

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Public Participation Statement sets out how Oxford City Council has engaged and consulted with stakeholders on the Oxpens Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in accordance with Regulation 12 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012¹, and the adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
- 1.2 This statement provides details of the informal and formal engagement and consultation activities and the resulting feedback and how this feedback has informed the final SPD. The period of statutory public consultation was 17th June – 30th July 2013.

2 Purpose of the SPD

- 2.1 The purpose of the Oxpens Master Plan SPD is to provide detailed advice on the master planning and design principles for the development of the Oxpens site within the West End area of the City.
- 2.2 The City Council has an adopted Core Strategy (September 2011) and an adopted West End Area Action Plan (2008) that were subject to a rigorous consultation process and public examination. The Oxpens Master Plan SPD builds on the policy context set out within these documents and use this as a basis for the development of more site specific supplementary guidance for the master planning of Oxpens.

3 Early stage informal consultation

- 3.1 Early stage informal consultation took place with a range of officers from within the City Council particularly Property Team; City Development and Housing. Members Briefings sessions were also held for City Council and County Council councillors. A statement setting out the scope of the Public Consultation on the Draft Oxpens Master Plan SPD was submitted to and approved by the Public Involvement Project Board at their meeting in March 2013.
- 3.2 Oxfordshire County Council was informally consulted on the draft document and there were discussions and meetings with a range of officers, including property, infrastructure and transport.
- 3.3 Discussions and meetings took place with a number of external stakeholders, including key landowners, and/or agents in the area acting for, BRBR, the Milton Group, Royal Mail and Greensquare Housing.

¹With effect from 6th April 2012, the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 (Statutory Instrument 2004 No. 2204) were replaced by the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (Statutory Instrument 2012 No. 767). Therefore 2004 Regulation 18 was replaced by 2012 Regulations 12(b) and 13.

- 3.4 Discussions and informal consultation took place with the representative resident group in the local area, SENDRA. Wider informal consultation was also carried out with stakeholders that have a particular interest in the West End area of the city, through the West End Steering Group (which includes representatives from Housing & Communities Agency, the Westgate Alliance, Christ Church, Saïd Business School, Science Oxford, Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxford University, Oxford Brookes University, Network Rail, the Environment Agency, English Heritage) who were asked for comments on the draft document.
- 3.5 The City Council appointed David Locke Associates and MJP Architects to draw up an indicative masterplan for the Oxpens site. Property market advice was provided by CBRE and technical engineering advice from Atkins and Halcrow. The consultants, together with officers from the City Council, prepared alternative options for the Oxpens site in consultation with key landowners and stakeholders to arrive at a mixed-use development that seeks to maximise the use of the site and ensure that any indicative proposals are viable.
- 3.6 As part of the early consultation process key landowners, external stakeholders, residents groups and City and County members and officers were invited to make comments on the indicative master plan, prior to the formal public consultation stage.
- 3.7 A joint Oxford City and Oxfordshire County Council Business evening event was held on Thursday 6th June, which was attended by around 80 people. The purpose of these regular events is to provide a forum for engaging with the local business community on key issues or themes. There was a presentation on the Master Planning of the Oxpens site by the Head of City Development who highlighted the main headlines emerging from the SPD which was used to inform and stimulate an open discussion. Those present were also made aware of the formal Public Consultation process.
- 3.8 A report on the Draft Oxpens Master Plan SPD was taken to a meeting of the City Executive Board (CEB) on 12th June 2013. Members agreed its content and its suitability for going out for Public Consultation.

4 Consultation on the Draft SPD

- 4.1 Formal public participation on the Draft SPD took place for a six-week period between 17th June and 30th July 2013. The consultation involved the information being made available on the City Council's website and for viewing at St Aldate's Customer Service Centre and at libraries within the city; use of the City Council's online consultation software; an invitation to comment sent to statutory consultees, and those persons who have registered an interest in planning policy documents (approximately 1400 parties and individuals) and a press release. An exhibition was held at St. Aldate's Chambers for three weeks during the formal consultation period.
- 4.2 A leaflet explaining the vision and key design principles together with a questionnaire was physically delivered to 900 local residents, landowners and businesses, plus a further 200 questionnaires were distributed through the Customer Service Centre and an electronic version was also made available for responses on the City Council's website.
- 4.3 150 responses from organisations and individuals were received. Following the six-week period of statutory public consultation, responses were processed, analysed and carefully considered and where appropriate have informed revisions to the draft SPD. 45 letters/e-mails were received plus 105 responses to the questionnaire.

5 Summary of Main Issues Raised through Public Consultation

5.1 Long Term Vision for Oxpens

Of the 150 responses received (from organisations and individuals) the vast majority were in favour of the proposed long term vision with only 20 individuals disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Upon interrogation of the negative responses it seems that most of those not in favour had concerns over flooding, traffic or transport. These matters are discussed further below.

5.2 Design Principles

All twelve design principles were supported by the majority of respondents with an overwhelming agreement on a number of these principles, most notably, DP1: a high quality development, DP3: Sustainability, DP6: Quality public realm and DP8: Relationship to the river.

The only significant variant in this was the response to DP2: Maximising the Value of the Site, where about 20% of the 150 responses did not agree. This may be down to a misunderstanding of the terminology used. The term 'maximising value' in the context of the SPD is used to describe the ambition to create a scheme which is both deliverable and high quality, while making it a desirable place to live in Oxford so that the site's full potential is realised. The plan has gone to great lengths to incorporate open space and, with the provision of a public square and additional land adjacent to the meadow, the ratio of public open space to development exceeds that set out in the AAP, the Sites and Housing Plan (policy HP9) and policy SR7 of the Local Plan.

There was a very high degree of support for DP4: Addressing Oxpens Road and DP: 5 Improving Accessibility. The proposed public realm improvements to Oxpens Road were very much welcomed.

Heritage

English Heritage expressed concern that the heritage aspects were not adequately addressed. In response, additional work has been carried out in collaboration with the heritage officer to ensure that the nature in which heritage had informed the design is better articulated and greater guidance has been provided. A number of additions were made to the text, particularly to Dp1 High Quality Development, DP4: Addressing Oxpens Road, DP6: High Quality Public Realm, DP7: Enhancing Oxpens Meadow and DP11: A coherent character. Following comments from Oxford Preservation Trust the wording around the section on view cones has been further strengthened.

The section on archaeology has been strengthened following a desktop study and discussions with the City archaeologist.

Oxpens Meadow

DP7: Enhancing Oxpens Meadow was supported by the majority of respondents. One organisation expressed concern that the proposals for paths/cycle ways shown in the draft plan were too intensive. The arrangements for the Meadow shown in the plan are indicative only and any designs for the area will be subject to consultation with the local community and Fields in Trust, the body which has the benefit of the Deed of Dedication that the Council has made. To ensure that this is clear in the document, a note has been added to the plans.

At the request of the Environment Agency, the text has been adjusted to confirm that Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) features should not be incorporated within the flood mitigation area.

Design Principles DP9: Appropriate Land Use Mix and DP10 Generating activity and DP12: Phasing, were supported by the majority.

5.3 Pedestrian and Cycle Links

Specific comments made reference to the importance of retaining or enhancing the links to the city centre, along the river and to the station. Castle Mill Stream which flows up from Oxpens meadow towards Paradise Street and continuing towards the east end of Park End Street currently has a series of paths along this route but it is not constant. The route could be improved so that all parts were connected and by doing this it may prove to be a key north-south corridor for cyclists if some obstacles, such as high kerbs, were modified. Similarly, there are some trails which run alongside the river and under the railway leading to Osney Mead which could be enhanced to provide good connectivity for Oxpens residents and surrounding communities. These routes could be improved so that there is a clearer east-west connection and, like its north-south counterpart, the route could be made to be more cycle friendly. The proposals to extend Beckett Street would provide another choice for cyclists travelling towards Botley Road and wishing to avoid Frideswide Square.

Overall it was noted that respondents wished to see a scheme whereby the provision for pedestrians and cyclists was integral to the scheme's design and not viewed as an add-on. As well as fostering better connections within the city it was also noted that the provision of cycle parking was a feature that should not be forgotten, especially the provision of secure facilities for the area of student accommodation. The SPD has been amended to incorporate consideration of facilities for cyclists and a safe route from the Oxpens Meadow area to connect with the train station.

5.4 Bridge over River

There was majority support (over 70%) for new bridge to provide cycle and pedestrian access to Grandpoint, although the exact position would need to be considered in the context of any scheme to enhance the meadow and in discussion with the Environment Agency. Text has been amended to reflect this.

5.5 Oxpens Road

Responses show there is a very high level of support for the improvements to Oxpens Road to make crossing easier and improve permeability.

5.6 Public Square & Activities

There is a high level of support for the new public square to be next to Oxpens Road. The Draft SPD discusses the appearance of the space and suggests potential occupiers. It is important that there is flexibility in the design, both now and into the future, so that demands are continually met and the suggestion is that units on the ground floor have the ability to be adapted to various uses, although these should remain small as set out in the Area Action Plan. There is flexibility in the SPD to adjust the location of the square if necessary. Text has been adjusted to ensure that smaller units are not amalgamated to form larger ones where this might undermine the retail core.

There has been a suggestion that some level of parking provision is needed for the traders or entertainment providers who operate in the square if this activity is to be successful and to also minimise potential conflict with neighbouring occupants. Current policy allows for operational parking to be included.

The most popular activities for the square were seating areas and restaurants/ cafes which suggests an interactive space that enables people to meet up.

A significant portion of comments referred to the need to make the space feel inclusive to all, particularly families with children, as well as accessible to all, such as level access for wheelchair and electric scooter users. A play area or a place which provided activities for young families were two suggestions raised on a number of occasions. These items could be explored further as any scheme comes forward. Entertainment and arts related uses of the space were also suggested. An open air theatre, outdoor winter ice-rink, and performance space were all ideas put forward as well as other spontaneous activities such as having a culture of street entertainers and buskers. The area was also seen as another good venue for an open air produce or arts market. The general impression is for a vibrant and high quality space possibly showcasing a permanent piece of modern art or visiting exhibits. The practical needs of local residents were also highlighted in the feedback and shops selling general groceries and other daily items were all seen as features that would help the area thrive.

5.7 Ecology

Following comments on ecological aspects, the text has been adjusted to enable an increase in biodiversity and avoid harm to high quality habitats by carefully locating any enhanced leisure or pedestrian routes.

5.8 Flooding

Flooding was raised as a concern by several individuals and organisations. The quantum of development across the West End as a whole (which includes for development at Westgate, Oxpens and all the other sites in the West End Area) was assessed by way of a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment as part of the Area Action Plan which was approved by the Planning Inspector. Conceptual options for addressing the flooding issues at Oxpens were set out in the Oxpens Compensatory Flood Storage Pre-Feasibility Study (2007), prepared by Atkins in discussion with the Environment Agency, to support the AAP. These options were reviewed as part of the SPD development process and the 'Left Bank Option' was selected for the purposes of the SPD because it was wholly contained and deliverable on the Oxpens site. As a scheme comes forward for the site a detailed flood risk assessment will be undertaken. There were no objections to the SPD from the Environment Agency.

One landowner questioned the strict need for flood remediation measures to be resolved *and delivered* prior to development of any built form since there is no risk from actual building as opposed to occupation and expressed concern that this could restrict enabling development. The SPD has therefore been adjusted to allow for a phasing plan for development and flood mitigation that would need to be agreed with the City Council in consultation with the Environment Agency before commencement of development. This provides protection yet allows for flexibility. Following comments regarding the type of flood remediation solutions possible, and the fact that the environment agency has been planning for some time to update the Oxford flood model, the text has been amended to provide both flexibility on the solutions and clarity around the essential characteristics of the development framework that should be maintained should either a different solution be possible or if flood remediation work proved not required following update of the EA model.

5.9 Contamination

Additional text was added at the request of the Environment Agency. One respondent suggested that the area had been used as a 'rubbish tip' in the past but investigations and records find no evidence of this. However, some of the site area comprises made-up ground and as such it may be that residents' memories of lorries delivering 'loads' to the site were misinterpreted as being rubbish, but were in fact 'clean fill'.

5.10 Transport

A few respondents were concerned about the traffic generated by any new development. Trip generation across the West End was assessed as part of the AAP. The amount of traffic generated from the Oxpens development will be quite low, with parking policies allowing for 1 space per house, no parking (other than disabled and operational) for commercial, hotel and flats. The new road through Oxpens site (Becket Street extension) will provide an alternative route for traffic heading West from the South, thus reducing traffic movements through Hollybush Row and Frideswide Square, which is being redeveloped to provide a much improved public realm. The Becket Street extension will be designed with the same public realm improvements as Oxpens Road.

The Highways agency has no concerns over the proposal. Detailed transport studies will accompany a planning application as a scheme comes forward.

5.11 Uses

The uses for the Oxpens site are set out in the West End Area Action Plan. Key adjacent land owners and the majority of respondents agree with the mixed-use proposal. One organisation has suggested that the scheme should be all residential but this would be contrary to adopted policy WE20 of the AAP which requires all sites of 0.2Ha or greater to incorporate more than one use. In addition, a fully residential scheme would not achieve the same employment and economic benefits. The SPD text has been strengthened to ensure that there is no net loss of jobs as a result of the development.

Other uses suggested for the site included concert hall, swimming pool and museum. These uses are not ruled out by policy set out in the West End AAP.

Locating the train station on Oxpens has been proposed. This would be contrary to the uses for the site identified in the West End AAP and has now been ruled out as an option through the Oxford Station masterplanning process.

5.12 Community facilities

One respondent raised concerns over the loss of the petrol station, Royal Mail delivery office and coach parking. The latter two of these facilities would be relocated elsewhere and the Council is working with partners to enable this. Royal Mail has a statutory duty to provide a delivery office in the City. There are 7 petrol stations within 4 miles of Oxpens and the proposed new development would have small retail facilities and services.

The long term future of the ice-rink was a recurring question. The SPD takes a long term view and sets out proposals for the whole site. However, the SPD does not preclude the ice-rink either staying or being relocated at some point in the future.

5.13 Integration with other schemes

Some concerns were raised about the apparent lack of an integrated transport strategy and links between the Oxpens plans and those of nearby developments at Westgate and the station. However, these plans are in fact joined up and actions have been taken to address this issue. The SPD dovetails with plans for Westgate and the emerging station masterplan.

6. Strategic Environmental Assessment Consultation

A Combined Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening and Scoping Report was produced to determine the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 for the Draft Oxpens Master Plan SPD.

The City Council consulted with the three statutory environmental bodies (English Heritage, the Environment Agency and Natural England) for 5 weeks in order to determine the level of detail of the information that must be included in the SEA Report. As well as meeting the requirements of the Regulations, the SEA Combined Screening and Scoping Report was made available alongside the draft SPD during the formal public consultation period.

The SEA Combined Screening and Scoping report identified that the Oxpens SPD is likely to add an additional level of detail to that of the AAP. However any such assessment should be proportional to the level of the plan that is being assessed. Any assessment undertaken under the SEA Regulations 12 does not rule out the need for further assessment, should it be necessary, under the EIA Regulations.

In line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 SI 1633, the SA for the SPD underwent a 5 week consultation for the Screening and Scoping Stages. In line with the Regulations, the environmental consultees – English Heritage, the Environment Agency and Natural England were invited to comment at this stage. The Screening and Scoping consultations were conducted simultaneously for a period of 5 weeks. We received 5 comments from on the Screening and Scoping consultation from a range of groups including the environmental consultees at the scoping and screening stages and two other local groups – Oxford Preservation Trust and SENDRA.

Between 17 June and 30 July 2013, the Environmental Report for the SPD underwent a 6 week public consultation alongside the SPD itself. This consultation invited the same group that were consulted on the SPD to comment on the SEA and included members of the public who had registered an interest in planning on our online consultation portal. In total there were four responses on the Environmental Report. There were no objections or concerns from any of the statutory agencies.

This page is intentionally left blank