

To: City Executive Board
Date: 18 December 2018
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: The Westgate Centre

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Westgate Shopping Centre Redevelopment.
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Mary Clarkson, Board Member for Culture and City Centre
Corporate Priority:	A Vibrant and Sustainable Economy
Policy Framework:	The Oxford Economic Growth Strategy West End Area Action Plan
Recommendations: That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
Appendix 1 – Draft City Executive Board response to the recommendations

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 4 December 2018, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report it requested earlier in the year concerning the impact the Westgate redevelopment has had on the City Centre, since it opened one year ago. The Committee's consideration of this issue was concerned with how the opening of the Centre had affected the local economy, local traders and the number of visitors to the City. Given the high profile of the redevelopment within the City, the Committee agreed to invite various guests to contribute to the discussion.

2. The Panel would like to thank Matt Peachey, Economic Development Manager, for presenting the item and for providing the Committee with a detailed report. The Committee would like to thank the following guests for their helpful contributions:
 - Brendan Hattam, Westgate General Manager
 - Sara Fuge, Westgate Development Manager
 - Elaine Philip, Markets Manager, Oxford City Council
 - Graham Jones, Oxford High Street Association and ROX

Summary and recommendations

3. The most prominent features of the Committee's discussion concerned the Oxford Living Wage (OLW), and how it could be better promoted within the Westgate Centre. This issue remains a priority for the Committee, particularly in light of the recent OLW Review Group which complete its work in March 2018. The Committee were pleased to note that Land Securities Group, which manages the operation of the Westgate Centre, pays the OLW as a minimum to its Oxford employees.
4. The implementation of the OLW is a crucial means of bringing people closer to housing affordability, which is most acutely a challenge for residents in and around Oxford. There has been significant progress in recent years in increasing the number of OLW employers in the City, and it is felt that this momentum needs to continue. As expressed by the OLW Review Group last year, the Committee believe that employers who pay the OLW should be celebrated for doing so, and that more work should be undertaken to promote the OLW specifically within the Westgate Centre. The Committee requests in broad terms that CEB consider ways in which this wider promotion and uptake can be achieved.
5. ***Recommendation 1: That CEB considers what further opportunities are available to promote and encourage the take up of the Oxford Living Wage among employers located in the Westgate Centre.***
6. No data was available at the meeting concerning the number of retailers within the Westgate Centre that offered the OLW. It was positive to see that the Centre helps to sustain 2000 FTE jobs in the City, but it is equally important that employees are provided a fair wage, in light of the local affordability challenges. The number of retailers providing the OLW should be a key consideration of the Council in determining whether the development is successful, and meets the needs of local residents. There is an opportunity here for the Centre to set a benchmark regionally for providing a concentration of good wages in the retail sector.
7. It should be noted that the General Manager of the Centre, Brandan Hattam, said there may be an opportunity for a Council representative to attend a quarterly meeting of Westgate leaseholders, to briefly promote the uptake of the OLW, and the Committee believes this should be pursued.

Recommendation 2: That CEB carries out a survey of the 125 retailers in the Westgate Centre to understand how many are paying the Oxford Living Wage as a minimum to all their staff.

8. The Committee heard from Graham Jones, of Oxford High Street Association and ROX, that local traders had concerns about the condition of the public realm in some areas. It was suggested that the poor condition of some public spaces in the City had a negative impact on footfall, particularly in light of the higher quality public spaces within the Westgate Centre. The Committee believes this feedback should be considered by the Council, and investigated to see where improvements are most in need.

Recommendation 3: That CEB engages with local retailers in the wider city to understand where improvements to the public realm are most needed, and that these are incorporated into the City Council's scheme of works.

9. The Committee understands that during the planning stages of the Westgate Redevelopment, consultants were commissioned to consider what impact the Centre might have on other retail areas in the City. It was concluded from their study that the areas most likely to be negatively affected by the redevelopment, in terms of their income, would be secondary retail sites in the City, away from the city centre, such as Summertown and Cowley Road. It was not clear to the Committee whether work had been done since the Centre reopened. Members of the Committee and guests felt that there had been a noticeable increase in the number of vacant units in these secondary retail areas.

Recommendation 4: That CEB carries out a survey of retailers in secondary retail areas in the City (outside of the city centre) to understand what impact the redevelopment of the Westgate Centre has had on local businesses.

Further Consideration

10. The Scrutiny Committee remains invested in ensuring that the success of the Westgate Centre is kept under review, and that it is to the benefit of local residents, businesses and visitors. Given the scale of the development, it is likely that the Committee will want to revisit the issue in next year's work plan. It was noted that it may take two more years before more robust conclusions can be made about the impact of the Centre on the City.
11. Outside of its recommendations, the Committee has also requested more information from officers on the number of car parking spaces in the city centre and utilisation rates for these spaces. It is hoped that progress towards a Zero Emission Zone and recent increases in the use of public transport will help reduce the demand for city centre parking, and therefore improve congestion flows within the City in future years.
12. Finally, The Committee wishes to formalise its request for an update on progress against the recommendations of the Oxford Living Wage Review Group to come to the Committee on 2 April 2019.

Report author	Stefan Robinson
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252191
e-mail	srobinson@oxford.gov.uk