

**West Area Planning Committee**

8th March 2016

**Application Number:** 15/03198/FUL

**Decision Due by:** 18th March 2016

**Proposal:** Temporary soft landscaping for the central area of the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter.

**Site Address:** Radcliffe Observatory Quarter Woodstock Road (**site plan: appendix 1**)

**Ward:** North Ward

**Agent:** Mr Paul Goffin

**Applicant:** University Of Oxford

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## **Recommendation:**

West Area Planning Committee is recommended to approve the application subject to and including conditions listed below, for the following reasons:

## **Reasons for Approval**

- 1 The Council considers that the proposal accords with the policies of the development plan as summarised below. It has taken into consideration all other material matters, including matters raised in response to consultation and publicity. Any material harm that the development would otherwise give rise to can be offset by the conditions imposed.
- 2 Officers have considered carefully all comments on these proposals. Officers have come to the view, for the detailed reasons set out in the officers report, that the objections do not amount, individually or cumulatively, to a reason for refusal and that all the issues that have been raised have been adequately addressed and the relevant bodies consulted.

## **Conditions**

- 1 Development begun within time limit
- 2 Develop in accordance with approved plans
- 3 Contamination Risk Assessment
- 4 Contamination validation / remediation
- 5 Details of fencing, lighting and cctv

## **Principal Planning Policies:**

Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016

**CP1** - Development Proposals

**CP22** - Contaminated Land

**NE23** - Habitat Creation in New Developments

**CP11** - Landscape Design

**CP20** - Lighting

Core Strategy

**CS19\_** - Community safety

Other Planning Documents

National Planning Policy Framework

## **Public Consultation**

Statutory Consultees Etc.

- Environment Agency Thames Region- No comments to make
- Thames Water Utilities Limited – No comments to make
- County Highways Authority - No comments to make

Individual Comments:

The main points raised were:

- Welcome proposal to improve soft landscaping in the ROQ.
- Removal of hardstanding an improvement
- To maximise biodiversity effects the wild flower planting should be as wide as possible
- The University should have an overall landscape strategy for the ROQ

## **Officers Assessment:**

### **Site Location and Description**

1. The site lies within the central area of the ROQ, sitting behind the Blavatnik and Freuds on Walton Street, Mathematics and former Outpatients on Woodstock Road and the student accommodation of Somerville College to the south. To the north lies Green Templeton College and the Tower of the Four Winds (**appendix 1**)
2. The site is currently surrounded by blue hoarding and is a flat area of hard standing that has been recently used for storage, parking and office buildings during adjacent construction activities.

## **Description of proposal**

3. It is proposed to create an area of open green space until such time as new buildings come forward in line with the ROQ Masterplan.
4. The proposed works are to build mounds on the site with ballast and gabions (where needed) and cover the whole site with a 100mm layer of topsoil. Further a 100mm layer of recycled gravel would make up footpaths and an oval meeting area with steps up from the Blavatnik building where the land height changes. The topsoil would be seeded with grass and wildflower seeds. Seating would be provided in the oval area. It is proposed to replace the hoarding with metal fencing, similar to the fences installed in the University Parks. Four pedestrian gates will be installed to provide access from each side of the central area, and a larger double gate by the north side for maintenance access. All gates will be fitted with an electronic access system available for students and University staff; a CCTV and lighting scheme will be incorporated to protect all areas from anti-social behaviour with lighting to create a safe and smart area whilst the land is unoccupied.
5. Officers consider the principal determining issues to be:
  - Principle of landscaping;
  - Contamination;
  - Heritage
  - Impact on Amenities

## **Principle of Landscaping**

6. The landscaping this area of land as an open space for users of the ROQ is acceptable in principle. It is considered an appropriate use that makes best use of this land in the intervening years before further buildings come forward in accordance with Policy CP1 of the OLP.
7. The landscaping proposed is simple and unobtrusive and would introduce wild grasses and flowers that would enhance biodiversity over the temporary period in accordance with NE23 of the OLP and CS12 of the CS.
8. The fencing with lighting and cctv is considered acceptable and would provide security around the perimeter of the site during darker hours (dusk to dawn) and restrict access only to university staff and students in accordance with CP20 of the OLP and CS19 of the CS. The details of these can be secured by condition.

## **Contamination:**

9. The reports submitted have provided a contamination risk assessment for the whole Radcliffe Observatory Quarter site for a commercial end use. The proposed temporary landscaping would establish a more sensitive end use as a public open space – park (POSpark) than the current use. The generic assessment criteria for POSpark are more stringent than for a commercial

end use, and therefore the risk assessment(s) previously carried out for this site are not adequate to assess the risks for the proposed use. The proposal states that this site has been recently used for storage, parking and office buildings during adjacent construction activities, which may have introduced additional sources of contamination. The proposed strategy is to cover the unwanted hardstanding with the recycled gravel, and bury any protruding hardstanding under the mounds. This may increase slightly the size of the mounds but will negate the need of removing any existing concrete plinths, tarmac surfaces which may expose the underlying soils and therefore pose a greater risk of contamination.

10. It is recommended that a suitably qualified person undertake a site walkover to assess any changes in the site conditions since the previous site investigation, and provide recommendations for updating the risk assessment for the proposed end use. This can be secured by condition.
11. Validation sampling once the topsoil is in place will be required to confirm the site is suitable for use.

**Heritage:**

12. There would be no harmful impact on designated or non-designated Heritage assets.

**Impact on amenities:**

13. There would be no harmful impact on neighbouring residential on non-residential buildings adjacent.

**Conclusion:**

14. West Area Planning Committee is recommended to approve the application subject to and including conditions.

**Human Rights Act 1998**

Officers have considered the Human Rights Act 1998 in reaching a recommendation to grant planning permission, subject to conditions. Officers have considered the potential interference with the rights of the owners/occupiers of surrounding properties under Article 8 and/or Article 1 of the First Protocol of the Act and consider that it is proportionate.

Officers have also considered the interference with the human rights of the applicant under Article 8 and/or Article 1 of the First Protocol caused by imposing conditions. Officers consider that the conditions are necessary to protect the rights and freedoms of others and to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest. The interference is therefore justifiable and proportionate.

## **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

Officers have considered, with due regard, the likely effect of the proposal on the need to reduce crime and disorder as part of the determination of this application, in accordance with section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. In reaching a recommendation to approve, officers consider that the proposal will not undermine crime prevention or the promotion of community safety.

**Background Papers:** 15/03198/FUL

**Contact Officer:** Felicity Byrne

**Extension:** 2159

**Date:** 22nd February 2016

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