

CABINET – 25 February 2014

THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO AN APPLICATION FOR THE RE-DEVELOPMENT OF THE WESTGATE CENTRE, OXFORD

Report by Director for Environment & Economy

Introduction

1. The county council has been consulted by Oxford City Council, in their role as local planning authority, on an application for re-development of the Westgate centre in Oxford. The application is outline for all matters except for access. Reserved matters applications providing, amongst other things, detailed building design proposals are expected during 2014. The developer plans to start on site in 2015, with a target opening date of late 2017.
2. In addition to the main application, the developer has also submitted two applications for temporary parking to manage the situation and maintain access to the city centre during the construction phase. These are for the provision of up to 420 temporary parking spaces at Oxpens and for temporary coach parking provision at the Redbridge Park & Ride site.
3. Overall, officers recommend that the county council supports the proposed Westgate redevelopment, subject to the technical issues, as outlined in Annex 1, being addressed.

Background

4. There is an extant planning permission for re-development of the Westgate centre which was originally granted in 2007 but was never implemented due to the economic recession in 2008. This new application is by the Westgate Oxford Alliance, a joint venture between Land Securities and The Crown Estate.
5. Officers have taken part in extensive pre-application discussions with the city council and with the developers on many aspects of this application.
6. The application is for:
 - demolition of the southern part of the existing Westgate centre
 - refurbishment of the retained part of the existing Westgate centre
 - retention of the central library
 - construction of a retail-led mixed use development, representing a 50% increase in Oxford's retail offer
 - leisure uses including cafes, restaurants and a multi-screen cinema
 - associated car and cycle parking, alterations to the public highway, public realm works and landscaping
 - between 27 and 122 residential units

7. The county council's single response to this application, which incorporates officers' responses from each of the relevant service areas, forms Annex 1 to this report. While these responses raise a number of technical issues, these are identified in the context that officers recognise that redevelopment of the Westgate centre would act as a catalyst for regeneration of Oxford city centre and would reverse the trend of losing shoppers to other sub-regional centres such as Reading, Swindon and Milton Keynes.
8. The Westgate redevelopment, which could generate up to 3,400 full time equivalent jobs, would also provide Oxford with the opportunity to compete with other heritage cities such as Bath, Cambridge, York and Exeter, by providing an historic built environment, cultural facilities and an excellent retail offer.

Policy and Strategy

9. The re-development of this site is a key component of the city council's West End Area Action Plan (2008), a plan which provides for the regeneration of the wider West End area of Oxford. The plan also identifies improvements which need to be made to key areas such as Frideswide Square, Oxpens Road and Becket Street. The proposed application contributes to and complements those objectives of the Area Action Plan.
10. The county council has been developing a transport strategy for Oxford city centre. As part of that work it has considered the implications of this proposal alongside other known development opportunities within the city centre. This has provided the county council with an overview of key transport issues, as outlined in Annex 2.
11. The application for the Westgate centre will make an important contribution to that strategy and the developer's proposals for the transport network which will complement the county council's plans, include:
 - New north/south and east/west pedestrian streets and associated public squares, linking to the areas around the proposed development, with pedestrian entrances off Bonn Square, Castle Street /Norfolk Street, Thames Street and Old Greyfriars Street
 - A new bus and cycle link between Speedwell Street and Castle Street/Norfolk Street, with an associated bus interchange with 7 new bus stops
 - A significant number of new cycle parking spaces in and around the centre and an aspiration to create an integrated cycle facility which could comprise a cycle shop, cycle parking and other facilities (to be outlined at detailed design stage)
 - A taxi rank for up to 10 taxis in Old Greyfriars Street
 - A underground car park with two levels, with up to 1,100 parking spaces, accessed from a new junction on Thames Street
 - Dedicated servicing facilities for the proposed centre

12. The pedestrianisation of Queen Street is not part of the Westgate planning application. However, the highways layout submitted has been future-proofed to allow the removal of buses from Queen Street if this is agreed in future.

Key issues

Transport and Public Realm

13. The original highways plan submitted included a coach link as part of the car park access junction, and coach stops on Speedwell Street and Thames Street. Although these facilities may have given some benefit to coach passengers, they resulted in a complex and unusual highway layout which compromised the quality of pedestrian routes and the urban environment at this important arrival point to the development. A simplified plan has now been submitted as an amendment to the application.
14. Officers consider that the revised highway layout is appropriate for the development and meets the needs of all road users accessing the site. The coach link at the car park access junction has been removed, and the coach stops have been relocated to Oxpens Road, adjacent to the Ice Rink. Coaches will access Thames Street via the existing link between Speedwell Street and Thames Street next to the former Wharf House pub.
15. Scheduled coaches (National Express coaches and the Stagecoach and Oxford Bus Company routes from Oxford to central London, Heathrow and Gatwick) would be re-routed along Thames Street to reduce pressure on the streets and bus stops around the development site. This is important to ensure there is enough space for local buses to serve the development.
16. Bus and coach routeing and stopping proposals will continue to evolve over the next few years as service patterns change and the proposals for (amongst other things) the station master plan and the potential pedestrianisation of Queen Street are developed. The joint working between the councils, bus companies and Westgate Oxford Alliance will continue.
17. The development will generate some additional traffic in the city centre. The developer's assessment of the proposed roads and junctions next to the site shows that the extra traffic can be accommodated.
18. Officers have assessed the traffic impact of the scheme with the Oxpens and Frideswide Square developments also included: again, the extra traffic can be accommodated. The increases in traffic on the radial routes are estimated to be between 0 and 5%, with the largest increases off-peak. It is therefore deemed that the impact on the road network is acceptable given the size of the development and its strategic and economic benefits.
19. The car park proposed is smaller both than the existing car park and the car park included in the scheme which already has planning consent. However, the Westgate centre is in a highly accessible location, with excellent access by non-car modes. Officers therefore consider that the level of car parking proposed is appropriate for the site and helps minimise traffic generation and

congestion. The limited on-site car parking means that the Park & Ride system will need to accommodate increased demand. Accordingly funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy fund may be used for improvements to the Park & Ride facilities serving the city.

20. The traffic effects of the development will be greatest during peak shopping times, such as Saturdays in the run up to Christmas. The car park will be managed as part of a citywide parking management system to minimise congestion caused by visitors searching and queuing for spaces in the Westgate car park or elsewhere. The system will include live parking information signs guiding visitors to available parking spaces in the city centre and at Park & Ride sites. The county council has secured Technology Strategy Board funding to develop and deliver this. Community Infrastructure Levy funds may also be used to help fund this system.
21. The application includes an 'integrated cycle facility' which the county council supports and will work with the Westgate Oxford Alliance, city council and local cycling groups to develop this proposal in the context of other similar facilities that may be provided elsewhere in the city centre (for example, at Oxford Rail station), in accordance with the emerging cycling strategy for Oxford.
22. It is vital that the quality of public spaces outside the development match the quality of the spaces within the site. This will help ensure the development enhances its immediate surroundings and integrates well with the rest of the city centre.
23. The application site boundary excludes some of the necessary public realm works from the application site, including the west side of Castle Street, and the proposed coach stops on Oxpens Road. These improvements must be designed and built wholly at the developer's expense and delivered as part of the development as they are integral to the implementation of the planning application.

Issues during the construction phase

24. During the construction phase, it is imperative that access to the city centre is maintained. The on-site car park will be closed throughout this phase, so the two councils, Westgate Oxford Alliance and transport providers will work together to maintain accessibility and ensure that visitors know that the city centre remains open for business as usual. The Technology Strategy Board funding secured by the county council will help fund the development and implementation of a parking management system which will be central to this work.
25. As part of this, the county council supports the proposal for up to 420 temporary car parking spaces at Oxpens during the construction phase. The two councils and the developer will work together to monitor demand and identify and implement further measures, if necessary. This will enable all partners to ensure that Oxford remains open for business during the

construction phase of the development. The county council is reviewing on-street parking in the city centre to identify potential extra spaces that might be made available during the construction phase.

26. During the construction phase, tourist coach parking displaced from the Oxpens site will be accommodated at the Redbridge Park and Ride site. This will result in a temporary closure of part of the site, resulting in a loss of up to 360 car parking spaces. Officers have assessed this impact and are content that this can be accommodated within the existing spare capacity of the site.
27. As with any major construction project there will be implications upon neighbouring properties during the course of construction work and in this instance upon County Hall. The improvements to Castle Street and in particular the filling in of the subway will deliver a significant improvement to the streetscape but this will affect the relationship of the windows to the ground floor rooms of County Hall with the pavement due to changes of ground level. This approach was also proposed within the previous consented scheme and drawings were produced to illustrate that the revised levels would not interfere with the windows providing light to the building.
28. Proposed details would have to be agreed with the county council as land owner to ensure that works do not lead to water penetration as a result of the raised ground level. It is also likely that the proposals would rely upon a party wall agreement whereby measures to deal with privacy and increase in sound which might affect use of the rooms would demand appropriate mitigation measures to be funded by the developer.

Library

29. As owner of the freehold of the library, the county council is continuing to have discussions with the Westgate Oxford Alliance as to the impact of the development on the county council's freehold interest in the central library and the operation of library services. These discussions are on-going.
30. The details of access arrangements will be discussed and agreed through the reserved matters stage of the application, which will take place throughout the rest of this year. The county council will work with the Westgate Oxford Alliance to ensure that the revisions to the library, including the new entrance, will be in line with the quality of the rest of the development.
31. Changes to the location of the library entrance, plus the transport improvements to Castle Street, will provide an opportunity to improve pedestrian links to nearby facilities, such as the Castle site. The county council will work with the developer to bring forward these changes through the reserved matters stage.
32. In addition to this, it will be important to ensure that all works are phased to ensure that safe and convenient access to and from the library are maintained at all times and that suitable and convenient access provisions for deliveries to and from the Central Library are included within the service area at basement level to the satisfaction of the county council.

Economy and Skills

33. Given the significant number of jobs that this proposal will create, the county council requires the developers to prepare a Westgate Skills and Employment Plan, to be implemented and delivered by a dedicated project manager in partnership with the Oxfordshire Skills Board and the city and county councils. The plan will set out how the developers will ensure that local people will have the appropriate skills to access the jobs created by this development. This will ensure that targeted employment and training opportunities are provided to local people to maximise the benefit of local employment opportunities.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

34. The city council adopted the CIL development funding mechanism in September 2013, so this development will be required to pay the levy. The sum payable will be finalised at the reserved matters stage. Under the terms of the working protocol with the city council the allocation of CIL monies is discussed in advance with the county council.
35. The county council acknowledges the major investment proposed on the transport network, including part of the underground car park, new bus infrastructure, additional cycle parking and public realm improvements. In addition, further infrastructure will be required to mitigate the wider impacts generated by this development. The county council is working to agree, with the city council, the timings and priorities of investment in the context of other developments coming forward.
36. The county council's CIL priorities, in accordance with the approved 123 list, arising from this development are:
- Contribution to primary, secondary and special needs education provision
 - Contribution to the expansion of the Oxford Park & Ride system
 - Reconfiguration of city centre bus & passenger waiting facilities, including real-time information
 - Traffic management schemes, including Frideswide Square and its approaches
 - City-wide parking management system
 - Contribution to public realm enhancements, including wayfinding
 - Contribution to Oxpens cycle/pedestrian bridge
37. The county council will seek agreement with the city council, using the mechanism agreed in the working protocol associated with the CIL regime, to secure funding for these priorities.
38. The city council are in the process of updating their 123 list, as part of this process the county council will be looking to review the list and make amendments. Subject to this being approved later in the year, the county council would add the following as one its priorities for the CIL fund:
- Contribution to freight consolidation network

Financial and staff implications

39. There are financial implications for the county council in its role as owner of the library freehold. Funding to mitigate the impacts of the development will be sought and managed by the city council under the CIL regulations; this is the first opportunity for the county council to test the procedures by which funding can be recovered from the city council to fund the county's infrastructure requirements arising from a strategic site development in Oxford.
40. There are no staff implications arising from the proposed development and any additional costs incurred by the county council which arise from the construction or operation of the development will be funded by the developer and secured through legal agreements.

Equality and Inclusion

41. The development proposals are not considered to have the potential to affect people differently according to their gender, race, religion, beliefs or sexual orientation. The council expects the developers to demonstrate in any reserved matters applications that the proposed development will be fully accessible to all.

RECOMMENDATION

42. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
- Note the issues raised in the responses to this consultation; and
 - Approve the county council's single response to the consultation

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Director of Environment and Economy

Background papers: None

Annex 1: the county council's single response to the consultation

Annex 2: Westgate, Oxford: transport policy and strategy context

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