

CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD – 22 JANUARY 2014

Questions from members of the public

Agenda Item 5 (Northern Gateway Area Action Plan)

The questions suggest that there has been a misunderstanding about the role of the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan (AAP). Many of the questions are focussed on the decision to allocate the Northern Gateway site for development and the reasoning behind this. However, it was the Core Strategy that allocated the Northern Gateway site.

The Core Strategy was adopted after a lengthy production process, including public examination. It was through this process that issues relating to the housing and employment needs of the city and the balance between these uses were addressed, and this resulted in the Northern Gateway allocation.

The AAP will have a very specific role within the planning policy framework of the city. This will be to add a greater level of detail to the Core Strategy allocation, to set site-specific policies and to help facilitate delivery of this policy.

The production of an AAP to take forward the Core Strategy allocation is a proactive and plan-led approach to facilitating development in the city. The City Council has long preferred this approach to place making as opposed to the alternative, reactionary approach of simply waiting for planning applications to be submitted.

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(Questions from Nigel Gibson)

- 1. The options being approved for consultation appear to be predicated around providing for approximately 8,000 jobs – how many of those are for existing Oxford citizens, and how many for people outside the city?**

Answer

The AAP Options Document does not use a figure of 8,000 jobs; an important function of this document is to explore and test a range of sizes of development. The number of jobs will be related to the overall size and the type of employment development, which are still under consideration and being tested through the AAP. The Options Document is clear that the employment created must be directly related to the knowledge economy of Oxford, this recognises that if that sector of the economy is to continue to make a significant contribution to the national, regional and local economy, there must be an opportunity for it to grow.

- 2. The options being approved for consultation appear to be predicated around providing for approximately 500 new homes – assuming that the Council gives in to the developers and does not enforce its own policy of 50% social housing, we can expect about 200 new dwellings. How many of these do you expect to be occupied by people on the Housing Register, and from which Bands?**

Answer

The AAP Options Document clearly sets out the City Council's policy approach to affordable housing - to require at least 50% of units to be provided as affordable. The City Council has a long standing commitment to maximising the delivery of affordable housing and reducing the length of the housing register. The allocation of housing will be in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocation Policy.

- 3. What concerns does the Council have that concreting over a huge green space and attracting 8,000 new jobs will fundamentally change the character of the City of Oxford? Why does the Council think this is a good idea?**

Answer

The AAP Options Document does not propose either of these suggestions. However, it does stress that the detailed design of the scheme will have to carefully address the character, historic environment, biodiversity and drainage considerations amongst others. The Options Document does propose that open space, landscaping and sustainable urban drainage features for example, must be included as part of the design.

- 4. How will creating approximately 8,000 new jobs and only (approximately) 500 new homes address what the Council tells us continually is already a major housing crisis within the City?**

Answer

It is the Core Strategy that allocated the Northern Gateway for employment-led development having addressed issues relating to the housing and employment needs of the city and the balance between these uses. In fact the AAP Options Document is seeking views on options to build a higher number of homes than set out in the Core Strategy.

- 5. If the Council is successful in creating the 8,000 jobs, what do you forecast will be the corresponding demand for housing within the City boundary? If the number is less than 8,000, where do you anticipate that these people will live and commute from and what discussions have you had with the relevant local authorities?**

Answer

It is the Core Strategy that allocated the Northern Gateway for development having addressed issues relating to the housing and employment needs of the city and the balance between these uses. Neighbouring authorities were party to the Core Strategy process that allocated this site, and continue to be regularly updated and consulted on this project.

- 6. A development of this size will undoubtedly create additional demand for leisure facilities; will the Council consider reversing its policy of reducing publicly funded leisure facilities, as evidenced by its determination to close Temple Cowley Pools Leisure Centre and the existing Blackbird Leys Swimming Pool, the only replacement being a 25m swimming pool and ancillary water?**

Answer

The questioner is mistaken there is no policy of reducing publicly funded leisure facilities. The council has continued to invest in leisure, with £4.6million pounds being invested on improving the council's leisure facilities since 2009. The new pool in Blackbird Leys is additional to this. The new pool not only includes an 8 lane competition standard pool, but a teaching pool and a splash pool. There will also be ancillary facilities such as a new soft play area a sauna. The council is also investing in sports pavilions (two new builds are underway), fitness trails, tennis courts, multi-use games area and activity programmes.

This Northern Gateway site has been identified for development for a number of years (having been safeguarded for future development in the Oxford Local Plan in 2005 and allocated in the Core Strategy in 2011) and so the City Council has been mindful of this in its' planning, programming and budgeting since then. Development of the Northern Gateway site will be liable for significant payments towards the provision of infrastructure in the city through the Community Infrastructure Levy.

- 7. Assuming that you give in to the developers and allow only 40% social housing in the 500 new houses, this still means that 200 families of varying sizes are unlikely to be able to afford to use privately run leisure facilities – how will the council fulfil their need for indoor leisure facilities?**

Answer

The AAP Options Document clearly sets out the City Council's policy approach to affordable housing, to require at least 50% of units to be provided as affordable. The City Council has a long standing commitment to making indoor sport accessible to all members of the community. This level of increased demand can easily be absorbed within the city's leisure offering which has continued to be improved over recent years.

- 8. The options report makes little reference to leisure facilities of any sort; what demand does the Council forecast, in terms of number of visits per year, that will be generated by the three options under consideration? Can you please explain in detail how you arrived at these figures?**

Answer

This site has been identified for development for a number of years (having been safeguarded for future development in the Oxford Local Plan in 2005 and allocated in the Core Strategy in 2011) and so the City Council has been mindful of this in its' planning, programming and budgeting since then. This

level of increased demand can easily be absorbed within the city's leisure offering which has continued to be improved over recent years.

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(Questions from Jane Alexander)

- 9 In the light of recent flooding in Oxford, which the City Council has openly spoken of causing expensive damage to many, what concerns does the Council have, that concreting over this immense a green space which borders the Oxford canal, flood zone areas 3 and 2 on one side, and being only 5,000 ft from the river Cherwell on the other, that if this were to go ahead, the consequences of future flooding would be raised to unacceptable levels?**

Answer

The principle for development on the Northern Gateway site was considered through the Core Strategy and resulted in an allocation. The site is located entirely in Flood Zone 1 which is land assessed as having a less than 1 in 1000 annual probability of river flooding in any year. The Options Document makes it clear that development will only be permitted where it has been shown through a Flood Risk Assessment that it will not increase flood risk either on the site or elsewhere.

- 10. If you were to permit this development, what provision have you made for what you refer to as 'leisure' and we call 'essential health and exercise' facilities in the area?**

Answer

The Options Document is clear that when planning for a new community it is important to plan for the necessary supporting amenities; there will be access to on-site public open space, new pedestrian and cycle links through to neighbouring areas and improved access to a whole range of services and facilities within reach of the site. The site is only about a mile away from Summertown District Centre which includes the Ferry Leisure Centre and pool. In addition, development of the Northern Gateway site will be liable for significant payments towards the provision of infrastructure in the city through the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Ferry Leisure centre has been expanded and improved over recent years and we are exploring ways to further improve the facility. The council have also fully modernised Cutteslowe Sport Pavilion and next financial year will be improving the second pavilion in Cutteslowe Park. The council are also working with a community association who have attained funding to install a fitness trail in the Cutteslowe and Sunnymead Park.

11. Will the Council consider reversing its policy of reducing publicly funded leisure facilities? Many people, who at present go to Temple Cowley Pools for their exercise, will find it more convenient to go to Ferry instead, not Blackbird Leys thereby pushing that facility to capacity. How will Ferry pool cope and is this something the people who already use Ferry have been made aware of?

Answer

The questioner is mistaken there is no policy of reducing publicly funded leisure facilities. Please refer to the consultation pages for the new pool on the City Council website at:
<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decLP/ConsultationonLeisureFacilities.htm>

12. With the lack of consultation and the Council not listening to the concerns of over 12,000 of the public through petitions what trust can the public have that you act in our best interest?

Answer

There will be no lack of consultation. Details of public involvement are set out in paragraphs 14 and 15 of the report and the approach to consultation is set out in paragraphs 16 through to 19 of the report. There has already been significant consultation in the early stages of the AAP project. Subject to City Executive Board approval, a six-week period of public consultation will begin on the Options Document on 14th February. Results from that consultation will feed into the draft AAP which will itself be subject to further public consultation later in the year.

13. How does the Council intend to publicly tell the people of Oxford in particular those in Abingdon Road and Botley Road areas who were directly worst affected by recent flooding, of its plans to concrete over yet more rain-water-soak-up-mitigation-land areas (potential flood plain) thereby putting those recent victims and others at still greater risk in the future?

Answer

The site is located entirely in Flood Zone 1 and the Options Document makes it clear that development will only be permitted where it has been shown through a Flood Risk Assessment that it will not increase flood risk either on the site or elsewhere. Subject to City Executive Board approval, a six-week period of public consultation will begin on the Options Document on 14th February.

Questions from John Bleach, Chair of Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan)

14 We are very disappointed to hear that there was insufficient time for comments made by the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan Group, at the invitation of the Planning Department, to incorporate these comments into the draft options document (tabled at this meeting). Can the Council ensure that sufficient time will be given to allow the local

community to make a meaningful contribution to the Northern Gateway project?

Answer

Every effort is being made to fully involve the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan group in the production of the AAP. In November officers accepted an invitation to take part in a workshop organised by the Neighbourhood Plan group. The response from the group and the public more widely to this workshop was very positive. Following that workshop, officers wrote up a summary of the event and attended a meeting of the Steering Group to run through the outcomes, at that meeting (8th January 2014) the draft Options were also shared and comments noted. One of the changes requested was to include an additional option relating to the Green Belt south of the A40. An amendment will be tabled at the CEB meeting requesting this change.

To be clear, CEB are requested to approve the Options Document for public consultation, discussions with the Forum thus far have taken place in advance and in addition to the public consultation. Following CEB approval the document will be published for a six-week period of consultation. During this period a range of consultation methods will be used to reach as many people as possible, for example there will be a series of exhibitions, a summary leaflet and questionnaire will be delivered to each household in the area and a second workshop will be jointly hosted by the Neighbourhood Plan group and the City Council. Again the outcomes of the consultation will be reported, published and used to inform the next stage of the AAP.

- 15 The Core Strategy inspector stated in his report that: “To be acceptable, any development must show that the site can be developed in a sustainable manner, with priority given to non-car modes of access, and that the nearby road system can accommodate any additional traffic in an acceptable manner.” Can the Council explain how the diagram on page 14 of the agenda (under “Access and highways measures”) demonstrates the required strategy to give priority to pedestrians and cyclists, rather than to cars, thereby ensuring the complete integration of this development into the local neighbourhood?**

Answer

The City Council and its partner the County Council, both take the promotion of sustainable transport modes and integration very seriously. These are issues addressed in the Options Document. The diagram referred to is just one element of the proposed transport solution for the site. Bus, pedestrian and cycle priority measures and the issues of design and integration are discussed on pages 10 to 13 of the Options Document and reflected in the Preferred Strategy at pages 18 and 19.

Within the Options Document we need to identify and consult on the key strategic parameters for the transport solutions (e.g. key road junctions and new roads), but this will be developed in tandem with the details of public transport, cycle and pedestrian routes and measures.

Significant work is currently being progressed to develop the proposed transport strategy for the site (and indeed the wider area) and to produce the required evidence to support the AAP. The outcomes of this work will be reflected in the draft AAP which is programmed for Council consideration and an additional 6-week period of consultation in the Summer. The City Council is very aware of the parameters and measures of success set out in the Core Strategy for the Northern Gateway and will indeed be required to prove to an independent Planning Inspector through a public examination that the draft AAP complies with these.

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