

To: City Executive Board

Date: 23rd July 2008

Item No:

Report of: Head of City Development

Title of Report: Northern Gateway Area Action Plan Development Plan Document – partnership-working arrangements

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To consider the timetable and work programme for the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan DPD

Key decision: No

Executive lead member: Cllr. Ed Turner

Report Approved by:

Finance: Financial Management (Christopher Kaye)

Legal: Legal & Democratic Services (Lindsay Cane)

Head of City Development: Michael Crofton-Briggs

Policy Framework: The production of this document will fulfil a key element of the new Local Development Scheme. It will also build on policies set out in the adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016, and emerging policies within the Core Strategy 2026. This document seeks to improve Oxford's environment, economy and quality of life in line with the City Council's vision for Oxford.

Recommendation(s):

That the City Executive Board agrees to:

1. approve the principle of partnership working with the developers (including financial contributions) for the production of the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan Development Plan Document;
2. authorise the Head of City Development to enter into a formal agreement with the Northern Gateway Consortium to confirm the details of the partnership arrangement to deliver the production of the Area Action Plan.

Summary

1. The purpose of this report is for City Executive Board to approve the production of the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan Development Plan Document, through a partnership working arrangement. This report sets out the key areas in the production process. These include the broad scope of the proposed Area Action Plan (AAP), the resources needed and the timetable. When adopted, the AAP will form part of the Local Development Framework.
2. The City Executive Board is asked to approve the principle of the partnership working for the production of the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan, including the financial contributions from the Consortium to part fund its production.

Vision and strategic aims

3. The production of this Area Action Plan will fulfil a commitment of the new Local Development Scheme, (also on this agenda). It will also support the City Council's vision to improve the environment, economy and quality of life. The Oxford Sustainable Community Strategy has a key-crosscutting theme the importance of promoting a vibrant and inclusive economy, which is considered to be important to contribute towards a positive and sustainable future for Oxford.

Background

4. The Oxford Employment Land Study, carried out by Nathaniel Lichfield and commissioned by the City Council, provides the evidence base for Oxford's future employment needs. The study warned that if Oxford's supply of suitable employment space runs out, and no new land is provided, this could seriously threaten its role as a leading centre of knowledge based industries. The consultants advised that Oxford should guard against complacency and take steps to ensure it remains competitive. The study identified the 'safeguarded land' at Peartree as the principle opportunity to provide additional land to meet Oxford's future employment needs. The West End area of the City centre would also provide some, albeit limited, complementary employment growth.
5. This overall policy approach conforms with Oxford's role as a Diamond for Investment and Growth, which is promoted by SEEDA as part of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES). It also reflects Oxford's importance within the Central Oxfordshire sub-region, which was considered by the Panel at the Examination in Public into the South East Plan. The Panel recommended that the Core Strategy policy for the sub-region should in Oxford's case be "more upbeat reflecting an aspiration to maintain its world-class status."
6. The opportunity for bringing the Northern Gateway forward, within the Local Development Scheme, was discussed by City Executive Board last year. Subsequently leading members have had preliminary discussions with the Consortium regarding the desirability of making an early start to

the Area Action Plan, which would be made possible by some partnership working.

7. Once adopted, the Area Action Plan will form part of the Local Development Framework. This status will allow it to be used in the determination of planning applications as a material consideration under Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Scope of the AAP

8. The proposed Area Action Plan (AAP) is to the north of the City centre. It lies adjacent to the Peartree Interchange where the A34 meets the A44 and the A40 runs east-west adjacent to the site. The principal opportunities for development comprise two key parcels of land, presently identified in the Local Plan as 'safeguarded land.'
9. The main land uses within the 'area of search' include low-grade agricultural grazing, the Pear Tree Park and Ride, and the service area with hotel accommodation. The two main areas of unused land are divided by the A44 and bounded to the south by the A40 Northern Bypass Road. There are also two areas of Green Belt land and the Oxford Hotel.
10. The site occupies a strategically important position on the northern edge of the city, and offers a major opportunity to create a high-quality gateway to Oxford. The surrounding road network experiences peak hour congestion and Oxfordshire County Council has developed proposals for highway improvements as part of an 'Access to Oxford' package. Further detailed transport modelling will however be required to show the impact of an employment-led development on this site and mitigation measures put forward to significantly reduce any adverse effect on the strategic and local road network, particularly the A34 and A40.
11. A large area of the site experiences high levels of traffic noise due to its close proximity to major road junctions, and these roads also segregate parts of the site from the neighbouring urban area, resulting in the majority of the area being unsuitable for housing. It has therefore not been identified as a strategic housing site, however, an element of residential development may be appropriate as part of an employment-led scheme.
12. The purpose of the Area Action Plan (AAP) is to build on the strategic employment-led land allocation proposed in the Core Strategy Preferred Options Document, and consider the scope for the mix of uses. This identified the 'safeguarded land' at Peartree as suitable for an employment-led development. It offers a significant opportunity to bring forward the development of this key site at the earliest opportunity. The Northern Gateway will provide employment uses that build on Oxford's strengths in the form of a new development designed to a high standard that will make a positive contribution to this area. It also offers an

opportunity for the relocation of Oxford's emergency services, which would improve response times and release sites in the West End, and elsewhere for future development.

13. The precise boundary of the proposed Area Action Plan (AAP) will be subject to further scoping work and discussions with key landholders. It is considered likely to include principally the 'safeguarded land' owned by St. Johns College and Worcester College, together with the service area and associated land to the north owned by Merton College. This would include the Park and Ride, Holiday Inn and Travel Lodge and Burger King, which may have scope for modernisation. The search will also consider the relationship of these potential development sites to adjoining land including areas of Green Belt, and it is proposed that a focused Green Belt review will be undertaken. A site plan showing the 'safeguarded land' together with an indicative proposed boundary is shown as Appendix 1.

Climate change / environmental impact

14. There are a number of documents already produced by Planning Policy, which show a clear commitment to the issue of climate change. The LDF already contains a Supplementary Planning Document on the issue of Natural Resources Impact Analysis, which sets out the requirements for energy, water and resource efficiency and for the generation of on-site renewable energy. The draft Core Strategy includes a specific chapter on "Tackling Climate Change". These over-arching themes run through the whole suite of documents in the Local Development Framework.
15. The Area Action Plan (AAP), along with all Development Plan Documents, will be subject to the Sustainability Appraisal and the Sustainable Environmental Assessment process, which will use sustainability indicators to assess the potential impact of development opportunities emerging from the AAP.
16. The AAP will, for example, need to assess further the impact of this development upon the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation and in particular the watercourses and hydrology. Measures to avoid and mitigate any potential impacts, such as sustainable drainage measures to prevent pollution of groundwater may therefore be required.

Equalities impact

17. The issue of equalities is addressed through the documents already produced and those proposed in the new Local Development Scheme (LDS). A key theme of the emerging Core Strategy and the new LDS 2008-2011 is the focus on regeneration. The Northern Gateway AAP will provide an important means to deliver and manage the amount of employment growth to promote a sustainable economy.
18. Given the shortage of available land, it is important that economic development at the Northern Gateway builds on Oxford's inherent strengths. This employment-led development delivered through the AAP

will aim to provide a range of jobs for the local workforce within the city, which has the potential to make a significant contribution to the sustainable future of Oxford's economy.

Financial and staffing implications

19. Preliminary discussions have taken place with key stakeholders particularly those with an interest in the 'safeguarded land'. This includes Goodman, formerly known as Arlington (St.John's land), and Kier (Worcester College) who wish to bring the production of the Area Action Plan (AAP) forward as soon as possible. These key stakeholders have formed the Northern Gateway Consortium (NGC) and offered to work in partnership with the City Council in producing this new Development Plan Document. The composition of the Consortium may be enlarged, prior to the formal agreement, to include other key landowners, such as Merton College. The City Council will however also be working in partnership with a range of other organisations including the County Council as Local Highway Authority, Highways Agency, Cherwell District Council as a neighbouring local authority, together with other landowners, amenity bodies and local residents.
20. The City Council, as the Local Planning Authority, will have sole responsibility for preparing the Area Action Plan, but in order to meet an earlier timetable, in advance of the adoption of the Core Strategy, the project has been moved forward as part of the new Local Development Scheme.
21. To assist in the production of this document a proposal for partnership working arrangements has been made. The Northern Gateway Consortium (NGC) has proposed to make a total financial contribution of £100,000. This would comprise £50,000 per year, towards the allocation of existing professional and technical staff within Planning Policy to be deployed to work on this Area Action Plan (AAP) for the two-year period (08/09 and 09/10). Whilst this funding would essentially pay for the equivalent of one and a half full-time members of staff working on the AAP, in practise however it would contribute towards a small team of three to four people working on this project. The Northern Gateway Consortium (NGC) would however be responsible for funding the Sustainability Appraisal, Master Planning and Workshops for the AAP. The precise terms and timescale of this partnership working arrangement will be secured by a formal agreement between the Northern Gateway Consortium and the City Council, to ensure both transparency and commitment on behalf of both parties.
22. It is considered that the financial contribution towards the production of this document from the landowners / developers would not compromise the role of the City Council as Local Planning Authority. In addition, the Area Action Plan (AAP) will be subject to an independent Public Examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

23. The production of the Area Action Plan (AAP) will be a commitment as part of the new Local Development Scheme (LDS). The LDS includes a programme setting out the production of the AAP with key milestones that must be met.
24. In terms of staffing, the production of the Area Action Plan (AAP) will be met from the current staff resources of the Planning Policy team, together with the partnership funding arrangements through the Northern Gateway Consortium. In addition there may be some input from other Service Areas as appropriate.

Timetable

25. The new Local Development Scheme timetable reflects the recent changes to the Regulations and PPS12. It also shows the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan brought forward, from the original timescale. The key milestones show the formal commencement of the AAP in September 2008. The publication (consultation) stage would begin in November 2009, and Submission in February 2010. Adoption is planned for November 2010.

The next stages

26. Following approval by City Executive Board, full details of the terms of the partnership working arrangement with the Northern Gateway Consortium will be set out and agreed with the Head of City Development and the Executive Director of Regeneration of the City Council.
27. The production of the Area Action Plan will then formally commence in September in accordance with the timetable, set out in the Local Development Scheme, and approved by the City Council and Government Office for the South East.

Name and contact details of author: Tom Morris (email tmorris@oxford.gov.uk). Tel No: 01865 252143

Background papers: None

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Map showing indicative proposed boundary for the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan