

## **CABINET – 21 OCTOBER 2014**

### **FRIDESWIDE SQUARE, OXFORD – TRANSPORT AND PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS**

**Report by Director for Environment & Economy**

#### **Introduction**

1. This report seeks Cabinet's approval for the revised design of the Frideswide Square transport and public realm improvements in Oxford.
2. The latest design takes into account the feedback from stakeholders and the public following consultation on the scheme that ran from 14 August to 12 September 2014.

#### **Background**

3. The County Council is planning to transform Frideswide Square from a busy highway junction into a well-managed entry point to the city in keeping with Oxford's international reputation. Frideswide Square provides a vital link between the major road routes into Oxford. It is therefore of strategic importance in Oxfordshire's road network, handling 35,000 vehicle movements and thousands of 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. An estimated 6.6 million people pass through Oxford rail 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 will be an important part of the proposals for Oxford Rail station as set out in the recently launched rail station Masterplan.
5. The city centre will see an unprecedented level of growth and activity over the next few years. These improvements to Frideswide Square will play a fundamental part in making the city centre a more attractive and economically successful place.

#### **Recent progress**

6. On 13 March 2012, the Cabinet approved the "Boulevard" option for detailed design and implementation although work was paused later that year to allow for the station Masterplan to report its findings – this allowed the county council to understand what the implications of major redevelopment of the rail station might be for the Frideswide Square scheme.

7. Earlier this year, it became clear that the latest design for the square would be fully compatible with the emerging station Masterplan and as a result the funding to deliver the Frideswide Square scheme was allocated in the county council's capital programme to allow its delivery in 2014/15 and 2015/16.
8. Since then, the county council have been refining the design for the scheme. The results of detailed traffic modelling have informed this process, particularly the road alignment aspect of the design. The modelling is demonstrating that the removal of traffic lights and large areas of road space not only offers the potential to completely transform this hugely important public space but also helps to improve how traffic flows through the area. This will be particularly beneficial for the many buses that use Frideswide Square on their way to the rail station or to and from West Oxford and beyond.
9. The design work also has concluded that alterations to how traffic is routed in the wider area are needed to make the changes to the main square be as effective as possible in traffic terms. These changes, which will also help manage traffic during the construction of the main square, are:
  - making Becket Street two-way for its entire length;
  - providing a new mini-roundabout at the junction of Osney Lane, Oxpens Road and Hollybush Row; and
  - re-opening the junction of Worcester Street, George Street and Hythe Bridge Street.
10. These works were approved by the Cabinet Member for Environment on 24 July and started on site on 1 September. They will be completed by early December.

### **Consultation on the design for the main square**

11. A revised design for the main square was discussed with local county and city councillors and a wide range of other stakeholders from July to September. A public consultation took place from 14 August to 12 September which also included the draft Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) required.
12. The revised design also proposed that certain parts of the pedestrian areas could accommodate cyclists. This was a pragmatic response to the concerns previously expressed that inexperienced or unconfident cyclists would not want to use the carriageway and the fact that some cyclists would consider the paved areas to provide a more direct route through the square, particularly to and from the rail station.
13. Given the large amount of off carriageway space, it was felt that the sharing of some space by pedestrians and cyclists would be successful – there are other examples of busy pedestrian areas in central Oxford where this happens successfully e.g. New Inn Hall Street, Bonn Square, southern end of Catte Street.

14. The areas that are proposed to be shared by pedestrians and cyclists are shown in Annex 1. The draft TROs are included as background papers.

### **Consultation feedback**

15. A wide range of feedback was received through the stakeholder meetings and wider public consultation. The full written comments received as part of the consultation are included as a background paper. A summary of these comments and the officer response to each one is included in Annex 2.
16. The most commonly raised issues about the proposed design were:
- the absence of any on road cycle lanes through the square and on its approaches;
  - the need for there to be dedicated cyclists only space on the paved areas;
  - how would cyclists join or leave the proposed shared use areas in the square;
  - the lack of a formal crossing point between the Royal Oxford Hotel and the north side of the square;
  - the difficulties that pedestrians with visual impairments will have using the space due amongst other things inadequate tactile markings/guidance and the proposal for cyclists to use some of the paved area;
  - there is a lack of clarity about how cyclists would join and leave the road;
  - the trees proposed alongside the road in the centre of the square are too dense and block views through the area;
  - making sure that the landscaping design doesn't prevent the use of the improved public space for things like temporary markets, public art installations, and public events (such as infrequent outdoor cinema, theatre or civic events);
  - the difficulties that the new design could create for loading for premises on the south side of the square;
  - whether the statue of the Ox on the west side of the Said Business School could be placed somewhere in the square to allow people to appreciate it;
  - how the scheme could generate additional traffic if it works as well as the technical work is estimating. This, in turn, could have a detrimental effect on bus journey times;
  - the need to consider having no kerb level difference throughout the whole of Frideswide Square, not just at crossing points.
17. Annex 3 considers these main issues in more detail. The scheme design has been amended in the light of some of these comments received.
18. The design was also presented to the Oxford Design Panel who subsequently submitted written feedback, which is included as a background paper. The City Council response to the consultation is due to be approved by its Executive Board on 15 October, after this report is published, these will be reported verbally at the Cabinet meeting.

19. The revised design for approval is in Annex 4.

### **Policy & Strategy**

20. Improvements to Frideswide Square will contribute to the delivery of the County Council's strategic objectives by enabling more people to travel in and out of the City Centre for all purposes including employment and education. The design encourages use of sustainable modes of transport, helping to support healthy and thriving communities and enhancing the environment.
21. Transforming Frideswide Square is a vital part of the regeneration of the City centre. It is the single most important part of the access strategy for the City centre, helping to ensure excellent access to major development sites such as the new Westgate 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 City Centre.

### **Equality Implications**

22. A Service and Community Impact Assessment was completed for the last time the scheme was reported to Cabinet in 2012. The mitigation that was suggested in the assessment is still applicable at this stage of design and as such an update to the assessment is not needed. It has been used as the design has progressed to ensure the smallest impact as possible on people with protected characteristics according to the 2010 Equalities Act.

### **Risks**

23. A register outlining the risks to the project and how they will be managed is included as a background paper.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

24. The approved capital programme includes Frideswide Square. The total budget for the scheme (including costs to date) is £5.478m and it is funded using the following sources:

• County Council capital	£3.300m
• Developer contributions (County held)	£1.300m
• Developer contributions (City held)	£0.175m
• City Council capital	£0.703m

25. The latest programme for delivery shows the enabling works finishing at the start of December this year and the main works to the square starting on site at the beginning of February next year. The work would take until the beginning of December 2015 to complete. There will be close liaison with local businesses and other stakeholders to keep them informed of progress in the run up to and during the construction of the scheme.

26. Part of the pavement in front of Said Business School is not public highway. An agreement to allow it to continue to be used by members of the public is currently being negotiated with the business school and the University of Oxford.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve:**
- (a) the revised design for Frideswide Square shown in Annex 4 to be priced for construction;**
  - (b) the Traffic Regulation Orders as advertised for a restricted zone for Frideswide Square;**
  - (c) the area shown on the plan in Annex 1 to be shared use by pedestrians and cyclists.**

### **SUE SCANE**

Director for Environment & Economy

Background papers: Document A - Draft Traffic Regulation Orders for Frideswide Square  
Document B – Copies of all consultation responses  
Document C – SCIA from last report to Cabinet, 13 March 2012  
Document D – Risk Register

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September 2014