

**DRAFT**  
**Bicester Civic Building**

**Brief**

**1. Introduction**

Franklins Yard comprises a freehold site in the ownership of Cherwell District Council in Bicester town centre. The site adjoins the town centre redevelopment being undertaken by Town Centre Redevelopment (Bicester) Ltd, a company owned by Sainsbury's. That scheme will provide a new convenience store, a seven screen cinema, other shops and A3 units, replacement public facilities, and approximately 560 public car parking spaces. The site has frontage onto a new public square to be formed as part of the town centre scheme, and this will be pedestrianised between the hours of 10.00am and 4.00pm, and will be available for servicing vehicles at other times.

Franklins Yard is currently used as a public car park, but following completion of the town centre scheme, it will be available for redevelopment to provide a new civic building, together with other development in a form yet to be determined. It is anticipated that the site will be available for development to commence in the autumn of 2013. The Council is seeking to establish now the form which that development should take, and how it is to be financed.

**2. The Site**

The site is shown edged red on the attached plan. The plan shows the proposed Wesley Lane/Wesley Square which has yet to be constructed, but which forms the principal frontage to the site. To the east of this there is the portion of Wesley Lane which is not to be redeveloped as part of the town centre scheme. This is a narrow street of shops, comprising 73 Sheep St and numbers 1-8 Wesley Lane, and planning permission exists for the redevelopment of this with modern retail or A3 units with flats above. On the eastern side of the site lie numbers 81 to 85 Sheep Street, comprising two retail units with flats over. The owner of these units also controls a parcel of land which currently comprises part of the Franklins Yard car park, having frontage onto St John's Street, as shown hatched on the plan. The owner's plans for this land are the construction of an extension to his premises comprising retail space on the ground floor with flats above. The preference is for a comprehensive development of the site incorporating the hatched land, on the basis that the owner will be responsible for reimbursing the cost of constructing the premises to be provided on this land. The design needs to respect this ownership boundary. The site also has frontage onto St John's Street and Manorsfield Road. A new roundabout which is to be constructed at this junction, as part of the town centre scheme, is shown on the plan.

**3. Access and Servicing**

It is anticipated that the main pedestrian access to the site will be from Wesley Lane/Wesley Square when completed. The long frontage onto Manorsfield Road and the new St John's Street roundabout provides an opportunity for other pedestrian accesses to properties on the site. It is envisaged that the main vehicular access to the site will be via the existing vehicular access from Sheep Street.

Servicing rights exist over the site to the rear of numbers 1-8 Wesley Lane which are to be redeveloped by the owner, and also to the rear of 81 to 85 Sheep Street. In addition, rights exist to two car parking spaces used by the Bicester and District Ex-Servicemen's Club. The location of these spaces may be varied to fit in with any scheme layout.

#### **4. Required Elements**

The civic building is required to provide a public library to be occupied by Oxfordshire County Council, together with office premises to be occupied by Cherwell District Council. The library is to provide approximately 640 sq m of accommodation on one level, preferably on the ground floor, together with approximately 230 sq m of offices. If necessary the offices may be provided on the floor above. [A specification for the required premises is annexed.]

Cherwell's offices are to provide a Linkpoint comprising an office for the public to make enquiries and seek access to Council services, together with office accommodation for ? staff. Cherwell intends to work with other public authorities and agencies to provide joined up public services, and the Linkpoint needs to provide access to multi-functional office accommodation at the same level, capable to accommodating ? workstations, together with interview/meeting facilities. The estimated floor area to accommodate these requirements is 200-250 sq m. [Again a specification for the accommodation required is annexed.] [Bicester Town Council are considering the possibility of locating their offices on this site. They would require 100 to 200 sq m, although this would not provide a suitable committee room].

It is proposed that the premises should incorporate some galley or exhibition space. Further details are to be provided by Simon Townsend, although this may well be accommodated in any reception/waiting area.

A taxi rank will be provided on the Wesley Lane frontage to the site by the developer of the shopping centre. This will accommodate four taxis.

It is likely that the library and offices will have a shared entrance and lobby, although this will have to be designed in such a way that the premises can be open to the public at different times. All services to the individual premises must be metered separately.

The building will need to be accessible from the rear for servicing, including access and overnight parking by a mobile library van. The two car parking spaces used by the Ex-Servicemen's Club are required to be re-provided.

#### **5. Other Potential Uses**

The site is of sufficient size to accommodate a substantial amount of additional accommodation, and the Council is open to ideas as to what this may comprise. The uses may include retail, office, A3, residential or hotel uses. Whilst the principle frontage to the site will be onto the new Wesley lane/Wesley Square, there is a long frontage onto Manorsfield Road. This provides the opportunity to create numerous accesses to individual premises.

#### **6. Planning**

The site comprises part of the larger town centre regeneration area identified in the Council's non-statutory Local Plan, which has been saved for development control

purposes. In 2004 the Council adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) for this wider regeneration area, and a copy of that Guidance can be found at the following address, [www.cherwell.gov.uk/planning/regeneration](http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/planning/regeneration). The document is amongst the downloads on the page covering regeneration projects. The Council's design aspirations, as set out in that guidance, remain relevant today, and compliance with the relevant provisions of that document will be expected.

The site is likely to accommodate development three/four stories high, and consequently there is the opportunity for a range of uses in upper parts. Whilst the majority of the development is likely to be three stories high, a localised increase in height will be appropriate to screen parts of the new shopping centre development to be constructed on the adjoining site. In particular the access and egress drums serving the new decked car park are relatively high, and consequently the design of these buildings needs to respond to that.

It is important that the scheme provides a lively and attractive frontage onto all the public roads which surround it. In particular, the frontage to Manorsfield Road and St John's Street is of high importance in visual terms, and the buildings must address this as active frontages rather than turning their backs on them. The new Wesley Square, which is to be constructed as part of the adjoining town centre development, will be a busy public space, and it is anticipated that the principal access point to the new library and offices will be from this frontage. Other uses suitable for this frontage would include A3 uses which might take advantage of the opportunity to create external seating areas.

The SPG provides further information of relevance to design and planning matters.

## **7. Ownership and Title arrangements**

The Council owns the freehold of the site, and will want to retain this, with the exception of the hatched land which is owned by Broadribb Ltd, as described above. It is the intention that a long lease be granted to Oxfordshire County Council in respect of the library accommodation. It is anticipated that a long lease or long leases will be granted in respect of other parts of the site. It is likely that the structure of such leases will be driven by the form of the development proposed, and the Council is open to proposals in this regard.

The Council's aspiration is to maximise the development value created through this scheme. That value will be used to contribute to, or meet the cost of constructing the public library and offices. If it is necessary to do so, the Council will consider making a capital contribution to the cost of these works. If the development value exceeds the cost of these works, the Council is likely to wish to commute any surplus into an ongoing rental income. This may be used to mitigate the future annual running costs of the civic building.

The purpose of this scheme is primarily to provide the necessary civic building, and to minimise the capital cost to the public purse through enabling development. If residential development is proposed, it is likely that the Council will accept that no affordable housing is required within the scheme, in order to maximise the value created. The Council may choose to utilise the capital savings which it achieves through not having to finance the works from its reserves, by investing in affordable housing elsewhere.