

Executive

BICESTER MARKET SQUARE HIGHWAY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

7 SEPTEMBER 2009

Report of Head of Economic Development and Estates

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To confirm that the Council can, in collaboration with Oxfordshire County Council, move forward to public consultation on three proposed plans for an environmental Improvement Scheme of Bicester Market Square.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to:

- (1) Agree that the three options for the Environmental Improvement Scheme of Bicester Market Square described in the report, go forward for public consultation.
- (2) Request the County Council to make it clear in the consultation that
 - the implementation of any scheme will be timed so that it does not clash with the programme for the Bicester town centre redevelopment.
 - designs that result in the loss of public car parking may have significant financial implications and will require the approval of the District Council as landowner of the Market square car park.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 The environmental improvements of Bicester Market Square has been a project that this Council has been involved with for some time. The scheme is now a joint financial collaboration of Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council. The scheme has progressed to the stage of three proposed options being available for public consultation in November 2009. This report seeks the approval of the Council to progress with consultation on all three options.

Proposals

- 1.6 That the three proposed options for the environmental improvement of Bicester Market Square be submitted for public consultation.

Background Information

- 1.7 The proposed environmental improvements for Bicester Market Square is a project that Cherwell District Council has been pursuing for some time. In 2005 four proposed options went out to public consultation but the project was not pursued at that time, on the advice of the highway authority. In 2007/08 £250,000 was included in the Council's capital programme for improvements to Market Square, with the intention that this should fund improvements to the Council's public car park. The County Council has agreed to put £750,000 into a highway improvement scheme for the Square. The project board are now proceeding with a scheme covering the whole of the Market Square and Market Hill area, with a total budget of £1million .
- 1.8 The County Council are project managing the scheme but with Cherwell District Council providing specialist advice on urban design issues. The project board for the scheme is made up of; Town, District and County Council members, County Council officers, Cherwell District Council officers, representatives from Bicester Vision, and Jacobs; the OCC consulting engineers.
- 1.9 Since the previous scheme failed to proceed in 2005, Bicester has seen many changes. Planning permission has now been granted for the new Town Centre development, which incorporates a Sainsbury's and a cinema, with associated restaurants and retail units. This will be a huge investment for Bicester, which will see a new retail and leisure core created for the north end of the town centre. The eco town has now also been announced for NW Bicester with a potential 5000 new dwellings. This will have a knock on effect of a potential increased footfall in Bicester town centre. Bicester Village receives approximately 4 million visitors per year, a figure increasing year on year, and the Council and Bicester Vision are keen to encourage these visitors to come into the centre of Bicester. The Market Square is the first part of the town centre they will see and will be key to increasing visitor numbers. There is also new rail investment for Bicester, potentially bringing an even greater number of visitors and residents and along with it a growing economic potential. All this, coupled with the need for greater containment of the Bicester population, so they use the facilities within Bicester, provides sound reasoning why Bicester Market Square needs this investment and why the design and use of the Square is of great significance.
- 1.10 The expectation is that consultation will take place during the autumn on the 3 options prepared. Following that a preferred option will be agreed, and detailed design can be carried out. When detailed proposals have been prepared, there will be further public consultation. It is likely that there will need to be amendments to traffic, and parking orders, and this second round of consultation will cover these matters. Currently it is anticipated that it will be possible to commence work towards the end of 2010. It will be necessary to consider the timing of works carefully when the programme for the town

centre redevelopment works is known. It would be wise to avoid implementing these works while any highway infrastructure works relating to the town centre scheme are proceeding.

- 1.11 In order for Bicester Market Square to not get left behind when the new Sainsbury's scheme is developed in the Town Centre, then a full scale, integrated approach needs to be achieved for the Market Square too. Consideration needs to be given to traffic flow, parking levels, local occupier, visitor and residents demands, aesthetics, landscaping, links to Bicester Village and the new Sainsbury's development and any future promotion and vision for Bicester. It is not just thinking about the now but the future for Bicester too.
- 1.12 The three options suggested for public consultation are all different in their approach. Currently there are **48** public car parking spaces in Market Square and Market Hill, 33 pay and display spaces operated by the Council in the Market Place car park plus 2 disabled spaces, 13 limited time on street spaces, plus **9 taxi spaces** on the Market Hill rank.
- 1.13 Option A would leave the road, street scene and a parking layout very similar to the existing. However, there would be new paving, new crossing points and a more aesthetically pleasing environment to include limited new street furniture, public art and some landscape features. Provision would also be made for loading and unloading and taxis. There would be provision for **36** parking spaces in total; 24 pay and display 10 limited waiting, two disabled and **six taxi spaces**. This is a reduction of 12 public parking spaces overall and three taxi rank spaces
- 1.14 Option B would provide for two way traffic on the south side of the Market Square. There would also be a movement of some of the parking provision from Market Square to Market Hill. There would also be some on street parking. Again, as option A, there would be new paving, new crossing points and a more aesthetically pleasing environment to include new street furniture, public art and some landscape features. There will be a small public civic space available for things like on street seating. Provision will also be made for loading and unloading and taxis. There would be provision for **40** parking spaces in total; 30 pay and display, eight limited waiting, two disabled plus **four taxi spaces**. This comprises a reduction of eight public parking spaces overall and five taxi rank spaces.
- 1.15 Option C would also provide for two way traffic on the south side of the Market Square. This option however removes all parking from Market Square, but still creates parking provision on Market Hill and with some on-street parking. Again as option A and B, there would be new paving, new crossing points and a more aesthetically pleasing environment to include new street furniture, public art and some landscape features. There will be a large public civic space available for on street seating, as well as events and exhibitions, linking well with Sheep Street and Crown Walk, both of which are pedestrianised. Provision would also be made for loading and unloading and taxis. There would be provision for **26** parking spaces in total; 14 pay and display, 10 limited waiting, two disabled, plus **four taxi spaces**. This comprises a reduction of 22 public parking spaces and five taxi spaces.
- 1.16 All three options presented at the public consultation event will also show illustrations in 3D of how the schemes would look once complete, as well as

providing the public with the advantages and disadvantages of all three options.

- 1.17 All options reduce the amount of public car parking in the existing Market Square car park, and option C removes it entirely. This will result in a reduction in car parking income for the Council. Options B and C designate some replacement parking in Market Hill as pay and display parking, and following the implementation of decriminalised parking enforcement, the income would help to off-set any deficit generated by the Council in undertaking such enforcement. However, it would not be possible to treat any income as general revenue income, and it would have to be retained within a ring-fenced account.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

- 2.1 Whilst the three proposed options are all very different, it is believed that the three alternatives are required to give the public a varied choice of what could be achieved and to provoke their thoughts and comments.
- 2.2 The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward.

Option One Approve all three Options to go out to public consultation in November 2009.

Option Two Reject one or more options. However this may result in a delay to the public consultation event if a new option is drafted or changes made to the other options in light of any comments.

Implications

Financial: The matters set out in this report do not affect the capital budget of £250,000 set aside for this project. The loss of off-street car parking spaces administered by the Council will result in lost income. To some extent this may be reduced if the parking is displaced to other Council operated car parks. Also, any income to the ring fenced parking account which would be set up when decriminalised parking enforcement is introduced, is ignored. When this scheme is built, and in the light of other changes to the distribution and management of parking resulting from the town centre redevelopment, it will be appropriate to review the structure of car park charges generally. This may mitigate any reduction in the Council's income. However, disregarding these effects, the estimated reduction in car park income arising as a result of each option is:-

Option A – £22,073 per annum

Option B – £66,219 per annum

Option C - £80,934 per annum

Comments checked by Eric Meadows, Service Accountant 01295 221552

Legal:

As this scheme is being undertaken by OCC, it will not be necessary for there to be any agency powers granted to this Council. It will be necessary to seek an indemnity from OCC relating to the works which they are to carry out on the Council's land, and an agreement relating to the future on street parking income.

Comments checked by Malcolm Saunders, Senior Legal Assistant 01295 221692

Risk Management:

If the Council does not agree to at least two of the proposed option being put forward for public consultation, there is a significant risk that this will delay the project as new options or amendments to options are sought.

Comments checked by Rosemary Watts, Risk Management and Insurance Officer 01295 221566

Urban and Rural Services

The scheme is in its early design concept and issues in regards to taxi ranks, car parking, landscaping and street traders will need to be addressed as the options are progressed.

Comments checked by Chris Rothwell, Head of Urban and Rural Services 01295 221712

Wards Affected

All wards in Bicester

Corporate Plan Themes

A District of Opportunity

Executive Portfolio

Councillor Norman Bolster

Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Estates

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	
Background Papers	
None	
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