

Appendix 8: Response to Queries on Highways Issues.

The realignment of bus priority route with right-angled bends is sub-optimal.

The current proposal makes more efficient use of land by putting all the car parking underground, and using the land at ground level and above for retail and leisure uses. As a result, the area of land west of Norfolk Street is now an integral part of the development. The developer is keen to ensure the site is not divided in two by the bus priority route and to create a safe and attractive pedestrian route from Bonn Square to the proposed John Lewis. This also minimises the need for large volumes of pedestrians to cross the bus priority route. There are currently two right angled bends in the equivalent section of the bus priority route, which increases to three with the development in place. However unlike the current bends those now proposed allow buses to pass each other without needing traffic signal controlled shuttle working, so delays negotiating these bends would be reduced compared to the existing arrangements.

Poor integration with Oxpens and West End.

The Highway Authority supports the aspiration to transform the character of Oxpens Road from 'inner ring road' to an attractive city centre street as part of the Oxpens proposals. However there are far more demands being placed on this section of Thames Street immediately south of the Westgate site than on other parts of the Oxpens Road / Thames Street corridor, because this section needs to accommodate the realigned bus priority route and a signalised access to a major car park. A simplification of the originally proposed car park access junction has now been submitted to help reduce the amount of carriageway space in this area, to improve pedestrian connections between Westgate and Oxpens, and to provide a simpler, less cluttered foundation for the landscaping and public realm proposals which are to follow at the reserved matters stage. Again, it is worth noting that by developing the land west of Norfolk Street for retail, residential and leisure uses, (rather than for a multi-storey car park and bus turning area), the current proposal has far greater potential to establish a successful urban design connection with Oxpens than the consented scheme.

Lack of a transport strategy for the city centre.

The Highway Authority's transport strategy for the city centre is set out at a high level in its third Local Transport Plan, and the West End AAP. The transport schemes identified in the AAP are currently being developed in detail with significant progress agreed or close to being agreed for Frideswide Square, Oxpens and the railway station. The combined effects of Frideswide Square, Oxpens and Westgate have been assessed using traffic modelling and this work will be updated to include other developments (e.g the station masterplan). Moreover proposals for changes to bus routes, (including the closure of Queen Street to buses), are being developed in close collaboration with the bus companies in the context of a countywide bus growth study. The Highway Authority therefore considers there to be a strong transport strategy in the city centre with several of the most important schemes identified in the strategy well-developed.

Assessment of impacts on bus and park and ride networks inadequate.

The bus operators' future decisions about bus service provision and routing will be affected more by other growth, (e.g. housing growth across the county), than by the Westgate development. The Highway Authority is therefore undertaking a joint study with bus companies based on recently published population forecasts.

Transport assessment study area too small.

Transport consultants acting for the applicant have assessed the traffic impacts, as have the Highway Authority. Whilst there are increases, both are satisfied they would not have a significant impact, and that such impacts as there are would be outweighed by the development's wider benefits. CIL funding may be used to mitigate any traffic impacts.

Flawed assumption that trips will divert to P&R when the car park is full.

The Highway Authority requested the applicants' transport consultants to undertake a "sensitivity test" assuming that overspill parking demand from Westgate would initially fill up other parking spaces in the city centre, rather than all being diverted to Park and Ride. The impact of this was not found to be great as there is relatively little spare capacity elsewhere in the city centre, particularly on Saturdays. The reduction in the size of the on - site car park compared to the extant permission is welcomed in transport strategy terms, though it is recognised that it poses challenges in managing excess demand. Various conditions are suggested to be imposed on the planning permission if granted, (e.g. a parking management strategy), to address the issue.

Transport methodology is flawed.

The survey specification and transport assessment methodology were agreed in advance by the Highway Authority. At the strategic level the proposed scheme would not have a greater traffic impact than the consented scheme since the car park is smaller and this (together with pricing) is the biggest determinant of the overall modal split. Moreover whilst there will always be uncertainties as to the exact proportion of the new Westgate trade which will come from existing visitors rather than new, the 'new trips' figures used in the transport assessment are considered to be robust. Further, the development is located at a highly sustainable location, with very constrained car parking. The development proposes over 1000 new cycle parking spaces and around a dozen new bus stops, whilst reducing car parking spaces. It is hard to see therefore how a retail-led scheme of this size could be delivered with less traffic impact. In the context of all of the above, the Highway Authority was satisfied that the transport methodology is appropriate and robust, and that the impacts are acceptable. The Highway Authority have highlighted the priorities it would wish to see funded from CIL funds to mitigate impacts.

No assessment of cumulative impacts.

The cumulative impacts of Oxpens, Westgate and Frideswide Square have been assessed, including in the context of the West End AAP which was found to be sound by an independent inspector.