

# Scrutiny Committee reports for City Executive Board – Thursday 11 May 2017

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**To: City Executive Board**

**Date: 11 May 2017**

**Report of: Scrutiny Committee**

**Title of Report: South Oxford Science Village planning application**

## **Summary and Recommendations**

**Purpose of report:** To present the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on the South Oxford Science Village planning application

**Scrutiny Lead Member:** Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny

**Executive lead member:** Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services

**Recommendation** of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

**That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendation set out in the body of this report.**

## **Background**

1. The Scrutiny Committee considered the South Oxford Science Village planning application report at a meeting on 2 May 2017. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Alex Hollingsworth, Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services, and Patsy Dell, Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services, for attending the meeting to present the report and answer questions.

## **Findings and recommendations**

2. The Board Member provided some background to the decision and highlighted the progress that had been made in working constructively with neighbouring district councils on the issue of Oxford's unmet housing need. The Council's preferred approach was to agree sites and numbers with the districts and for these to be taken forward through their local plan-making processes. The Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services said that even though agreements were now in place with some of the districts, it appeared

likely that no new homes would be built specifically to meet Oxford's unmet housing need before 2020/21.

3. In response to a question the Head of Service said that the Council was looking to develop South Oxford Science Village through a three-way partnership arrangement with Thames Water and Magdalen College. The site was being promoted as a mixed use development and all costs would be split three ways between the three land-owning partners, including the costs of hiring planning consultants to act on their behalf. The Council's budget allocation of £560k had also contributed to a lot of detailed technical work on archaeology, drainage, biodiversity, etc. which had taken the partnership up to the point of submitting a major planning application. A further budgetary provision of £220k was being requested to cover additional technical studies and a planning application, as well as a potential call in inquiry or appeal.
4. A question was asked about whether this approach would have been necessary if there had been a single planning authority in place across Oxfordshire. The urban extension site would have needed to be promoted through a plan making process under any scenario and significant costs are involved in that process as well as those to be incurred in securing any necessary planning permission. As the land was outside the city boundary the Council was not the planning authority but the added costs arising from this factor alone (e.g. additional QC fees) were relatively small given the overall cost of promoting strategic sites.
5. The Committee noted that the responsible planning authority, South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC), had voiced support for an alternative site at Chalgrove Airfield, which was being proactively pursued. The Committee heard that there was a national policy of developing surplus land owned by the Ministry of Defence. However, the Council's view was that the location of that particular site was too remote to be considered a suitable location to meet Oxford's unmet need, being some twelve miles from the city. The County Council had produced a robust document setting out the infrastructure challenges at Chalgrove Airfield. The site's location meant that the associated infrastructure costs would be very high and good public transport links were unlikely to be viable, so a significant increase in car journeys would be expected. The expected lead-in time it would take to complete a major development at the Chalgrove site also made it unsuitable in terms meeting Oxford's unmet housing need.
6. The Council's view was that an urban extension on land south of Grenoble Road would be more sustainable as it would be connected with existing bus routes, cycle infrastructure and potentially the Cowley branch line. The increase in car journey numbers could therefore be expected to be significantly lower than for an equivalent development at Chalgrove.
7. The Board Member said that in his personal view it seemed likely that the South Oxford Science Village planning application would be refused by the relevant SODC planning committee, even if planning officers advised to the contrary. It was difficult to quantify the risk to the Council of pursuing an application but the Council believed that an urban extension at this location was a major priority and that it had a robust case to put forward in a planning appeal or call-in inquiry,

should the application be refused. The Head of Service said that the proposal was deliverable, given that the landowning partners including the Council were working together to promote housing delivery to meet its needs but there were no guarantees on the outcome. Sites at Wick Farm and Elsfield to the North East of the city were also in contention for development, as well as Chalgrove. If development went ahead at multiple sites then there would be a need for the city and district councils to work closely with the County Council on how the sites fit together strategically.

8. The Committee also received assurances on the following points:
  - Transport improvements in the Eastern Arc of the city were already in the Oxford Transport Strategy and the LTP4 but would be picked up in the additional transport work being picked up as part of the local plan.
  - Changes to the Green Belt were commonplace in district councils' local plans (e.g. SODC were proposing changes to the Green Belt at Berinsfield), although there were difference of opinion about how the relevant legislation and guidelines should be interpreted.
  - The landowner would have scope to exceed SODC's planning policies in regards to social housing, although costs would be a limiting factor.
  - The strength of the economic case for development in the greenbelt had previously been accepted by planning inspectors as an exceptional circumstance.
  - Part of the site was within the 'odour footprint' of the sewage works but this was not unusual and could be mitigated through site planning.
  - Similarly the presence of electricity pylons could also be mitigated through site planning.
  
9. The Committee voiced strong support for the decision and agreed not to add to the recommendations in the officer report, other than to say that progress should be made as quickly as possible.

***Recommendation 1 – That the City Council, in partnership with Thames Water and Magdalen College, seeks to submit a planning application for South Oxford Science Village as soon as possible.***

**Name and contact details of author:-**

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**List of background papers: None**

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**City Executive Board response to the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on the South Oxford Science Village planning application**

**Provided by the Leader of the Council and Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services**

<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>	<b><i>Agree?</i></b>	<b><i>Comment</i></b>
That the City Council, in partnership with Thames Water and Magdalen College, seeks to submit a planning application for South Oxford Science Village as soon as possible.	Y	

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**To: City Executive Board**

**Date: 11 May 2017**

**Report of: Scrutiny Committee**

**Title of Report: Fusion Lifestyle's Annual Service Plan 2017/18**

## **Summary and Recommendations**

**Purpose of report:** To present the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on Fusion Lifestyle's Annual Service Plan 2017/18

**Scrutiny Lead Member:** Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny

**Executive lead member:** Councillor Linda Smith, Board Member for Leisure, Parks and Sport

**Recommendation** of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

**That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations set out in the body of this report.**

## **Background**

1. The Scrutiny Committee scrutinised Fusion Lifestyle's Annual Service Plan 2017/18 at a meeting on 2 May 2017. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Linda Smith, Board Member for Leisure, Parks and Sport, Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services and Francois Smit, Sports and Partnership Manager at Fusion Lifestyle, for attending the meeting to present the report and answer questions.

## **Findings and recommendations**

2. The Head of Community Services introduced the report. He highlighted the positive progress made in leisure participation since Fusion Lifestyles took over the running of city leisure centres in 2009. In that time annual visits to leisure centres had increased by 500,000 and the running costs had reduced from £2.4m per year to near zero. The one downside of this increased usage was that it made cleanliness and maintenance more challenging. He explained that the

targets remained ambitious - they were challenging but not impossible - and the service had a very good track record of achieving targets.

3. Cllr Smith, Board Member for Leisure, Parks & Sport highlighted some of the key focus areas for the forthcoming year:
  - Increasing participation by a minimum of 5% and by 15% for some target groups;
  - Continuing to reduce carbon emissions, in particular at Hinksey Outdoor Pool where they hoped to install a pool cover to reduce heat loss. This would be a logistical challenge due to the size and shape of the pool;
  - Better promotion of free swimming for under 17s;
  - Explore the viability of a crèche facility at Ferry Leisure Centre.
4. The Committee asked whether it was possible to distinguish between the numbers of visits to leisure centres and the numbers of individual users. It was not clear to what extent increases in participation were due to more people using leisure services, or whether it was more a case of the same people using them more frequently. The Head of Community Services said that visits were the benchmark used across the sector. Membership data could be provided as well but the numbers of casual users were hard to identify accurately. The Board Member said that not everyone liked to provide personal information in order to access leisure centres. Moving casual users onto reward cards or membership packages would be paramount to getting a better idea of the numbers of individual service users but it would not be possible to get the full picture without being prepared to turn people away. The Committee suggest that if capturing user numbers is an ambition then the Council and Fusion should formulate a plan for doing so.

***Recommendation 1 - That the City Council and Fusion Lifestyle resolve the issue of whether or not to capture the numbers of individual service users (as far as practicably possible) as well as the numbers of visits, either by coming forward with a plan for doing so or by providing reasons why not.***

5. The Committee commented that they would like to see added to the key focus areas listed in the covering report how Fusion plans to improve disability facilities at the centres. The Head of Community Services said encouraging inclusiveness was a fundamental objective of the Fusion contract. The Committee suggest that more could be made of this ambition in the Service Plan.

***Recommendation 2 - That the Service Plan includes a greater emphasis on improving disabled access to leisure centres.***

6. The Committee commented that there was no geographical analysis of users and that it would be useful to know things like how many users of Barton Leisure Centre lived in Barton, which communities were well served and which facilities were being used by former users of Temple Cowley Pools, for example. The Committee also asked what strategies were used to encourage usage in off-peak periods. Fusion Lifestyle's Sports and Partnership Group Manager provided assurance that people were using multiple facilities across the city. Geographical usage information was available and was used for marketing purposes. The

Board Member said that the usage data is constantly being reviewed and that she reviews performance data every month.

7. The Committee questioned whether it was feasible for city residents to be offered cheaper fees than people based outside of the city. The Board Member said it would be worth considering for concessions and in some cases this was already happening, for example free swimming classes for under-17s were available to residents only.
8. The Committee asked whether progress was being made in encouraging social prescribing. Fusion's Sport and Partnership Group Manager said that GP engagement with social prescribing was variable across the city and that his new role at Fusion was to develop a more corporate approach to social prescribing. Fusion also worked closely with Sport England and various mental health services but there was lots still to be done.
9. The Committee questioned how the Service Plan fits in with the Council's own strategies and commented that a strategy map would be useful. The Head of Community Services said that the Leisure and Wellbeing Strategy was the high level policy framework document that set the headline priorities and five year targets. The priorities and some of the targets in the annual Service Plan flowed from that strategy. The Board Member suggested that it would make more sense in future if the Service Plan was presented to members alongside the annual performance report for the previous year. This year the performance report had not been ready in time for the May CEB meeting cycle.

***Recommendation 3 - That in future years Fusion Lifestyle Service Plans can be presented to the Scrutiny Committee for pre-decision scrutiny alongside performance data for the previous year. This is likely to mean the service plans going to CEB for endorsement in June/July rather than May in future years.***

10. The Committee also requested geographical and seasonal information about leisure centre usage as part of the annual performance report, as well as feedback from user groups.

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**List of background papers: None**

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**City Executive Board response to the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on Fusion Lifestyle's Annual Service Plan 2017/18**

**Provided by the Board Member for Leisure, Parks and Sport**

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<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Agreed?</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1. That the City Council and Fusion Lifestyle resolve the issue of whether or not to capture the numbers of individual service users ( as far as practicably possible) as well as the numbers of visits, either by coming forward with a plan for doing so or by providing reasons why not.	Y	It is not possible to capture the number of individual service users as we have a large number of pay and play users and there are many users who we currently cannot identify. Work outlined in the plan to increase the take up of reward cards and convert more casual users into members will help us gather more information on users. The number of individual members and reward card holders will be reported in the performance data presented to Scrutiny Cttee.
2. That the Service Plan includes a greater emphasis on improving disabled access to leisure centres.	Y	Improvements such as the newly equipped disabled changing room at Hinksey Pool can be highlighted.
3. That in future years Fusion Lifestyle's annual service plans can be presented to the Scrutiny Committee for pre-decision scrutiny alongside performance data for the previous year. This is likely to mean the service plans going to CEB for endorsement in June/July rather than May in future years.	Y in part	<p>It is up to the scrutiny committee to agree it's work programme and schedule its own agendas.</p> <p>The Annual Service Plan will continue to go to CEB in May.</p> <p>Scrutiny committee should decide which is more important; pre-scrutiny of the ASP or consideration of the ASP alongside the performance data.</p> <p>If the scrutiny committee were to move to consideration of the ASP alongside the performance report, after the ASP has been agreed by CEB, its recommendations would still help to improve leisure services.</p>

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