

PIDDINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

Serving the Parish of Piddington, Oxfordshire

SITE A, MOD BICESTER

Community Guide to Responding to the Application

Prepared to accompany the Parish Council's Public Consultation Notice
Consultation period: Monday 7 September to Monday 14 September 2026

Application reference PCU/RARE/C3105/3378843

Foreword

Piddington Parish Council has issued a Public Consultation Notice for Site A, MOD Bicester, running from Monday 7 September to Monday 14 September 2026. There is no legal requirement for public consultation on this application, but the Council has chosen to run one anyway, because residents should have a proper opportunity to have their say.

This guide is a companion to that notice. It exists for one purpose: to help residents write a response, whether to the Parish Council or direct to the decision-maker, that will actually be read, taken seriously and given weight.

You do not need to be a planning professional. A short, honest response in your own words, addressed to the right issues, is worth more than a long one copied from somewhere else. What matters most is the last part: adding your own experience to the evidence, so your letter reads as yours and not as everyone else's.

Part One sets out straightforward rules for writing a response that counts. Part Two shows you how to turn a fact into something personal. Part Three gathers, under separate headings, the evidence residents may wish to draw on. Part Four explains exactly how and where to send your comments.

This guide draws on the applicant's own submitted documents and on the public record. It is a plain-language summary prepared for residents, not the Parish Council's own detailed representation, which sets out the full legal and technical case separately.

The Proposal, in Brief

- What is proposed: change of use and development of Site A, MOD Bicester, for Home Office accommodation for up to 1,256 single adult men, confirmed in the applicant's own application form and Statement of National Importance.
- The route being used: the “urgent Crown development” procedure under sections 293B–293C of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended — a fast-track process decided by central government rather than by Cherwell District Council.
- Consultation status: there is no statutory requirement for public consultation under this procedure. The Parish Council is running its own community consultation regardless, from Monday 7 September to Monday 14 September 2026.
- Who decides: the Planning Inspectorate's Crown Development Casework Unit, on behalf of the Secretary of State — not Cherwell District Council, although the district council is a consultee.

Two ways to respond — and why the difference matters

The Parish Council's consultation and a formal representation to the decision-maker are not the same thing, and it is important to understand the difference before you write anything.

1. Writing to the Parish Council

Application reference	PCU/RARE/C3105/3378843
Consultation period (Parish Council)	Monday 7 September 2026 to Monday 14 September 2026 (7 days)
Send comments for collation to	Piddington Parish Council — joe.marshall@piddingtonpc.org

Comments sent only to the Parish Council will be collated into a summary of local opinion, which the Council will then submit alongside its own representation. On their own, however, they are not treated as a formal representation to the decision-maker.

2. Writing direct to the decision-maker

Planning Inspectorate	Crown Development Casework Unit — crowncasework@communities.gov.uk
Cherwell District Council	Planning Service (local planning authority) — planning@cherwell-dc.gov.uk
Application reference to quote	PCU/RARE/C3105/3378843

Sending your comments direct to the Planning Inspectorate and Cherwell District Council is the only way to guarantee they are treated as a formal representation and placed on the official case file. You can do both — send a copy to the Parish Council for the community record, and send your own representation direct as well.

A note on timing: the Parish Council's own consultation closes on Monday 14 September 2026. There is, however, no guaranteed statutory period for representations to the decision-maker under this fast-track procedure, and no confirmed closing date for the official case file. Do not wait — send your comments as soon as you can, ideally well before 14 September.

Part One — Writing a Response That Counts

Both the Parish Council and the decision-maker have to read a great many letters. These rules are about making sure yours is one that actually influences the outcome, rather than one that gets set aside.

What helps

1. Write it yourself. A response in your own words, explaining what concerns you and why, carries more weight than a copied template — and identical letters can lawfully be treated as a single representation rather than many separate ones. Use the facts in Part Three as raw material, not as a script.
2. Give your full name and full home address, including postcode. Under the Parish Council's notice and under normal practice for the decision-maker, a response that cannot be tied to a real address may not be counted.
3. Stick to planning matters. The decision can only lawfully take into account things relevant to planning: highway safety, flood risk, drainage and utilities capacity, ecology, heritage, the development plan, and whether the correct procedure has been followed. National immigration policy is a matter for Parliament, not for this planning decision, and comments framed only in those terms will carry little or no weight.
4. Respond to the site and the process, not to the people who might live there. Concerns about safeguarding, community pressure or service capacity are legitimate — but frame them around what has or has not been properly assessed, not around assumptions about the character or conduct of future occupants.
5. Be specific rather than general. “I object to this” does very little on its own. “I object because no confirmed sewage capacity has been demonstrated for this scale of development” is a point that has to be engaged with.
6. Where you can, point to a document or a fact, even informally — “the applicant's own ecological report says the survey is not comprehensive” is enough; you do not need a formal footnote.
7. State clearly whether you support or object, and include the date of your response — both are asked for by the Parish Council's notice and expected by the decision-maker.
8. Ask for an acknowledgement. Request confirmation that your response has been received, and ask to be kept informed of next steps.
9. Keep a copy of what you sent, and note the date. If the timetable is later disputed, this matters.

What to avoid

1. Don't send a word-for-word copy of someone else's letter, or of this guide. Multiple identical submissions can be logged and weighed as one representation rather than many, which is the opposite of what you want.
2. Don't make it personal in the wrong direction. Comments directed at named officials, at the applicant, or at people who might be accommodated at the site do not strengthen a response — they weaken it, and can be used to suggest the whole letter is not planning-led.

3. Don't repeat rumour or unverified claims as if they were fact. If you are not sure of a figure, say so, or leave it out. One claim that turns out to be wrong can cast doubt on everything else in the letter.
4. Don't rely on feeling alone. It is entirely fair to say you are worried or angry — but pair it with the reason, so the concern is anchored to something that can actually be weighed.
5. Don't use threats or intemperate language. It has no bearing on the planning merits, and gives the reader an easy reason to set the letter aside.
6. Don't leave it to the last minute. As set out above, there is no guaranteed notice period before the window for representations to the decision-maker may close.

A note on tone

This is about a rushed process and an unsuitable site. It is not an objection to the presence of people seeking asylum in this country, and it is not an objection to the individuals who might be accommodated here. Keeping that distinction clear is not just good manners — it is what keeps a response focused on the things that can actually change the outcome.

Part Two — Making the Evidence Your Own

The single biggest difference between a letter that gets noticed and one that gets filed away is this: does it read like it was written by a real person about a real place they know? Part Three gives you the evidence. This page shows you what to do with it.

The three-step method

Pick one or two facts from Part Three that matter most to you — you do not need to use them all. For each one, add what you have personally seen, experienced or worried about, in your own words. Then say plainly what you would like to happen as a result. That is the whole method.

A fact from Part Three	<i>"No confirmed capacity for water supply, foul drainage or sewage treatment has been demonstrated for a development of this scale."</i>
Your own experience	<i>"We already notice low water pressure most evenings on our stretch of Widnell Lane, and our neighbours have raised the same thing for years."</i>
What you're asking for	<i>"I ask that no decision be made until Thames Water has confirmed, in writing, that the network can take this additional load."</i>

Prompts, if you're not sure where to start

You do not need a special reason to respond — being a resident is reason enough. But if you are looking for your own angle, these questions may help:

- ? Do you walk, cycle, ride or drive along the B4011 or Widnell Lane regularly? What have you actually seen — near misses, poor visibility, the state of the verge?
- ? Do you, or your children, use Launton FC's ground, the local school, the surgery, or other facilities that sit on this corridor?
- ? Have you lived here long enough to remember the 2003 proposal for this land, or has someone in your family? What changed, and what didn't?
- ? Do you rely on private water pressure, a private drainage system, or a well nearby? Have you noticed pressure drops or drainage problems already?
- ? Are you, or is someone in your household, particularly affected by construction traffic, noise, or changes to a quiet rural area — for example because of a health condition, young children, working from home, or caring responsibilities?
- ? Do you run a farm, smallholding or business nearby that could be affected by construction traffic, lighting, fencing or security infrastructure?
- ? Are you part of a local group, club, church or committee that uses shared facilities or land nearby, and that could be affected?

Two neighbours who both mention road safety on the B4011 will still write two completely different letters if one talks about walking a dog along the verge every morning and the other talks about a daily school run. That difference is exactly what makes both letters worth reading.

Part Three — Points You May Wish to Draw On

These are gathered under separate headings so you can pick out what matters most to you. They are drawn from the applicant's own submitted documents, from independent evidence and from the public record. Please put them into your own words and add your own experience — see Part Two.

The process being used

- This application is being handled under the fast-track “urgent Crown development” procedure, ordinarily reserved for cases of genuine national emergency.
- The Home Office's own factsheet states a minimum operational life of ten years for the site, and its own Statement of National Importance says that, over time, the site is intended to be expanded for use as a long-term asylum accommodation solution — difficult to square with a case built on urgency.
- Reported national spending on asylum accommodation has been falling, which sits uneasily with the claim that this particular site is needed as a matter of urgent necessity.
- This procedure carries no statutory requirement for public consultation, no guaranteed minimum period for representations, and no requirement to notify neighbouring residents directly — which is why the Parish Council has chosen to run its own consultation.
- Cherwell District Council, the local planning authority, has stated that no consultation took place with it before the site was publicly announced.

Source: Home Office site factsheet (30 June 2026); Statement of National Importance

Scale, in context

- The application form and the applicant's own Statement of National Importance confirm a capacity of 1,256 bedspaces, all for single adult men, delivered in phases.
- 1,256 people is more than four times the entire recorded population of Piddington itself (304 residents), and close to the combined population of Piddington, Upper and Lower Arncott and Blackthorn together.
- The Home Office's own Statement of National Importance describes the site as opposite HMP Bullingdon, a category B prison, and records that two villages lie within a two-mile radius.
- The site's own preliminary Unexploded Ordnance Risk Assessment scopes its work around “accommodation for 3,510 service users” — nearly three times the capacity stated elsewhere in the application — suggesting the eventual scale being planned for may be considerably larger than the figure being presented to residents now.

Source: Application Form; Statement of National Importance; Unexploded Ordnance Risk Assessment; ONS 2021 census area profiles

How the application classifies itself

- The Application Form records the proposed use class as C2A – Secure Residential Institutions, the same use class used for prisons and detention centres.
- This sits uneasily with the Home Office's repeated public description of the site as “non-detained”, with residents “free to come and go”.
- Residents are asked to consider, and may wish to ask the decision-maker to clarify, why a facility described throughout as open and non-detained has been classified under the planning use class for secure institutions.

Source: Application Form, section 17

History at this location

- A smaller accommodation centre (capped at 750 people) was proposed nearby in the early 2000s. Following a fourteen-day public inquiry, an independent Inspector found the location unsustainable, citing isolation, risk to community cohesion, and strain on local services — and identified pedestrian road safety as one of only three reasons given for recommending refusal.
- That earlier scheme was abandoned within about two years as uneconomic, after the national demand used to justify it fell sharply.
- The current proposal is for a larger number of people, at greater scale, built on a similar argument about urgent national need.

Source: 2003 Bicester Accommodation Centre public inquiry record; MOD Bicester Alternative Accommodation Study

Inconsistencies in the applicant's own documents

- Some documents describe the site as vacant and non-operational; others describe it as leased and in active use for defence storage.
- Some documents describe the site as “greenfield”; the site is in fact a former Army ordnance depot with hardstanding, former rail sidings and a history of handling munitions.
- Floorspace figures differ between documents (17,935 sqm in one, 17,350 sqm in another).
- The number of Nissen huts to be demolished is given as five in the Secretary of State's written statement, but the Drainage Design Statement records 24 Nissen and Romney sheds on site, with later phases built on their existing slabs.
- The lowest site level is given as 62.29 metres above ordnance datum on the existing site plan, but as 64 metres in the heritage assessment — the two documents cannot both be right.
- The deprivation ranking given for the local area is stated inconsistently within the applicant's own paperwork.
- The intended length of stay for occupants is given as a fixed maximum in one document, described as “subject to confirmation” in another, and left unaddressed in the main planning statement.

Source: cross-check of Planning Proposal Statement, Written Ministerial Statement, Drainage Design Statement, Application Form, Archaeological and Heritage Assessment, Equality Impact Assessment

What's missing from the application pack

- The submitted Site Parameters Plan, one of only three drawings put forward for approval, contains no dimensions, heights, access points, parking numbers or key.
- No site layout plan, floor plans, elevations, external lighting layout, boundary or security fencing plan, or drainage layout has been provided.
- At least nine matters are left to be resolved after any permission is granted rather than assessed now, including the lighting scheme, the contamination investigation, the long-term power supply, and the long-term foul and surface water drainage solutions.
- The Application Form's own tables for materials, parking and staff numbers appear to have been left blank, despite figures for these matters (for example, around 147 car parking spaces and roughly 130 staff) appearing elsewhere in the application.

Source: Application Form; submitted drawings BIC-DR-AR-100105 to 100108; EIA Screening Direction

Ground conditions and unexploded ordnance

- The site's history as a wartime ordnance depot means there is a realistic risk of unexploded ordnance and contamination, but the assessment carried out is a preliminary, desk-based risk assessment only — no intrusive ground investigation appears to have been carried out before the application was submitted.
- The applicant's own geo-environmental assessment identifies areas of the site historically used for handling and storing munitions, and flags asbestos-containing material as a further contamination risk in the made ground.

Source: Preliminary UXO Risk Assessment (31 March 2026); Preliminary Geo-environmental and Geotechnical Assessment

Water, drainage and sewage capacity

- The nearest wastewater treatment works, Bicester WwTW, serves a population equivalent of around 40,436 and has been upgraded to a design capacity of around 67,840 — the applicant's own utilities assessment states that “potential headroom may exist but requires confirmation of capacity and permit compliance”.
- No on-site wastewater treatment plant currently exists, and the application's own foul drainage strategy is described as provisional pending further survey and stakeholder engagement.
- There is no evidence that Thames Water has confirmed, in writing, that the network can accommodate this scale of additional demand.

Source: Utilities and Infrastructure Assessment; Drainage Design Statement

Power and other utilities

- The applicant's own assessment states that the condition, capacity and configuration of the electrical network serving the site are “currently unknown”, and that the capacity of the primary intake “has not been verified”.
- Because of this uncertainty, the applicant proposes to rely on temporary and permanent generators to meet an estimated maximum demand of around 2.16 MVA, rather than a confirmed grid connection.
- There is no gas supply proposed for the site, meaning heating, hot water and cooking for over a thousand people would depend on this same uncertain electricity supply.
- The only correspondence with the network operator in the application pack is an automated asset-protection reply, which explicitly states that it does not constitute any formal agreement or consent.

Source: Utilities and Infrastructure Assessment, sections 3–5

Flood risk

- The applicant's own Flood Risk Assessment records that around a quarter of the site has a “high chance” of surface water flooding in any given year, with further areas at medium and low risk.
- The Environment Agency's standard surface water modelling, which the assessment relies on, does not take account of the site's own private drainage ditches and pipework, whose condition has not been surveyed.
- The drainage strategy needed to manage this risk is being prepared separately and had not been finalised at the time the Flood Risk Assessment was submitted.

Source: Flood Risk Assessment; Planning Proposal Statement

Air quality

- The Air Quality Screening Technical Note states in its summary that it involved “identifying sensitive receptors”, but a later section of the same document states plainly that “no sensitive receptors have been selected”.
- The screening conclusion relies on a traffic threshold that the assessment itself does not state, because the supporting trip generation figures are not disclosed in the published version of the Transport Assessment.

Source: Air Quality Screening Technical Note

Noise

- The applicant's own noise modelling shows that a section of the site would exceed the recommended external sound levels used to judge whether internal noise guidelines can be met without additional sound insulation.
- No commitment to specific, funded noise insulation measures for the affected areas has been secured at this stage.

Source: Noise Impact Assessment, sections 4–5

Ecology and biodiversity

- The applicant's own ecological assessment states that it cannot be considered a comprehensive assessment, and records that a number of protected species surveys remain outstanding.
- No biodiversity net gain assessment appears to have been produced, despite this being a standard requirement for developments of this kind.
- Natural England appears to have been consulted more than once, but the correspondence said to resolve its concerns has not been published.

Source: Preliminary Ecology Appraisal; Natural England correspondence (redacted)

Heritage and archaeology

- The applicant's own heritage assessment identifies potential for unrecorded archaeological remains from the Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods, and recommends a watching brief and an agreed scheme of investigation — neither of which appears to have been secured ahead of a decision.

Source: Archaeological and Heritage Assessment

Highways, access and pedestrian safety

- Recorded traffic on the approach roads averages around 3,000 vehicles a day in each direction, with 85th percentile speeds of around 53–54 mph — well above a comfortable walking or cycling speed differential.
- Where a footway exists at all, it is roughly one metre wide; the Department for Transport's own inclusive design guidance, which the Transport Assessment says it has followed, recommends a minimum of two metres.
- Large sections of the Transport Assessment's baseline traffic and speed data are attributed to a road in Essex, transferred from a comparable scheme with different recorded staff shift times, rather than to a site-specific survey of the local road network.
- The junction capacity modelling that concludes there is “plenty of spare capacity” carries the software's own warnings that its results should be treated with caution given the carriageway width entered and that heavy vehicle traffic was set to zero in three of the four modelled scenarios, despite this being a site expected to generate significant coach, minibuses and delivery vehicle movements.

- Three recorded collisions over five years near the site access are used to conclude that no further road safety analysis is necessary; Widnell Lane itself, the direct route to Piddington, has no traffic count, no collision search and no safety assessment anywhere in the Transport Assessment.
- A recorded road safety incident on this same road corridor, near Blackthorn in 2024, in which a young child died, is a matter of public record (BBC News, April 2024) and underlines the seriousness of getting this assessment right.

Source: Transport Assessment, including Appendices B, C and G; BBC News, April 2024

Fire safety

- The fire strategy submitted does not appear to set out basic matters such as travel distances to escape routes, exits, or the firefighting water supply available on site.

Source: Fire Strategy Report

Local services and infrastructure

- No site-specific capacity assessments appear to have been agreed with the NHS Integrated Care Board, Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, South Central Ambulance Service, or the county council as highway and flood authority.
- None of these bodies is a mandatory statutory consultee under the fast-track procedure being used, which increases the risk that capacity pressures are not properly assessed before a decision is made.

Source: Utilities and Infrastructure Assessment; SI 2025/411, article 13

Welfare of future occupants and safeguarding

- The Home Office's own Equality Impact Assessment concedes that the site and rooms "are not adapted for those with particular accessibility needs", and that this could prevent residents making full use of the site's facilities, before concluding this is not directly discriminatory.
- An existing Traveller site, recorded elsewhere in the application documents as established and occupied, lies around 150 metres from the site boundary. It is not mentioned anywhere in the Equality Impact Assessment, which contains no assessment of the effect of the proposal on the existing settled community nearby.
- Independent evidence, including High Court findings concerning a comparable site (RAF Wethersfield), has found that large-scale, isolated institutional accommodation of this kind carries a foreseeable risk of mental health deterioration among occupants, describing the Home Office's failure to assess the equalities impact of its own allocation policy as "a most serious and inexplicable omission".
- A separate High Court judgment in 2026 found against the Home Office on every ground argued, in a case concerning the very policy that would govern how people are allocated to sites such as Site A.
- Taken together, this supports the view that welfare and safeguarding risks at this type of site are foreseeable, and must be properly assessed in advance rather than managed after people have already moved in.

Source: Equality Impact Assessment; TG and others v SSHD [2025] EWHC 596 (Admin); 2026 High Court judgment on the asylum accommodation allocation policy

Conflict with planning policy

- The proposal is difficult to reconcile with policies in the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011–2031, including Policy PSD1 (presumption in favour of sustainable development), Policy SLE4

(facilitating safe and suitable access for all users), Policy INF1 (infrastructure to support development) and the plan's environment and heritage protection policies.

- National planning guidance requires that both national importance and urgency be demonstrated at the level of the individual site — not simply asserted by reference to a general national problem.

Source: Cherwell Local Plan 2011–2031; national Planning Practice Guidance

Value for money and alternatives

- A comparable Home Office accommodation programme in the early 2000s was discontinued as uneconomic after significant public expenditure, with value-for-money concerns recorded by the National Audit Office.
- No evidence has been published of a proper options appraisal explaining why this site, at this scale, was chosen over alternatives such as dispersed housing, smaller sites, or repurposed buildings.

Source: MOD Bicester Alternative Accommodation Study; National Audit Office reporting

Part Four — Sending Your Response

Option A — the Parish Council's consultation

Email your comments to the address below by the close of the consultation period. This feeds directly into the Council's own evidence base and summary of local opinion.

Application reference	PCU/RARE/C3105/3378843
Consultation period (Parish Council)	Monday 7 September 2026 to Monday 14 September 2026 (7 days)
Send comments for consultation to	Piddington Parish Council — joe.marshall@piddingtonpc.org

Option B — direct to the decision-maker

This is the only way to guarantee your comments are treated as a formal representation and placed on the official case file. You are welcome to do this as well as, not instead of, responding to the Parish Council.

Planning Inspectorate	Crown Development Casework Unit — crown casework@communities.gov.uk
Cherwell District Council	Planning Service (local planning authority) — planning@cherwell-dc.gov.uk
Application reference to quote	PCU/RARE/C3105/3378843

Information to include, whichever route you use

1. Your full name.
2. Your full home address, including postcode.
3. The application reference: PCU/RARE/C3105/3378843.
4. A clear statement of whether you support or object.
5. Your reasons and specific concerns, in your own words — with your own experience added, as set out in Part Two.
6. The date of your response.

This guide is offered as general assistance to residents wishing to respond to the Parish Council's consultation or to make their own representation. It is not legal advice, and it does not set out the Parish Council's full case, which is contained in its own detailed representation to the decision-maker. Residents with specific legal questions should seek their own advice.

Issued by Piddington Parish Council

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