

# Planning Services Improvement Action Plan

Flowing from Roger Dudman Way Review, but includes extra actions

Small Steering Group

Councillor Colin Cook Panel: Colin Cook, David Edwards and Vincent Goodstadt.

In attendance: Michael Crofton Briggs, NikoGrigoropoulos

The independent review confirms that the City Council met its statutory obligations in handling the planning application. However, there are recommendations on embedding best practise. There are six principal sets of recommendations:

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Recommendation	Action / Programme *	Owner	Milestone	Progress/Achievement
<b>1. Planning Procedures</b>				
Improving the clarity of the informal and formal liaison arrangements and the documentation of the pre-application process;	<p>Para 56. SLA with University to strengthen – clear documentation what material presented and what comments made. Improving clarity of the informal and formal liaison arrangements and the documentation of the pre-application process.</p> <p><i>Set up a meeting to create an action plan</i></p> <p><i>Review of current service level agreement with the University of Oxford.</i></p> <p><i>Review of current internal procedure guidance, to confirm documentation of the pre-application process.</i></p>	MHancock CGolden & AMurdoch	30 April 14	

\* In Action / programme column normal text extracted from V Goodstadt report and italic text represents extra actions.1

	<p><i>Include in internal guidance the process to secure Design Review by the Oxford Design Review Panel.</i></p> <p><i>Consider a triage stage: with each pre-application request, allocate a category or type which determines level or amount of resource, audit, clarity, processes.</i></p> <p><i>Implement the BPI pre-application procedure. CG and AM have started working on templates. Need to update these and start using them. CG and AM to assist MH.</i></p>			
Providing a clearer auditing regime of the submitted documents against the requirements in the published guidance in the registration process on major applications;	<p>Para 58. Clear audit at validation of documents submitted for major applications against requirements.</p> <p><i>New Internal procedure guidance, training and implementation.</i></p> <p><i>Take what is done already and document this, so it can be in idox to be seen. If a discretionary document explain this. Also process to go back and keep audit up to date as other information is submitted.</i></p> <p><i>Carry out a review as to whether any further minor changes are required.</i></p>	NGrigoropoulos	30 April 14	

A review the EIA-related procedures	<p>Para 66. Review EIA procedure i. advice in pre-application, ii. Quality of forms and documentation used, iii. Training and briefing of officers in respect of Screening process.</p> <p><i>Fresh review, update of guidance and officer training.</i></p> <p>Plain English training here. The Friends of the Earth 2005 campaigners' guide is helpful in this respect (see attached):</p> <p><a href="http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/guides/environmental_impact_asses1.pdf">http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/guides/environmental_impact_asses1.pdf</a></p>	MMorgan	30 June 14	Initial improvements made autumn 2013
<b>EXTRA:</b> external accreditation	<p><i>Investigate which planning authorities have done this and what advice is available from national organisations such as PAS..</i></p> <p><i>Initial analysis of 'what it out there' from V Goodstadt.</i></p> <p><i>Scope out project, what help needed</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Project plan</i></li> <li>• <i>Action Plan</i></li> </ul>	NGrigoropoulos/LGodin	30 Sept 14	
<b>EXTRA:</b> Review of how we organise the electronic application file. Data management	<p><i>Devise guidance on data management, initially for application files. To aid audit, retrieval and clarity.</i></p> <p><i>Proposal could be to put data in sub-sections that relate to the stages in the process in IDOX (pre-app; submission, consultation, negotiation, changes, committee report, decision, compliance with conditions.).</i></p>	MArmstrong/CGolden Support from LGodin	30 Sept 14	

	<p><i>Label each piece of data better.</i></p> <p><i>Potential for external advice and help needed.</i></p> <p><i>To include all sections including Heritage, photos, etc.</i></p>			
<b>2.Consultation Processes.</b>				
Further development of pre-application guidelines:	<p>Para 91. Best practice – resource intensive, so most appropriate for majors.</p> <p>Para 98.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Allow more time between project inception and the proposed commencement date</li> <li>2.Engage other appropriate parties (including members) in pre-application discussions, and not just officers;</li> <li>3.Provide opportunities for presentations and briefings to members;</li> <li>4.Encourage a two-stage consultation on major applications ; and</li> <li>5. Set down clearer guidelines on the desired documentation.</li> </ol> <p><i>Workshop or brainstorm to explore options and best approach.</i></p> <p><i>Prepare internal procedure guidance</i></p> <p><i>Consider how best to persuade prospective applicant the value of initial consultation while scheme is still at option or conceptual stage and capable of change in response to consultation.</i></p> <p>A protocol / guidance for developers on the consultation they</p>	MHancock	30 April 14	

	<p>need to do for different sized developments.</p> <p><i>Work with Members on greater participation at this stage</i></p> <p><i>Work joined up with point 1.1 above and also design panel action</i></p>			
<b>EXTRA:</b> Review of Statement of Community Involvement	<p><i>Current SCI was adopted in 2006 and does not reflect the most up to date regulations in relation to policy documents so there was a case for review in any event but RDW adds to this.</i></p> <p><i>SCI review would cover pre-application consultation.</i></p>	LGodin	30 June 14	
Post-application guidance on planning processes.	<p>Para 99</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A more structured approach to the weekly lists to enable the ready identification of major developments;</li> <li>2. A more effective provision of Site Notices;</li> <li>3. Additional means for communicating the scale and massing of major developments;</li> <li>4. Consultation on revised drawings;</li> <li>5. The provision of feedback to respondents on planning decisions; and</li> <li>6. The planning processes to be more integrated with other regulatory processes.</li> </ol> <p><i>Ensure all actions documented in internal procedure guidance</i></p> <p><i>Provision of post-application guidance notes for applicants/page on our website.</i></p> <p><i>Clarification about what is/isn't a Non Material Amendment /Minor Material Amendment.</i></p>	NGrigoropoulos	Some 30 April 14, some 30 June 14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Already there</li> <li>2. Already acted upon</li> </ol>

	<p>3. See also Section 3.  4. Need to confirm.  5. Statutory consultees, - through committee report, or use of conditions.  6. Use pre-commencement conditions less, where they are important sort out before the decision is made. Already in place re.contamination.</p> <p><b>EXTRA.</b> A question to Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb asks that Council review the methods it uses to consult the public on planning applications</p>			
<b>EXTRA:</b> Application of project management procedures to applications.	<i>Consider merit of treating a major application as a 'project' with associated, but proportionate, project management? e.g. (as a minimum) set up a project plan with key stages and milestones that covers pre-and post-app. stages.</i>	NGrigoropoulos	30 June 14	
<b>3. Visual Impacts &amp; Quality of Design</b> It is recommended that existing initiatives to improve the design capacity of the Council should be complemented by action to enhance the use of in-house expertise and to provide members with greater support in their considerations of design issues and visual impacts by:	Para 145 - expanded below			
Developing greater technical capacity (IT and skills) to take advantage of the rapidly evolving potential for interpreting design and integration with established GIS systems;	<p><i>Contact Professor Gaskin at Brookes a specialist in area of 3D virtual models who already has a partial model of the City.</i></p> <p><i>Some important questions – does the City own and run the model and 'plug' in emerging schemes and then produce</i></p>	<p>LGodin</p> <p>Support from MCrofton Briggs</p>	30 Sept 14	

	<p><i>'visualisations'?</i></p> <p><i>Feasibility study to understand what is possible.</i></p> <p><i>Scope out project, what help is needed</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Business case</i></li> <li>• <i>Project plan</i></li> <li>• <i>Action Plan</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Officers already exploring more immediate and site specific options, such as the use of Google Sketch Up with a view to trial it to see how helpful it could be. It could help us in our understanding of light issues as well as scale and massing.</i></p>			
Improving the advice on the design evidence used to support application, in particular in the preparation of Design and Access Statements	<p><i>Review of our current advice and assessment of Design and Access Statements, to include understanding of latest Government guidance.</i></p> <p><i>Internal procedure guidance</i></p> <p><i>To check latest Government Guidance and our Validation Checklist.</i></p> <p><i>Potential to have a Design section on the planning pages of our website. This could include guidance on how to complete a good Design and Access statement as well as information on latest schemes and the Oxford Design Review Panel.</i></p>	MArmstrong/CGolden	30 April 14	
Enhancing member 'training' on design and planning;	<p><i>Explore with Members how they would like to achieve this.</i></p> <p><i>Potential role of Oxford Design Review Panel members</i></p>	NGrigoropoulos	30 June 14	

	<i>Continue and expand post development site visits to help Members review decisions – good examples and also where improvements could have been made.</i>			
Investigating and adopting the best new field-based approaches to assessing the visual impact of new development	<p><i>This is reference to poles, balloons or scaffolding.</i></p> <p><i>Run a pilot on a Council owned scheme.</i></p> <p><i>Evaluate pilot</i></p> <p><i>Options paper for future scope and operation, with opportunities and risks.</i></p> <p><i>Importance of verified views on major schemes. Importance of plans showing the context of a proposal, i.e. neighbouring properties, for smaller applications.</i></p>	NGrigoropoulos	30 Sept 14	“Swiss poles” pilot carried out and an evaluation to be included with Elsfield Hall report
<b>EXTRA:</b> Design Review	<p><i>In partnership with CABE establish the Oxford Design Review Panel.</i></p> <p><i>Work with case officers to introduce the appropriate proposals to Design Review and how to make best use of the Panel’s report.</i></p> <p><i>Templates for use with each project</i></p> <p><i>Leaflet to explain to developers and to inform the public</i></p>	MCrofton Briggs	30 April 14	
<b>EXTRA:</b> Improve internal design expertise	<p><i>Skills audit and schedule</i></p> <p><i>Learning &amp; Development opportunities</i></p> <p><i>Internal design charettes - design workshops for the DC teams to focus on more daily design issues.</i></p> <p><i>Options paper to ‘fill’ gaps to include possibility of employing an urban designer.</i></p>	CGolden	30 June 14	



<p><b>4. Committee Reporting</b> It recommended that the presentation of the planning issues of major applications to committee should be strengthened by</p>				
<p>A systematic documentation of the policy evaluation including clarification of the extent and nature of any departure from policy</p>	<p>Para 167 systematic record of evaluation against all policies that seen as material</p> <p>Internal meeting to explore and scope out</p> <p><i>Internal procedure guidance to explain how officers should record evaluation</i></p> <p>Understand issue of Departure and greater level of explanation necessary.</p> <p><i>Advice note prepared.</i></p>	<p>MArmstrong/CGolden</p> <p>Policy Team.</p>	<p>30 April 14</p>	
<p>A more evidenced-based approach to the presentation of the choices before committee, and the impact of mitigation through conditions in reports</p>	<p>Para 187 report could have been clearer in evaluation and analysis of the choices that were put before committee.</p> <p>E.g. report asserted need for student accommodation but could have gone further to explain why and give current achievement against 3,000 policy,</p> <p>Review of report writing guidelines, to provide extra guidance to authors on such matters as evaluation, analysis of choices and weight.</p> <p><i>Workshop to explore options and best approach.</i></p>	<p>NGrigoropoulos</p>	<p>30 June 14</p>	

	<p><i>Internal procedure guidance based on review of existing report template. Augment to include advisory notes to report writers.</i></p> <p><i>Lead policy officer assigned to majors in an advisory capacity; to flag up other sources of information; to be sounding board for discussions about choices and weight to be attached to different policy objectives</i></p>			
The use of alternative means of addressing design considerations (e.g. in terms of visualisations and where necessary site visits).	<p>Relates to section 3 above, and how illustrate and communicate design considerations to Members. Augment power point with other means such as models and exhibition boards (favoured method of the Design Panel)</p> <p>Importance of Verified views. Encourage applicants to produce models Have hard copies of the plans on boards from applicants for Members to view before the committee meeting.</p> <p><i>Discuss with Members</i> <i>Pilot some ideas and review</i></p> <p><i>Internal procedure guidance</i></p>	NGrigoropoulos	30 Sept 14	
<b>5. Planning Conditions</b> <b>It is recommended that enforcement procedures and coordination (on conditions) should be strengthened through:</b>				
An auditable process for determining the appropriate enforcement action	<p>Para 205 Review with legal of current process. E.g. Is there the discretion to take no action absolute?</p>	MMorgan	30 June 14	

	<p>E.g. Need clear decision process to decide to take no action.</p> <p><i>Necessity to document the decision especially when no action, and formally to secure sign off by a senior reviewer.</i></p> <p><i>Internal report template and procedure guidance</i></p>			
A review of the use of standard planning conditions, and updating of them where necessary	<p>New schedule of standard conditions,</p> <p><i>Structure decision notices to set out conditions in four categories (no additional submission, pre-commencement, pre-occupation, post completion)</i></p>	MArmstrong/MHancock	30 June 14	Initial update 2013
Inter-agency co-ordination to address the issues set out in the main report	<p>Review how much is left to pre-commencement conditions and what is agreed before decision made.</p> <p>E.g. Assess importance of issue and when needs to be agreed before consent given</p> <p><i>Internal discussion to understand issue, explore options and agree guidance to officers.</i></p> <p><i>Confirm approach with agency partners</i></p>	NGrogopoulos	30 June 14	
The use of a range of media should be considered to provide accurate and accessible information that addresses these concerns ( to the general public)	<p>Planning involves complex issues. Consider how we explain and communicate these. Consider briefing notes or similar for the general public, e.g. distinction between contaminated land and land containing contaminants.</p> <p><i>Open a running list of 'complex' issues that might benefit from lay explanation.</i></p>	LGodin with help from CGolden	30 June 14	

	<p><i>Use of section on Web for general planning guidance</i></p> <p><i>Check whether explanation is available somewhere else, we can link to.</i></p>			
<b>EXTRA:</b> Monitoring of pre-commencement conditions	<p><i>Assess role for Approved Inspectors and Building Control to report on impending commencement.</i></p> <p><i>Correlation with needs for Community Infrastructure Levy monitoring?</i></p> <p><i>Also there is more to do to communicate to applicants their responsibility?</i></p> <p><i>See conditions above : Structure decision notices to set out conditions in four categories (no additional submission, pre-commencement, pre-occupation, post completion)</i></p>	NGrigoropoulos	30 June 14	
<b>6. Wider Planning Issues</b>				
Enhancing the planning service in terms of planning process, policy and strategy	<p>Para 214, 215, 216</p> <p>Improve clarity on 'departure' from the plan.</p> <p>Is the City full? Lack of space leads to pressure to build higher with impact on urban form and views.</p> <p>Consider when appropriate to review the capacity of the City to absorb growth. –associated to issue below.</p> <p><i>Would tie into 3D virtual model of the City in 3 above.</i></p>	MJaggard	30 Sept 14	The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment review (commenced and for completion in March) will provide clarity on the capacity to absorb growth and the pressures on building higher.

	<p><i>Set out a provisional timetable for the review of the Core Strategy</i></p> <p><i>Consideration relates to Strategic Housing Market Assessment, SHMA output, Universities dialogue, Strategic Economic Plan, Growth Fund and wider Oxford Growth Strategy matters.</i></p> <p><i>Work towards preparation of Project Initiation Document and timeline.</i></p> <p><i>The imminent publication of the SHMA and the work that flows from that under the duty to cooperate (including discussions that we are instigating with the Planning Inspectorate) will help to inform decisions on the timing of any review of our own Core Strategy.</i></p>			
Progressing and formalising a more strategic approach to the future development needs and engagement with the Universities and Colleges	<p>Para 219 Work with the Universities and colleges towards a 15 yr business plan. The future of the Universities depends on the City it is in as much as on global competitiveness.</p> <p>Help the Universities and Colleges take community engagement seriously.</p> <p><i>Hold a College and University workshop</i> <i>Prepare a brief to go out with invitation to same</i></p> <p><i>Proposition: Joint commissioning of consultants - Where next for Oxford, the University and Colleges over a 5 to 15 yr horizon? / Oxford Growth Strategy?</i></p>	MCrofton Briggs	30 Sept 14	Initial meeting with colleges and University 17 Mar

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