

# **COUNCIL**

Thursday 20 September 2012

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillors Armitage (Lord Mayor), Abbasi (Deputy Lord Mayor), Sinclair (Sheriff), Benjamin, Fooks, Altaf-Khan, Bance, Baxter, Brett, Canning, Clack, Clarkson, Cook, Coulter, Curran, Darke, Goddard, Haines, Hollick, Humberstone, Jones, Kennedy, Khan, McCready, McManners, Mills, O'Hara, Pressel, Price, Rowley, Royce, Rundle, Sanders, Seamons, Simmons, Smith, Tanner, Van Nooijen, Wilkinson, Williams and Wolff.

## **36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Though not pecuniary interests the following Councillors informed Council as follows:

Councillor Van Coulter informed Council that he was an Executive Governor at Ruskin College and that he would withdraw from the meeting when during the debate Ruskin College was raised.

Councillor Mary Clarkson informed Council that she lived close to Ruskin Fields, but following legal advice previously was informed that she was able to participate in the debate.

Councillor Mohammed Altaf-Khan informed Council that he had previously been a student at Ruskin College.

Councillor Mike Rowley informed Council that he has previously been a student at Ruskin College.

Councillor Roy Darke informed Council that he had been in contact with Ruskin College, but had not expressed an opinion either for or against the proposals.

All of the above refer to minute 39.

## **37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jim Campbell, James Fry, Michael Gotch, Ben Lloyd-Shogbesan, Mark Lygo, Sajjad Malik and Ed Turner.

## **38. ADDRESSES BY THE PUBLIC**

Council received and took one address to Council (text of the address is appended to these minutes

(1) Debbie Jones from West Waddy ADP

## **39. BARTON AREA ACTION PLAN AND SITES AND HOUSING PLAN EXAMINATIONS**

The Head of City Development submitted a report which sought Council's endorsement of the main modifications to the Barton Area Action Plan and the addendum to both the Sustainability Appraisals for the Barton Area Action Plan and the Sites and Housing Plan. As a consequence of the revised Sustainability Appraisal, for the City Council to confirm its policy approach in relation to the allocation of land at Ruskin College.

The Head of City Development also presented to Council for information a Statement of Common ground between the City Council and the Oxfordshire County Council concerning the wording of policies BA1 and BA7. (Details appended to these minutes)

Councillor Colin Cook moved the report seconded by Councillor Bob Price.

Councillor Jean Fooks moved the following amendment which was accepted by Councillor Colin Cook.

"In Policy BA1, Transforming the ring-road, delete the last eight words in the paragraph on landscaping, so that it would read:

*The Landscaping of the central reservation may be reviewed.*

Following a debate, Council agreed:

- (a) To endorse the Main Modification to the Barton Area Action Plan as part of the approved plan subject to the inclusion of the further amendment from Councillor Jean Fooks;
- (b) To endorse the Barton Area Action Plan (as amended by the Main Modifications) as a material consideration in determining planning applications;
- (c) To endorse the addendum to the Sustainability Appraisal for the Barton Area Action Plan;
- (d) To endorse the addendum to the Sustainability Appraisal for the Sites and Housing Plan;
- (e) To confirm the approach taken to the Ruskin College proposals as agreed at Council on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2011, in relation to the Barton Area Action Plan and Sites and Housing Plan;
- (f) To note and endorse the Statement of Common Ground between the City Council and the Oxfordshire County Council concerning Policies BA1 and BA7.

**The meeting started at 5.30 pm and ended at 6.30 pm**

## Committee Address

Ruskin's intentions remain the same today as when we started out on this process: to assist in creating a strong and vibrant community on the Barton strategic site and allowing more people to enjoy and to benefit from the fields, and of course to provide much needed housing for the people of Oxford.

Ruskin Fields fields at the moment are unused and have no real function. They are thin in ecological terms, have no special interest and cannot only be preserved, but enhanced by careful and sympathetic development that preserves wildlife corridors and views, diversifies planting and introduces new water features. Our masterplan shows clusters of housing round an open central area that reflects the character of grain of Old Headington and nestled largely in a dip on the site, buffered from the sound of the by-pass.

Ruskin Fields central location could also create safe, effective and usable pedestrian and cycle links through our fields; which is even more significant now due to the stalemate between the City and County Councils over transforming the ring road. We have demonstrated through our Masterplan that it is possible to create an exemplar development on Ruskin Fields that enhances the Old Headington Conservation Area and allows our local neighbouring communities of Northway, Barton, Old Headington and new neighbours on the strategic site access to enjoy the fields.

A do nothing approach is short-sighted and backward looking. Our vision is to allow more people to enjoy and to benefit from the fields. Our Masterplan, underpinned by a Design Rationale and Transport Statement explaining the access arrangements approved by Oxfordshire County Council Highways Department, has demonstrated how Ruskin Fields could be developed in a manner that enhances the Old Headington Conservation Area and gives some meaning and more purpose to the fields.

The councils re-ran Sustainability Appraisal includes two objectives to "meet local housing needs by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent home" and "to reduce poverty and social exclusion." The council do acknowledge that Ruskin Fields would have a positive effect in relation to these objectives, but does not properly address the contribution that developing Ruskin Fields could make to open space provision in this part of Oxford.

The Oxford Core Strategy policy CS21 states that 'The City council will seek to maintain an overall average of 5.75 ha of publicly accessible green space per 1,000 population.' The report into open space provision commissioned by the council; The Scott Wilson Green Space Study (February 2007) indicates that there is a shortfall in relation to meeting this standard in the area around Ruskin Fields.

The report recommends addressing the open space shortfall in this part of Oxford by creating a park of city significance in the Marston/Northway area by linking a number of open spaces together, including Dunstan Park, to which the proposed open space on Ruskin Fields of 2.87 ha could make a significant contribution. This would be an important area, with a distinct character, which would be a significant asset to the areas of open space in Oxford. The opportunity to make a significant contribution towards meeting the open space deficit in this part of Oxford is a particular benefit of the Ruskin Fields proposals which is not recognized in the Council's Addendum to the Sustainability Appraisal (July 2012).

The council has assessed the impact of its own strategic site on biodiversity as a positive effect with a significant negative effect for both Ruskin's larger and smaller sites. The council says that Ruskin Fields in the case of birds and bats is of "city level importance". If this is the case, as the bird species that occur on Ruskin Fields site also occur on the councils other Greenfield Core Strategy Strategic development sites; so it follows that they too are of city level importance for birds.

In biodiversity terms, Ruskin Fields is similar to the Strategic site, in fact if you took away the ring road, Ruskin Fields run into the Barton Fields. We are bemused at how the council could come to two such different impact assessments for such similar fields.

Even though the access arrangements off Foxwell Drive have been agreed as acceptable by the County Highways, the council has assessed the smaller scheme in transport terms, as having a "negative effect", yet by contrast the councils assessment of the strategic site is assessed as "uncertain" The Sustainability Appraisal goes on to state that the Foxwell Drive access to the fields would create an additional 32 trips in and out, in the peak morning hours, and 37 trips in the evening peak hour. By contrast, in the morning and evening peak hours, the new Barton Development will generate 424 movements on Fettiplace Road and Barton Village Road. We are unsure as to how such a rate of trip generation could be assessed as "uncertain" on the strategic site, and the much lower trip generation at Ruskin Fields being assessed as having a "negative impact".

We still believe that the council has not assessed Ruskin Fields in a fair manner and have submitted representations to this end.

You could decide to go with your officer recommendation and approve the revised policies and Sustainability Appraisal. It is our view that the Planning Inspector would not be able to find the revised policies justified or deliverable in terms of achieving the objectives of the Barton AAP and she has virtually said as much; this, together with a biased and unjustified Sustainability Appraisal, would mean that there is a risk that the Planning Inspector would not be able to find the Barton AAP sound. This would result in a long, delay to the delivery of housing at Barton, probably not achieving an adopted document until the end of 2013 at the earliest.

We believe that we have submitted as part of this Public Examination additional information that clearly demonstrates the "do nothing" approach brings least benefits to local communities and the wider city of Oxford. An exemplar development that enhances Old Headington Conservation Area, increasing the fields' accessibility is the more sensible course of action.

The detailed level of information submitted as part of the Barton AAP will enable you to deviate from your officer's recommendation and allocate Ruskin Fields either within the Barton AAP or as a stand-alone site within the Site and Housing Plan.

## Barton Area Action Plan

### Statement of Common Ground between Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council August 2012

#### Introduction

At the hearing sessions held in July 2012 there was much discussion between the City and County Council's and others about the wording of Policies BA1 and BA7. At the close of the week the Inspector requested that the City Council proposed some amendments to these policies to address her concerns. As such, tracked changes to the policies were proposed as Main Modifications MM4 and MM6. The Main Modifications were subject to Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and published alongside an addendum to the SA for public consultation. The period of public consultation began on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2012 and closes on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2012 with a view to an additional hearing being held on the issue in the week commencing 24<sup>th</sup> September.

During the consultation period further discussions have been held between the City and County Councils at senior officer level. These discussions have resulted in agreement that both parties would be satisfied with the policies if some more minor changes were made to the supporting text to Policy BA1 and to Policy BA7 and its supporting text. These are detailed below.

#### Further proposed change to Policy BA1

The County Council were concerned that Main Modification MM4 does not make it specific that any changes to speed limits and any related physical works to the highway remain to be established and will require the prior approval of the Highway Authority. The City Council has reviewed this and agreed that it can support the addition of a reference to this effect so that any amendments to the ring road can ensure that it serves its strategic function. This will require investment both in the ring road and the links from the new development to the wider urban fabric. The County Council were also concerned that any reference to the proposed changes to the ring road should not be described as "transformational" since this may raise expectations of outcomes that may not be achievable. This would result in some minor changes to the text as identified in the [blue tracked changes](#) below. Please note the black tracked changes are those identified in Main Modification MM4.

#### Section 5 Integration with surrounding areas and the rest of Oxford

It is important that the new neighbourhood feels part of Oxford.

The place-shaping policies in this Plan aim to foster the sense of community that will be generated by people living in the new and existing homes. [There could be changes to the A40 ring-road to improve the overall environment such as the provision of](#) ~~will be transformed to reduce the sense of segregation it currently creates~~ [into a street that runs through the city rather than dividing it. There will be excellent high quality](#) new links across [over](#) the ring-road for pedestrians and cyclists, and improved public transport links. The local centre and community facilities will be easily accessible and new homes will be well related to existing homes in Barton. [The City Council will work closely with the Highway Authority in pursuit of these aims.](#)

#### ~~Transforming the~~ The A40 ring-road

- 5.1 The A40 ring-road runs immediately to the south of the strategic development site, forming part of the strategic highway network. Our policy for this stretch of the ring-road is [important crucial](#) to achieving the Plan's wider vision and objectives.
- 5.2 Comprising dual carriageway with a maximum speed of 70 mph, the ring-road creates a sense of severance and isolation. It forms a noisy barrier physically separating the strategic development site

from communities in Northway, Headington and the rest of Oxford. Leaving this stretch of the ring-road as it is would make it much harder to integrate old and new. Change would offer opportunities to:

- reduce noise levels for existing communities
- make best use of land, by increasing the amount of land available for development
- improve connectivity.

5.3 The ring-road will be Our aspiration is to seek to amend the ring road to reduce noise, make it more physically attractive and help integrate development with the wider urban fabric. ~~transformed the ring road to ensure it is no longer a noisy and visually dominating physical barrier that separates Barton and its surroundings from the rest of the city. This will be~~ We will seek to achieved this in the following three ways:

- Reducing traffic speeds will be reduced to a maximum of 40 mph.

Lower traffic speeds will reduce noise levels for the new development as well as for those living in surrounding communities. The amount of developable land would will be increased by allowing development to take place closer to the ring-road. The lower speeds would will allow traffic management measures in the form of a new signal-controlled junction or roundabout on the A40 ring-road and multiple safe and easy-to-use crossings for pedestrians and cyclists. Physical measures to the A40 to slow down traffic could also include changes to lane widths, the use of surface materials, street lighting and signage. Together these measures would help to transform the look, feel and operation of this stretch of the ring road.

- Building new development facing the ring road

New development could will be built facing the northern side of the ring-road.

~~To avoid any sense of separation between the new neighbourhood and the rest of Oxford, new homes will be built fronting onto the ring road. There will be~~ In such cases a parallel road would allowing access to the properties fronting the ring-road. These frontages of new homes will be along the southern edge of the strategic development site (though not necessarily its entire length) and in Barton itself. as shown in illustrations 1 and 2 show how proposed development could face onto the ring road on the strategic development site.

- Landscaping

The landscaping of the central reservation along this stretch of the ring-road could will be reviewed re-landscaped.

The central reservation is well planted with mature vegetation but overly dense. This forms another physical – albeit green – barrier between the strategic development site and the rest of Oxford. The planting could be reviewed to support integration should be re-landscaped to be more in keeping with a street running through the city.

Any changes to the physical layout of the A40 and/or its speed limit will require the prior approval of the County Council as the Local Highway Authority.

5.4 The changes to the ring-road must consider the setting of the Old Headington Conservation Area, which lies to the south of the ring-road.

<sup>1</sup> Illustrations are indicative

**Policy BA1: ~~Transforming~~ the ring-road**

Traffic management and safety measures will be put in place and design principles applied to the A40 ring-road between the western approach to the new junction/roundabout and the Headington roundabout to secure a reduction in traffic speeds to ~~a maximum of 40 mph.~~

~~Planning permission will only be granted for a layout for the strategic development site that maximises the scope to provide homes facing the northern side of the ring road. Such development must not be accessed direct from the ring road.~~

The ~~landscaping of the central reservation~~ may ~~will~~ be ~~reviewed~~ re-landscaped to reduce the density of the existing planting.

Where relevant, any development facing the ring-road and any review of the landscaping re-landscaping of the central reservation must consider views into and out of the Old Headington Conservation Area.

There may be an opportunity to provide homes facing the northern side of the ring-road. Such development must not be accessed direct from the ring-road.

**Further proposed changes to Policy BA7**

The County Council were concerned that Main Modification MM6 did not remove references to surface-level crossings. The City Council has now reviewed this and agreed that it can support removal of these references. This would result in four minor changes to the policy and its text as identified in **blue tracked changes below**. Please note the black tracked changes are those identified in Main Modification MM6.

**Pedestrian and cycle links**

- 5.31 The ring-road currently imposes a significant barrier for pedestrians and cyclists, with only one existing grade-separated (differing levels) crossing point – a subway to the south of Barton, which provides a link to Headington.
- 5.32 To improve integration and permeability and to promote maximum usage, a network of safe and easy-to-use pedestrian and cycle routes along desire lines (the routes people are likely to take, with or without a formally designated path) is needed to connect the new homes with facilities in the new neighbourhood and link the new development to its surroundings in Barton, Headington, Northway and the countryside beyond Oxford, and to the rest of the city. There will be multiple safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle links across ~~crossing points on~~ the ring-road.
- 5.33 The existing footpath that runs south-north across the strategic development site (and then beyond into the countryside in South Oxfordshire) could ~~will~~ be re-connected with Stoke Place, either as a surface-level crossing or bridge, linking the footpath with the public bridleway and byway that continues south into Old Headington along Stoke Place. ~~The A~~ re-connected link would ~~will~~ provide the new development with a direct pedestrian and cycle route to the shops and other facilities in Headington, the John Radcliffe Hospital and Cheney Secondary School. It would ~~will~~ open up access to the countryside in South Oxfordshire for those living in Headington. Stoke Place would ~~will~~ need to be upgraded to an appropriate standard, with changes to the surface, thinning of trees and vegetation and installation of sensitive street lighting. The nature of the changes to Stoke Place, together with the design, and siting and type of the crossing, should respect the character of Old Headington Conservation Area.
- 5.34 The new vehicle junction or roundabout on the ring-road will include pedestrian and cyclist crossing phasing and facilities. The new development is an opportunity to improve the existing crossing to the south of Barton. This could be in the form of further improvements to the subway or a parallel surface-level crossing. There could be at least one other new pedestrian and cycle link across ~~crossing of~~ the ring-road, linking the strategic development site with its surroundings. One potential location ~~crossing point~~ is from the new development to Foxwell Drive in Northway either as a surface-level crossing or

bridge, which would provide direct access to the wider cycle network and the city centre. Map 6 shows how the strategic development site will be accessed by vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists.

**Policy BA7: Pedestrian and cycle links**

New direct, safe and attractive cycle and pedestrian links will be provided as part of the strategic development, including:

- ~~re-connecting Stoke Place bridleway with the existing footpath running north-south across the strategic development site~~
- ~~upgrading Stoke Place to an appropriate standard for a cycle route and footpath and in a manner that is sensitive to Stoke Place's role and character in the Old Headington Conservation Area~~
  - a crossing of the A40 ring-road included in the new junction or roundabout
  - enhancement of the existing crossing between Barton and Headington
  - links between the new development and existing rights of way in surrounding countryside
  - giving priority to walking and cycling routes in the development, including connections to key destinations such as the local centre, community hub and Barton and the links across the A40 ring-road
  - a street network that is designed to be fully cycle and pedestrian friendly.

There may be an opportunity to re-connect Stoke Place bridleway with the existing footpath running north-south across the strategic development site. Any link crossing, whether at grade or via a bridge would need to ensure safety for all users. It would require the upgrading of Stoke Place to an appropriate standard for a cycle route and footpath in a manner that is sensitive to Stoke Place's role and character in the Old Headington Conservation Area.

**Conclusion**

The County Council consider that the further minor changes set out above are necessary and would satisfy their only outstanding concern with the policies of the Barton Area Action Plan. In the interests of collaboration and to secure the County Council's support the City Council have agreed with these proposed minor changes.

The City Council requests that the Inspector considers making these changes to the Plan alongside the other Proposed Minor Examination Changes. The County Council confirm that they satisfy their concerns and would not be seeking to make representations to the Main Modifications consultation if they are made.

Oxford City Council  
Oxfordshire County Council  
September 2012