

CABINET – 13 MARCH 2012

FRIDESWIDE SQUARE, OXFORD – TRANSPORT AND PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

Report by Director for Environment & Economy

Introduction

1. The county council has been planning to transform Frideswide Square from a busy highway junction into a well-managed entry point to the city in keeping with Oxford. In March 2011, the Cabinet Member for Transport approved two options for further design work and consultation. The Cabinet is asked to review that work and approve the “Boulevard” option for detailed design and implementation, with a construction start date early in 2013.
2. The council approved the capital programme for 2011/12 to 2016/17 on 10 February 2012. The approved capital programme includes a total budget of £3.7m for Frideswide Square. Delivery within this budget requires the current feasibility designs (previously costed at over £5m in 2009/10 prices) to be revised through a value engineering process, with significant early contractor involvement.

Project purpose: regeneration and growth

3. Frideswide Square provides a vital link between the major road routes into Oxford (see plans at Annex 1). It is therefore of strategic importance in Oxfordshire’s road network, handling tens of thousands of car, bus, cycle and pedestrian journeys every day as well as being the gateway to the area for rail passengers. In particular, it is one of the key bottlenecks preventing reliable journey times for people commuting into Oxford from outside the city.
4. Oxford rail station is one of the fastest growing stations in the country, with 50% growth in passenger numbers since 2003. An estimated 5.5 million people pass through the station each year. Frideswide Square is the main point of arrival and departure for people using the station, and therefore has an increasingly important transport and public realm function. Its improvement is an important part of the strategic proposals for Oxford Rail station as set out in the council’s draft Rail Strategy recently approved by the Cabinet, including the East-West Rail and the Evergreen 3 proposals, which bring with them much wider benefits for the Oxfordshire economy and growth areas of Bicester and Science Vale.
5. Transforming Frideswide Square is a vital part of the regeneration of Oxford’s West End, a joint city/county council regeneration programme that will deliver – amongst other things – housing, jobs and much-needed additional retail

space. Frideswide Square is the single most important part of the access strategy for the West End, helping to ensure excellent access to major development sites such as the Westgate shopping centre and Oxpens. The bold and innovative approach proposed for Frideswide Square will help to set the tone for other projects and developments in the West End.

Design approach and options approved in March 2011

6. In March 2011, the Cabinet Member for Transport approved a design approach for Frideswide Square with no traffic signals, drawing heavily on “shared space” principles including compact roundabouts, greatly reduced carriageway areas, courtesy crossings, and landscaping. The officer report (see background document A) explained why this was considered appropriate, including full assessments of equality, safety and sustainability impacts.
7. Two options were approved for further design work and consultation (see Annex 2). This report does not revisit that work, but focuses on the merits of the two options now under consideration.

Options now under consideration

8. The project team has refined the two options using feedback from consultation in 2010, carried out further traffic modelling, and consulted stakeholders on the revised designs. The latest versions (now called the “Oval” and “Boulevard” for ease of reference) can be seen in Annex 3. These versions are identical to those presented to stakeholders and do not yet reflect stakeholder comments, which will be incorporated at the single option detailed design stage.
9. The landscaping in particular remains largely indicative and is intended to illustrate the possible uses and treatment of the open spaces. A detailed landscaping scheme will be developed at the next stage of design, taking into account stakeholder comments, budgetary constraints and other factors such as utilities under the road.
10. Annex 3 summarises the main features of the options and draft proposals for the approaches to the square. The principal difference between the two options is the choice between creating a larger civic space in the centre of the square, with traffic and bus stops closer to the edges (the Oval), or three civic spaces at the edges of the square, with traffic and bus stops in the centre (the Boulevard).
11. The Oval requires some land outside the existing highway boundary, in front of the Saïd Business School. This land would need to be dedicated as public highway by the landowner (the University of Oxford) to allow the Oval to be built.
12. Both options are expected to perform equally in terms of safety, traffic flows, queuing and delays due the layout and geometry of the designs. There is no

significant difference between the estimated construction costs of the two options.

Stakeholder consultation

13. Stakeholders have been consulted on the two options for the square. A consultation summary is at Annex 4. Of the 45 organisations consulted, 31 responded, of which 21 expressed a clear preference for one option: 14 (67%) preferred the Boulevard and 7 (33%) preferred the Oval. Oxford City Council preferred the Boulevard. Copies of all responses received are available (see background document B).
14. Cycling groups and groups representing people with disabilities have raised significant concerns about the design approach proposed for the square over the last 18 months, and those were reiterated in this consultation.
15. Whilst the proposed approach is innovative, officers are confident it will be safe for vulnerable road users. Cycling groups and groups representing people with disabilities will be involved further as the detailed design develops, and design changes already suggested by these groups over the last 18 months will be incorporated into the design wherever possible.

Conclusion

16. Officers remain of the view that either option would dramatically improve the square. However, it is recommended that the Boulevard option is taken forward for detailed design and implementation, for the following reasons:
 - **Regeneration:** the Boulevard provides larger open spaces connected to all three principal frontages, which will better help businesses occupying them prosper and contribute to a thriving square and wider West End regeneration.
 - **Deliverability:** unlike the Oval option, no land outside the highway boundary is required to deliver the Boulevard, avoiding a significant risk to deliverability.
 - **Flexibility:** this part of the city is expected to change significantly over the next ten years. It is impossible to predict exactly what form these changes will take. The Boulevard has greater inherent flexibility to accommodate changes around the square such as new buildings or new uses.
 - **Stakeholder support:** the Boulevard is supported by the majority of stakeholders.
17. The West End Partnership Executive has been overseeing the development and progress of this project. The Executive has considered both options and expressed a preference for the Boulevard.

Equality implications

18. An equality impact assessment was produced as part of the March 2011 report. This has been updated and is at Annex 5.
19. The project team will continue to develop the design to address as many of the concerns of people with disabilities as possible. The usability of the space for people with disabilities will need to be monitored carefully once it is complete, and adjustments made in light of experience where necessary. Part of the project contingencies will be set aside to deal with any changes (including, but not limited to, changes to assist people with disabilities) post completion. No major changes will be made until at least one year has passed after the full completion of the scheme. This allows sufficient time for all road users to adjust to the new layout and for monitoring to be carried out.

Sustainability implications

20. A sustainability assessment of the proposed design approach was included in the March 2011 report. There are no significant differences (from a sustainability perspective) between the two options now being considered so a separate assessment is not considered necessary for this report.

Risks

21. A project risk assessment has been completed (see background document C). Risks have been identified in three key areas:
 - **Delivery within budget** – as stated in paragraph 2, value engineering work is yet to be completed so some uncertainty remains about exactly what can be delivered within the available budget and contingencies as set out in the financial implications section below. The council may need to consider reducing the scope and/or specification of the scheme or increasing the budget once detailed design and value engineering have been completed. Such changes will be managed in line with the corporate capital governance requirements and further approvals will be sought at the appropriate level.
 - **Delivery to programme** – a start on site date in early 2013 is challenging for such a large project. A detailed programme will be produced with a preferred contractor as part of the value engineering exercise, which will give greater certainty about delivery timescales. As with many major projects, there is a need to align the delivery timetable with other works on the network. This may have implications for programming of the project delivery.
 - **Delivery of objectives** - the scheme is bold and innovative and is in a high profile location. This carries with it an inevitable degree of reputational risk for the council. However the scheme has support from

most local stakeholders and community groups, and officers are confident it will be successful.

Legal implications

22. The proposals require a number of Traffic Regulation Orders, such as amendments to parking and loading restrictions. These will be progressed as part of the detailed design process and reported to the Cabinet Member for Transport if there are any unresolved objections.
23. The proposals for Frideswide Square are broadly consistent with recently published Department for Transport guidance on shared space (Local Transport Note 1/11, October 2011). There may nevertheless be some aspects of the final design that depart from other national guidance or standards where this is deemed appropriate and necessary to deliver the scheme's objectives. Any such departures will be discussed with the Cabinet Member for Transport and legal advice sought where necessary.

Financial and staff implications

24. The approved capital programme by the council includes Frideswide Square as one of the major integrated transport schemes. The total budget for the scheme (including costs incurred to date) is £3.7m and it is funded using the following sources:
 - Developer Contributions: £1.475m (of which £0.175m held by the City Council)
 - OCC Corporate Resources: £1.522m
 - Contribution from the West End Partnership: £0.703m (of which £0.350m is provisional and is expected to be confirmed soon)
25. The £3.7m budget assumes a 16% contingency. The contingency would normally be higher for a project at this stage of development and will be carefully managed through the design and value engineering process.
26. A condition assessment is currently underway to determine whether or not any structural maintenance work is required on the site. The results of this assessment will be considered as part of the programme development. Where possible they will be integrated into the annual maintenance programme approved by the council on 10th February 2012.
27. £230k of this funding was spent in previous years on surveys, design, consultation and traffic modelling. Further project development work will be carried out in 2012 with an aim to start construction towards the end of the 2012/13 financial year (subject to co-ordination with other major works in and around the city), with completion in autumn 2013.
28. The timetable is challenging and will require considerable staff resources between March 2012 and autumn 2013. The Highways & Transport service is

able to draw in additional resources through its contract with Atkins, and this is expected to be sufficient to deliver the required work.

Next steps and governance

29. Early contractor involvement is essential to deliver this complex project to time, cost and quality in a very challenging city centre environment. A procurement strategy that allows for this will be adopted.
30. Approvals will be sought through Capital Investment Board as appropriate at key points during the procurement process, in line with the council's capital governance procedures.
31. A project governance structure will be formally established, including a project manager with overall responsibility for delivery of the project, and project board to oversee it. A similar governance structure was used in 2009 for the Queen Street scheme as part of Transform Oxford.

RECOMMENDATION

32. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) **Approve the "Boulevard" option for Frideswide Square for detailed design and implementation, including the advertisement of any necessary traffic orders.**

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Background papers: Document A - Report to Cabinet Member for Transport, March 2011
Document B – Copies of consultation responses
Document C – Project risk assessment

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