

## **CABINET – 16 MARCH 2010**

### **OXFORD CITY CENTRE STREET SCENE MANUAL: PART ONE**

#### **Report by Head of Transport**

#### **Introduction**

1. The purpose of this report is to update members on progress in producing the Oxford city centre street scene manual: part one, and to seek approval of the manual. The manual has been jointly produced by Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council, with support from the West End Partnership. Officers are reporting to all three organisations to seek their approval of the manual. The city council's Executive Board is due to consider the manual on 3 March 2010; the West End Executive is due to consider it on 29 March 2010.

#### **Background**

2. The city and county councils have a shared aspiration to improve the quality of the streets and public spaces in Oxford city centre. The city centre is the county's economic and cultural hub, so an excellent public realm will help make Oxfordshire a more attractive place to live, work, and visit.
3. The street scene manual project was initiated by the city and county councils in order to produce a practical manual to inform the design, management and maintenance of streets and spaces in Oxford city centre. The aims were to:
  - set clear principles and palettes of materials to help deliver consistent high quality design;
  - improve the maintenance and management of city centre streets;
  - address the whole city centre, including the West End;
  - secure buy-in from the people who influence the public realm every day; and:
  - gain approval for and commitment to the manual from the city council, county council and West End Partnership.
4. It was agreed with all the parties early on that what was being sought in Oxford was, initially, an agreed set of principles for design and management in the city centre. This could then be usefully supplemented by further work on design specifications, heritage studies, or detailed street designs in future. What developed was therefore a concept of a manual of several parts. "Part one" would be an agreed statement of principles, processes and a palette of materials on which to build later parts of the manual in the future. Part one will most likely remain relatively fixed, whereas later parts will constantly be added to and amended in the light of experience and further work.

#### **An outline of part one**

5. Part one sets out the **principles** to guide the design and management of streets and spaces. There are statements of policy where it was felt a particular approach needed to be formalised and agreed between partners.
6. Part one also sets out a design **process** for the street enhancement schemes that will follow. This process importantly incorporates an assessment of the ambitions for a scheme and a context analysis to ensure that the right questions are asked of the right people at the right points in the design process. If projects follow this process it will ensure that they have all considered the myriad of issues that are involved in the design of a successful street scheme.
7. The final section of Part one is a **palette** of materials for use in ground surfaces and street furniture. The palette has narrowed down the choice of materials that could be used but still incorporates an element of choice to provide a balance between prescription (to ensure consistency) and flexibility (to take into account street-specific circumstances). The palettes will apply throughout the city centre but are provided with additional guidance to assist with their application and specification.
8. The full text of part one is available in the members' resource centre or from Martin Kraftl (telephone 01865 815786).

### **Consultation on part one**

9. The manual has been written jointly by city and county council officers. Throughout the drafting process, the large number of officers of both councils with an influence on the street scene (for example, refuse collection, street cleaning, street lighting, parking enforcement etc) were consulted. It is considered critical that these officers support the manual, because the implementation of it is largely in their hands.
10. Local interest groups have been consulted twice on the document: once in December 2008 before the first draft was produced and again in January 2009 on the draft. The long delay between the first consultation and the completion of a draft was a result of workload pressures for both councils, meaning work on the document ceased for much of 2009.
11. Reaction from interest groups has generally been very positive. The very existence of the document and the fact that it has been produced jointly by the two councils has been very well received.
12. However, there is concern from some interest groups about certain aspects of the document. Unlimited, a group representing people with disabilities, has expressed concerns about some of the policies, in particular those policies that encourage reduced physical separation between motorised traffic and pedestrians. These concerns are dealt with in detail in the equality impact assessment of the manual in Annex 1.

13. The interest groups have requested diverse and sometimes conflicting changes to the document. These requests have been accommodated wherever possible. Requests from the interest groups and officer responses to them are summarised in Annex 2.
14. The draft manual was made available to the public for their comments between 1 February and 20 February 2010. Comments from the public and officer responses are summarised in Annex 2.

### **Application of the street scene manual: part one**

15. The policies, process and palettes in part one of the manual will inform projects and initiatives of all kinds, from very minor works to major street improvements. As far as larger schemes are concerned, most projects are likely to form part of Transform Oxford and/or the West End renaissance programmes. As projects come forward over the coming years, the manual will add value to both of these important programmes by ensuring quality and consistency of design and a high standard of maintenance and management after completion.

### **Immediate actions**

Officers have identified a number of immediate actions that logically flow from the policies set out in part one of the manual. These are outlined in Annex 3. These will require further work and will be reported separately to Cabinet Member Decisions in due course.

### **Later parts of the manual**

16. Part one of the manual stands alone and is a useful document in its own right. However, to strengthen the manual and increase its usefulness and influence, officers recommend that additional parts are produced. Subject to staff resources, subsequent parts of the street scene manual could be produced over the next eighteen months to two years.
17. At the moment it would seem appropriate for one of the subsequent parts to contain **detailed technical notes** dealing with the various elements of the street scene (e.g. seating, road markings, cycle parking, public art etc) and setting out in detail how they are to be handled within the city centre. A significant amount of work has already been done to start most of these technical notes, but completing them will take considerable time and will require the assistance of many internal and external stakeholders. That part of the manual would need to be a working document, easy to update as processes and finances available change.
18. Similar street scene policy documents produced by other authorities include a substantial **historic context analysis**, designed to provide valuable information about the origins and history of streets from which street designers can draw to help inform their designs. For Oxford, such an analysis would be a vital resource for scheme designers, given the city's long and rich

history. Work on this has already started, led by Oxford Preservation Trust and Oxford City Council. This analysis could also form a subsequent part of the street scene manual.

19. Other specific plans and strategies could also form part of the manual. Examples include a comprehensive pedestrian wayfinding strategy and a strategy for lighting Oxford's buildings.
20. If produced, these later parts would be subject to separate approvals by the relevant committees of the city and county councils.

### **Equality and inclusion implications**

21. An equality impact assessment of the manual has been carried out and can be found at Annex 1. The manual contains many policies that should help people with disabilities, but it is acknowledged that certain other aspects (notably the support for reduced formal regulation of streets) are a source of considerable anxiety for some disabled people, particularly those with a sensory impairment. The manual does not include street designs for specific streets and certainly does not advocate the indiscriminate application of any particular design solution. The manual is clear that designers must consider the context carefully and consult widely on design decisions.
22. Officers recognise that street design practices are changing and that some of those changes have the potential to cause great difficulties for people with disabilities. These new practices are however enormously beneficial in many respects, so it would be senseless simply to ignore them. Officers are therefore comfortable that the approach set out in policy SS19, which commits both councils to investing time and money on further research, is the right way to handle this issue in the manual. The equality impact assessment recommends various changes to the manual, all of which have been made.

### **Sustainability implications**

23. The Street Scene Manual: Part One contains a section on sustainability and ethics addressing issues such as minimising elements and energy use, lifecycle, sourcing and sustainable drainage. The document acknowledges that projects which require significant works and the introduction of large volumes of materials can impact the environment both locally and on a broader scale. The design process involves carrying out an ambitions assessment in sustainability and environmental terms and requires early consultation with city and county council sustainability officers.

## Risks

24. An assessment of risk has been carried out and can be found at Annex 4. All risks have been mitigated to an acceptable level.

## Financial and Staff Implications

25. The majority of the manual's requirements are cost-neutral, requiring officers to do things differently but not requiring additional work or expense. Indeed there are several respects in which the manual is likely to save money – for example:
- Closer working with partners and interest groups will help ensure schemes are designed and built “correctly” from the outset, reducing the risk of expensive and wasteful adjustments
  - The requirement to reduce signs, road markings and other highway equipment to an absolute minimum will save on materials and labour costs associated with installing and maintaining these items
  - The selection of inherently robust materials such as stone and stainless steel will reduce the need for maintenance such as re-painting.
26. Potential additional costs for the county council fall into three categories:
- Additional capital and revenue costs incurred in the construction and **maintenance** of higher specification ground surfaces, street furniture and other equipment such as lighting.
  - Additional revenue costs for any future contributions to street scene **management** such as clearance of abandoned cycles from cycle racks.
  - Additional **staff time** required for the consultation and analysis required by the street design process in the manual. The extra work will fall largely to transport planners and highway engineers, but also to staff in other departments who may be asked to participate more in officer consultation on schemes.
27. These costs are very difficult to quantify because much depends on the number of street improvement schemes that are progressed in the city centre in future years; something that in turn depends on a wide range of factors, including levels of private development.
28. Any additional revenue, capital and staff costs would have to be funded from transport revenue and capital budgets unless it were possible to secure alternative funding sources such as section 106 agreements, city council funding or project-specific grants. If there is no funding available from alternative sources, members will have to decide whether or not to find the funding from county council budgets.

29. It is not possible to predict the level of any future costs or indeed the whether alternative funding sources will be available to help cover those costs. Individual schemes and initiatives with significant financial implications will always come to Cabinet Member Decisions for approval; both costs and funding will be quantifiable at that stage.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

30. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
- (a) endorse the Oxford city centre street scene manual: part one as the basis for the design, maintenance and management of streets in Oxford city centre;**
  - (b) authorise the Head of Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Growth and Infrastructure and Transport Implementation, to make minor amendments to the document;**
  - (c) instruct officers to continue to work with Oxford City Council to develop subsequent parts of the manual; and**
  - (d) instruct officers to work on the proposed immediate actions at Annex 3 and report to the Cabinet Member for Transport Implementation.**

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Background papers: Oxford city centre street scene manual: part one  
(available in members' resource centre).

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March 2010