

Report of: Planning Services Business Manager

To: Executive Board

Date: 19th June 2006

Item No:

Title of Report : Car-free Developments – Council Motion



Summary and Recommendations



Purpose of report: The report seeks to respond to the Council motion in the most practical way.



Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Goddard

Scrutiny Responsibility: Environment



d(s) affected: All

Report Approved by: Councillor John Goddard
Jeremy Thomas – Legal,
Emma Burson - Finance



Policy Framework: Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001 - 2016



Recommendation(s):



1. A letter should be written to all estate agents and letting agencies in City asking them to remind tenants and purchasers at the appropriate time that they live in car-free developments.



2. The issue of the car-free and low car parking developments will be considered further in the forthcoming Parking Supplementary Planning Document.



Council Motion

1. On 21st November 2005 the Council adopted un-amended and unopposed the following motion:

“This Council is committed to encouraging car-free developments, with new residents using the excellent public transport system that exists in parts of the City. However, the Council also recognises difficulties with ensuring developments are truly free of cars. Some housing units on car-free developments can be rented out without the eventual occupants being fully informed their new home will be car-free, without parking spaces available.

To ensure that future residents and the existing community do not suffer from lack of information or from inconvenience, Council urges the relevant officers to take action or otherwise report upon: -

- (i) complete information being made available by estate agents when housing units on car-free developments are being either sold or let;
- (ii) enforcement occurring rapidly after any breach of the car-free status happens,
- (iii) some simple mechanism being found to celebrate and advertise the car-free status of any development, for example, through a plaque or sign tastefully designed and obviously placed on the building.”

Discussion

2. The motion expresses the view that “housing units on car-free developments can be rented out without the eventual occupants being fully informed their new home will be car-free, without parking spaces available.”
3. This may not be a common occurrence, because it should be obvious to anyone visiting such a new development, with a view to purchase or lease, that there is no car parking available on site.
4. It is considered that planning permission nor any other consent is required from the City Council before owning a car.
5. Nevertheless, it is possible that new owners of properties that have no on-site parking spaces available may nevertheless still own a car. Since cars cannot be parked on site in spaces provided for such a purpose cars are then parked on parts of the site or in the adjacent

streets, possibly inconsiderately, much to the consternation of the established community.

6. In fact almost all car-free developments which have been granted planning permission are within those parts of the City where on-street parking is limited by a controlled parking zone. In such instances the occupiers of the car-free developments are not allowed, through a planning condition, to receive a residents parking permit.
7. It is possible that these prospective residents are not being advised early on that they are not entitled to a residents permit as the scheme has been removed from the cpz. This is something that the estate agent or vendor should be making the prospective occupier aware of. It is also be something that future residents may not be aware of just from visiting the site.
8. The Motion asks that estate agents should include information about the car-free status of such new developments in any sale or letting details. Estate agents and landlords may make this clear in any event. However, the City Council has no control over the published or other information given out by estate agents or landlords and it would not be able to enforce against information not being provided by them.
9. Nevertheless, in accordance with the motion, a letter should be sent to all estate agents and letting agents in the City asking them to remind tenants and purchasers at the appropriate time that they live in car-free developments and what this means.
10. As the lack of any parking on site will be an indication in itself of the car-free status of a development. So there should be no need to put up any signage to emphasize this. In any event there is no planning mechanism to require a sign to be put up on a development. However, should a developer wish to erect a suitably discrete sign there is no reason why any consent require should not be permitted.
11. The circumstances described above involve car-free developments within cpz areas. However comparable inconvenience may occur from low-car parking standard developments and in non-cpz areas. There are times when in a low-car development the landlord does not include a car parking spaces automatically with a residential unit but lets this separately, even to someone else.
12. This is part of a wider issue about levels of car ownership in the City, car parking standards and how these should be assessed on individual planning applications, even within Oxford where there is good public transport and support for non-car modes of travel. Lessons can be learnt from car-free and low-car parking standard developments that have been granted permission in recent years. The Planning Business Unit has embarked on a Parking Supplementary Planning Document that will address this and other related parking issues.

Conclusion

13. In accordance with the motion, a letter should be written to all estate agents and letting agents asking them to remind tenants and purchasers that they live in car-free developments.
14. The wider issue of car parking standards and car-free or low parking developments is to be addressed more fully in the forthcoming Parking Supplementary Planning Document.

Name and contact details of author: M Crofton Briggs, 01865 25 2360, mcrofton-briggs@oxford.gov.uk

Background papers: None

