

PLANNING REF : 262274
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Lib Dems
: Office 6, First Floor, Trinity Court, Molly Millars Lane, Wok
: RG41 2PY
SUBMITTED BY : Cllr Mike Giles
DATE SUBMITTED : 28/10/2026

COMMENTS:

Dear Planning Team,

Application 262274: Thames Valley Park, Earley

I object to this application as the Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate for Earley and Woodley, and as District Councillor for Sonning Common ward, where residents have raised concerns about this proposal at parish council meetings. I write in a personal capacity, not on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council.

New investment in the park is welcome. But as it stands, this scheme would run on gas for years, waste heat that could warm local buildings, and offer little to local people. The developers need to go back to the drawing board. This is an outline application with all matters reserved except access. If it is approved, the principle of a gas-powered data centre on this site will be settled. These issues must be resolved now, not left to later stages. Specific concerns as follows:

1. End the reliance on gas. Only 1.8MW of grid electricity is available to the site at first, against an expected peak demand of 110MW. Until a larger grid connection is available, with 2037 given as the backstop date, the site would run on gas fuel cells. The applicant's Energy Strategy Report estimates emissions of around 1.3 million tonnes of CO2 between 2028 and 2037. Even then, only 60MW of grid capacity has been secured, so gas could continue alongside the grid. This would become the largest single source of emissions in the borough, equal to around a quarter of its entire carbon footprint.

That cannot be squared with the Council's commitment to a carbon-neutral borough by 2030. Nor has the applicant shown how the scheme meets Policy CE2's environmental standards for non-residential development. There must be a firm end date for gas, an annual emissions cap, and a commitment to buy renewable electricity.

2. Data centres belong where the infrastructure already exists. The emerging Local Plan Update (Policy C7) requires applicants for digital infrastructure to demonstrate that no preferable alternative sites are available. This application does not do so. Data centres are best

located where high-capacity grid connections are already in place or committed, where renewable power is available from day one, and where established fibre networks and existing data centre clusters allow shared infrastructure. Suitable sites are on industrial or employment land designated for this kind of use, away from homes, woodland and green gaps. Such locations already exist elsewhere in Berkshire. Thames Valley Park meets none of these tests. It has almost no grid capacity, it would depend on gas for a decade or more, and it sits next to homes and protected green space.

3. Assess noise and air quality before deciding. The application does not show that plant meeting the recommended acoustic standards can be sourced, and it does not address noise or exhaust emissions from the diesel backup generators, including during testing. These impacts on nearby homes and the neighbouring nature reserve must be fully

assessed before the principle of this use is decided. A decision made without this information would be open to challenge.

4. Put the waste heat to work. The site has good potential to supply waste heat to local heat networks, including Reading's planned town-wide heat network, helping households and businesses move away from gas heating. Yet the application commits only to safeguarding space for a future connection, not to building or funding it. The heat network should be delivered, with a fair contribution towards connecting to Reading's network.

5. Protect trees and green space. The scheme would remove a significant number of trees and hedges, and the developer has promised only around the legal minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain. Any approval must require a much higher net gain, secured by condition.

6. Deliver local jobs. The application gives no clear figure for how many people the site will employ. The applicant should publish clear job figures and commit to local recruitment, apprenticeships and training for young people in Earley and Woodley.

7. Keep the site's future open. Thames Valley Park is one of the possible sites for a new Royal Berkshire Hospital, and could also provide much-needed homes on brownfield land. Scarce grid capacity and land must not be locked up in a way that rules these options out.

Unless these concerns are addressed, I urge this application to be refused. If it is minded to be approved, every measure above should be secured through binding conditions and a legal agreement.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Mike Giles

Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Candidate for Earley and Woodley

District Councillor for Sonning Common ward (South Oxfordshire)