

Report of: Planning Services Business Manager

To: Executive Board

Date: 19th June 2006

Item No:

Title of Report : Oxford West End Design Panel



Summary and Recommendations



Purpose of report: To consider the proposal for the establishment of an Oxford West End Design Panel.



Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Goddard

Scrutiny Responsibility: Environment



Area(s) affected: Carfax, Hinksey Park

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



Policy Framework: Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001 - 2016.
Statement in the Oxford Plan 2006 - 2009 "Ensure that the West End development achieves the highest possible standards of Urban Design"



Recommendation(s):



To establish an Oxford West End Design Panel as set down in the appendix to the report.



Background

1. On a number of occasions the council has been challenged to explain how the vision of quality development as an integral part of the renaissance of the West End would be achieved. The Central, South and West Area Committee too has expressed its interest in this point and suggested that consideration should be given to setting up a design review panel
2. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) runs a design review panel for projects of national significance. Other Local Authorities have established local panels to assist them.
3. The Planning Business Manager sought advice from CABE, Kent Architecture Centre, the Oxford Preservation Trust and others in the preparation of the proposals for an Oxford West End Design Panel (WEDP).

Dry Run

4. The proposal for establishing the panel is attached as **Appendix 1**. It sets out the purpose of the design panel and provides some terms of reference. It explains the proposed membership or composition of the panel and suggests that the panel should be limited in number and be made up of individuals with a particular expertise to offer in the West End. The idea would be to glean views that potentially are unlikely to be received through the Council's normal consultation process. The proposal explains how a development issue would be referred to the panel and how practically the panel would be run or operate.
5. In addition to consulting a number of people and organisations on the draft proposals a dry run of the panel was held on 26th January 2006.
6. The panel was made up of:
 - Urban morphology –Georgia Butina-Watson (Brookes Planning Department)
 - Urban Design – Roger Evans (CABE panel member)
 - Architecture – Brian Avery (CABE panel member)
 - Transport – Ben Hamilton-Baillie (West End AAP consultant)
 - Property – Richard Stansfield (FPD Savills)
 - Conservation and Heritage – Nigel Barker (English Heritage)
7. It received a presentation on the emerging West Gate Scheme from Capital Shopping Centres and its professional team.

8. The panel provided some interesting comments on the scheme. It also confirmed its agreement with the detailed proposals to establish a formal West End Design Panel. Helpfully too, each member indicated a willingness to participate in the future if invited.
9. The scope of the panel has been expressly limited to the West End for the time being. It is this issue of seeking to achieve high quality development and public realm in the West End that sparked interest in a design panel in the first place. Design is no less important in the rest of the city, but the remit of this new initiative should be focused initially on the West End. This matter will be kept under review and consideration can be given for a design panel for the rest of the City in the light of experience.

Central, South and West Area Committee

10. The Area Committee considered the proposal on the 10th May and agreed to commend to Executive Board the establishment of the Design Panel. It asked for two changes to the Proposal, namely that only travel expenses be offered to panel members and the Panel be invited to indicate dissenting their views in their report to the Council. Both changes have been made.

Conclusion

11. The Executive Board is asked to agree with the proposal of the establishment of the Oxford West End Design Panel.

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Background papers: No unpublished papers.



PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN OXFORD WEST END DESIGN PANEL

Purpose of an Oxford West End Design Panel (WEDP)

The purpose of the WEDP is to promote the highest possible quality of street, building and open space design in the West End of Oxford and ensure that developments contribute to the renaissance of the area.

The quality of proposed developments will be evaluated using the established principles of good urban design at a range of scales, including urban structure and grain, landscape structure and setting, building form, building detail, access and appearance.

The Panel should be seen as a mechanism for developers and architects/designers to promote their ideas and show how they are embracing the new vision for the West End. Presentations to The Panel will be an opportunity to explain design proposals and responses to context rather than just another part of a regulatory process for gaining planning permission.

The WEDP would not have any statutory planning function in its own right, but its advice would be a material consideration for the City Council's statutory planning function.

The WEDP would not undertake the normal planning case officer function and so would *not* review development proposals and plans against the statutory planning framework and against the West End ADF.

The Panel would consider designs in the context of Planning Policy Statement 1 (Creating Sustainable Communities) i.e. in terms not only of the architecture of individual buildings, but also about the functionality and impact of the development on the overall character, quality and sustainability of an area. In particular the Panel would be looking at how the designs contribute positively to making better places for people.

Suggested terms of reference for the WEDP

The WEDP may consider the following design matters:

- Major development, infrastructure or public realm proposals or other major projects located within the geographical area of the West End;
- Other major development, highway works or public realm proposals identified in the City Centre that have an impact on the form and character of the West End;

- Key strategic planning, design and transport strategies (LDF and LTP);
- Guidance documents, such as design briefs or guidance on the contents of design statements. A comment from the Panel will identify the degree of 'fit' between such documents and their expectations and the material being presented by developers and architects/designers;

Suggested composition of the WEDP

The intention is that the Panel consist of a limited number of people with a particular expertise and who would be able to provide comments on any proposal from across a broad range of professional disciplines. Each Panel Member would be invited to serve for a limited period of two years. Replacement of Panel members would be staggered or phased to ensure that there was continuity over the years.

It would be hoped that the panel would be able to reach a consensus view and give clear advice. The aim would be for The Panel to articulate what is perceived to be wrong with a design and to provide positive feedback to enable the development to be improved.

The WEDP should be a Council appointed panel of individuals rather than a group of representatives from particular organisations.

An appointment process would be needed that extends an invitation and asks for confirmation of willingness to participate together with an appropriate CV. Decision to appoint taken at Director level within the Council, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment.

Those who were invited to participate in the dry run and have indicated a willingness to be on the formal panel, if asked, are:

- Urban morphology –Georgia Butina-Watson
- Urban Design – Roger Evans
- Architecture – Brian Avery
- Transport – Ben Hamilton-Baillie
- Property – Richard Stansfield
- Conservation and Heritage – Nigel Barker

The Panel would elect a Chairman from amongst its members.

City Council would only pay travel expenses if requested.

Co-option would be permissible of other experts for a particular proposal (eg. Archaeology) or where one of the Panel Members cannot participate through a conflict of interests.

In addition the following organisations would be represented as observers:

- Oxford City Council
- Oxfordshire County Council

The City Council's Planning Service could provide the secretariat for the WEDP, or the Panel might prefer to appoint a secretary from its midst. This option is preferable.

The suggested process of referral to the WEDP

Development issues can be referred to the WEDP in the following ways

- (i) The City Council's Planning business unit agrees with an applicant that a development proposal should be referred to the WEDP as a result of a pre-application discussion.
- (ii) An applicant requests that a development proposal at the pre-application stage is considered by the WEDP.
- (iii) The City Council's Planning Control and Conservation Manager refers a live planning application to the WEDP.
- (iv) The Chair of the WEDP requests that a pre-application proposal, a planning application, public realm improvement or strategy document is referred to the WEDP.
- (v) A strategy is referred to the WEDP as part of a formal consultation process.

Suggested operational matters

It is proposed that the WEDP could operate in the following way.

1. The WEDP will probably meet quarterly or more often if needed.
2. The City Council will meet with the Chair to discuss forthcoming agendas, suggesting proposals to be referred to the WEDP.
3. Panel wish not to be burdened with too much documentation – paper light. So a minimum of relevant plans should either to be circulated in advance of the meeting or be left with the Panel as the scheme presenters retire.
4. The WEDP will normally consider a proposal once.
5. The WEDP will prepare a single short report for each of the proposals presented at the meeting. The Panel are invited to include dissenting views in this report. A copy of the report will be circulated to the project architect/ designer and the City Council.