phase and anticipated road traffic movement during operation in the transport assessment and the mitigation measures identified above, it is concluded that the effect on the receiving road network is unlikely to be significant.

Community impact and Human Health

The Proposed Development may affect the health of SUs, employees, and the local population. Factors such as, but not limited to, noise, air quality, and light may also result in differential and detrimental health effects on those who share a protected characteristic, including the elderly, the young, those with certain disabilities, and during pregnancy and maternity. Consideration to these effects have been given throughout this screening assessment. The accommodation is for single adult males only; therefore, certain protected characteristics won't apply to SUs. Due to the relative remoteness, the impact of any such factors on the local population will be limited.

The Proposed Development will provide accommodation for up to 1,256 single adult male SUs for a maximum of 90 days.

There are potential effects on the existing population, SUs, and staff with regard to their physical and mental health, and access to healthcare.

The Ward area is more deprived than 71% of neighbourhoods in England. The presence of the facility may give rise to anxiety amongst local residents such as through fear of crime. Both the SUs and the local populace may be adversely affected by protestors/demonstrators, or in a worse case disorder within the site. This may be exacerbated through the site being non detained and that the SUs can, albeit with difficulty, have access to local populated areas.

Construction

Construction may result in potential impacts on determinants of human health, specifically for the existing population, expected SUs once Phase 1 is operational while works continue, construction workforce, and operational staff. Impacts may include air pollution, noise pollution, transport delays when accessing healthcare, risk of injuries, reduced access for leisure, and soil and water pollution. The applicant assesses these residual construction effects on human health with respect to various populations, including wider groups, children, elderly people, disabled persons, and low-income groups. No significant adverse effect is identified.

Operation

Demographic change

The Proposed Development will eventually result in a 1,256 single adult male SUs who are able to freely leave the site and interact with the populace in the local area in the short to medium term. The

SUs are aged between 18 and 65, who will be allocated in accordance with the Allocation Asylum Accommodation policy and suitability criteria. Once they leave the site, they would commence the process of settling in the UK or be moved to detained accommodation with separate ensuing processes.

Community relations

The sole 'community' asset located on or around the site is the nearby sports ground, however a Gypsy and Traveller site to the south of the site is established and currently in operation.

In terms of the traveller site occupants and residents of nearby dwelling and villages, non statutory consultation is proposed to mitigate against negative perceptions in this regard with FAQs and Newsletter provided to the local community, information online with stakeholder engagement as appropriate. The various measures will allow for feedback and where possible for concerns to be addressed such as through site operational changes.

Health of service users

The Proposed Development involves asylum seekers; this may lead to a disproportionate number of people with increased mental or physical needs compared to the general population. The Proposed Development is consistent with similar asylum accommodation sites already operating elsewhere in the UK, and a Medical Centre is to be provided on site for the delivery of healthcare to meet routine and primary care needs. This will be sufficient to support SUs with most of their needs and reduce the burden on local health services, although there may be some additional demand on health emergency services.

However, it is noted that the HO will engage with service providers and that should SUs need to access the nearest GP surgery Unity Health Brill, on Thame Road, Brill, which is located c.4.5 km south of the site and currently under capacity and accepting new patients. The next nearest is Langford Medical Practice on Nightingale Place, located c.4.9 km northwest of the Site and also under capacity. The nearest local Accident and Emergency Services are at John Radcliffe Hospital c.13.4 km southwest. Bicester Community Hospital c.6.4km northwest provides non-emergency secondary care.

Suitable accommodation

The modular accommodation is built off site to industry standard for such purposes and in accordance with relevant legislation, arranged in a cluster, around quiet rooms and adjacent to out recreation area. The layout arrangement will help support the wellbeing of SUs.

Crime and the fear of crime

The crime rate across the CDC area is considered average. The Proposed Development and the presence SUs may generate anxiety amongst local residents and impact mental health and wellbeing. Mitigations as set out under '*Community relations*' subsection is relevant in this regard.

Health of the existing population

The current health characteristics of the receiving population is set out in terms of deprivation and disability, and is ranked in the second most deprived percentile in this regard and the measure to alleviate extra burden on local facilities is set out above under the '*Health of Service Users*' subsection.

Access by service users to other services and facilities

SUs will be able to access local facilities by the shuttlebus service provided. However, the Application Site itself will be self-sufficient. An activity co-ordinator will arrange educational activities (with an

emphasis on English language noted) and recreational activities with suitable outdoor and indoor space are incorporated into the Proposed Development's design.

Fire safety

The Proposed Development is expected to comply with all relevant Regulations, including the Fire Safety Act 2021.

The site will be ensured in accordance with the submitted Fire Strategy. Measures to address risk will be further considered through individual strategies for the various elements of the Proposed Development. Measures stipulated are:

- Fire safety systems and equipment to detect and respond to fires including emergency lighting;
- Appropriate access for emergency services together with water supply;
- Adherence to structural requirements with regards to fire resistance and spread;
- A simultaneous fire evacuation strategy with appropriate exits, signage and disabled person provision to suitable assembly point.

Security and protests

It is possible that protestors outside the wider site present a risk to the local population and SUs within the Proposed Development. The Home Office maintains regular engagement with Thames Valley Police and local partners through established operational and security forums to monitor community sentiment, review emerging risks and coordinate proportionate mitigation measures. The Home Office and the service provider have established procedures for managing protestors. Security measures are in place at the site including a 24-hour guarding presence, with potential utilisation of temporary CCTV towers under consideration subject to ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Defence.

The Home Office will inform the local police if it becomes aware of any potential protest. Should protest activity occur at the site, it will be managed by the local police as an operational policing matter with a Security Management Plan to be implemented and ensure the safe operation of the site. Anticipated mitigation measures include security zoning using anti-climb fencing and automated access control, CCTV coverage of the site perimeter, entrance points and key internal zones, intruder detection systems, perimeter intruder detection and regular security patrols. These measures are informed by Home Office security requirements and by relevant national guidance including National Protective Security Authority security guidance, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design and Secured by Design.

Highway safety

The B4011 in the vicinity of the site is subject to a 50mph speed restriction and the site access and egress points lack safe / paved routes traverse. To enter or exit the site on foot would require considerable care and SUs will be strongly encouraged to only do so using the shuttle bus provision on safety grounds. To further emphasise the potential danger, high visibility vests will be provided to those leaving on foot and further discourage this mode.

Community Impact and Human Health Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, including the identified mitigations, it is considered that there are no likely significant effects in this on any of the above issues.

Cumulative effects

A number of development proposals within 2km of the application site are likely leading to cumulative impacts when assessed alongside the Proposed Development. Of those proposals identified, only the permitted and ongoing development at HM Prison Bullingdon and the Gypsy and Traveller Site are relevant under the terms of PPG; with all others identified at an early stage of consideration by Cherwell District Council. The residents of the nearest villages and other isolated dwellings are also identified as sensitive receptors.

The development at HM Prison Bullingdon (c. 300m to the west) has the potential for cumulative transport and related impacts in the event development construction coincides. No other cumulative effects are anticipated from the development given that the prison populace is detained, distance and intervening features.

The 12-pitch Gypsy and Traveller site (c.150m to the south) has been established and occupied. It has the potential for multiple impacts on individual residences and the SUs. Some limited impact from interactions between the resulting traffic in particular and other nearby land uses are also possible.

Based on the information provided, the construction of the Proposed Development is unlikely to coincide to any great extent with that of HM Prison Bullingdon which was commenced in September 2024. There may be some limited cumulative transport and related impacts that may occur. Taking account of the short term duration of respective construction phases and the low likelihood of these coinciding to any great extent, the prospect of significant effects is low. Individual scheme mitigations will further reduce the resulting effects arising in this regard and overall these impacts can be adequately be mitigated, managed by standard construction process e.g. the proposed CEMP.

Some traffic related cumulative impacts will occur during operational phase but the effect on the road network is unlikely to be significant. Due to the limited scale of trip generation from the Proposed Development, it is unlikely that the additional cumulative impacts from the operational alongside other existing developments would reduce local road capacity to such an extent that the impact would be significant.

Once the Proposed Development is occupied, due to its self-sufficient nature, separation distance with the identified permitted and ongoing developments, and presence of existing intervening features, other cumulative impacts in addition to those as a result of increased traffic are unlikely. Any impacts in accumulation with the Proposed Development is likely to be negligible or at worse cases the impacts will predominantly be temporary in nature i.e. construction phase.

Other Matters

Given the mitigations proposed, and having considered all available information, there are no other issues amongst those not specifically addressed above which indicate a likelihood of there being significant environmental effects from this proposal. The third party representation received has also been taken into account in this screening direction.

Conclusions

The SSMHCLG has had regard to the characteristics of the development, the location of the development and the types and characteristics of potential impacts as set out above. Further, the SSMHCLG has had due regard to the impact on persons with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

For the reasons set out above, she has concluded that in the circumstances of this case, there are unlikely to be significant effects. As such, the Proposed Development is not considered to be an EIA Development for the purposes of regulation 5(3) of the EIA Regulations.

This direction does not affect any duties of the requestor under other legislation, including The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Is an Environmental Statement required?	No
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Name	Planning Casework Unit
Date	26 August 2026