

Executive

Bicester Market Square Highway and Environmental Improvement Scheme

24 May 2010

Report of Head of Regeneration and Estates

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To confirm the Council's approval of the final design for the environmental Improvement Scheme of Bicester Market Square.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To approve the presented final design for the Environmental Improvement Scheme of Bicester Market Square, for it to proceed to the County Council for approval.

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 between Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council. The Executive resolution of September 2009 approved three design options to go to public consultation in November 2009. This report now seeks the approval of the Council to the final design. This is a scheme created as a result of the consultation event in November and the public feedback on the original three options.

Proposals

- 1.2 That the final scheme be approved by the Council, and that it to proceed to the County Council for their approval.

Background Information

- 1.3 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 until April 2010 Jacobs, the OCC consulting engineers.
- 1.4 Further background to the project was set out in the Executive report of 7 September 2009.

Public Consultation

- 1.5 On 27-29 November 2009 the three options for the Square went out to public consultation as part of the feasibility stage. An exhibition was held in Bicester town centre where the plans could be viewed and comments given. Overall, just fewer than 1000 people attended the public exhibition. Of these, 355 completed questionnaires either at the exhibition or online by the 18 December 2009. Attached is a 9 page document summarising the responses.
- 1.6 The final question of the feedback form asked which of the three options presented would they like to see progressed. Of the 355 respondents:
- 10% (36) preferred Option A,
 - 24% (84) preferred Option B,
 - 51% (176) favoured Option C,
 - 2% (7) preferred a combination of Option A and Option B,
 - 5% (18) preferred a combination of Option B and Option C, and
 - 1% (4) preferred a combination of Option A and Option C.

Option C therefore was the clear preferred option to progress. This was given formal approval by the project board in January 2010, subject to some minor changes. The final scheme presented with this report has therefore been modified to take into account these requested changes, suggested as a result of feedback from the public consultation.

Taxi Survey

- 1.7 As part of these revisions there were concerns expressed that the number of taxi spaces allocated as part of the scheme in Option C were too few. Option C showed 4 spaces compared to the 9 currently provided. In March 2010 a taxi survey was therefore undertaken to inform the Project Board how many taxi rank spaces should be provided as part of the Market Square Scheme. This was done on a Friday and Saturday on consecutive weekends 10am-3am. The surveys measured:-
- i) at snapshots in time, each separated by a period of 15 minutes, the number of taxis waiting for fares.
 - ii) During each 15 minute period the numbers of taxis departing with fares.
- 1.8 The findings showing the numbers of taxis waiting at the rank at any particular time is the most informative for the purpose of designing a new

rank. Although probably suppressed due to the constraints of the existing rank space these show a maximum of 14 waiting at the rank with an evening average of 7.1 on Saturday (the busiest day).

- 1.9 On the assumption that the general demand at Market Square will not materially change as a result of the changes to Bicester's retail environment (it has been assumed the new town centre development would put demand on the northern end of the town for taxis numbers) the survey resulted in a conclusion that 10 rank spaces should be provided. This will cater for about 50% above average demand. (A balance has inevitably to be struck in a public urban space where there are several competing demands. It is not feasible to accommodate peak demand without compromising other uses).
- 1.10 At the time of writing this report the project board have yet to formally approve the revisions to the scheme. However they have been kept informed of discussions taking place about the minor amendments that would be made. Therefore the final scheme should come to them as expected. A plan of the scheme is attached.

Final Scheme

- 1.11 The final scheme will provide for two way traffic on the south side of the Market Square. In parallel with Option C it will also remove all parking from Market Square. Market Hill is now available for 11 taxis and 3 blue badge holder spaces only, there is no non-blue badge holder parking. This has been designed to reduce the traffic movement at, what could be a busy corner junction adjacent to the Kings Arms Public House. The final scheme now means only limited vehicles can access Market Hill and this would be clearly signed. No non-blue badge holders would need to drive into this area to try and find a space as there would not be any provided. There will however, be provision for 10, time limited, on street parking spaces adjacent to London Road, which are anticipated to be free of charge (although later consideration may be given to on street pay and display after any introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement) .

Parking and Financial Implications

- 1.12 The six spaces on the north side of London Road are currently located within land owned by Cherwell District Council, which is not part of the public highway, and could be operated as pay and display spaces. However, it is likely to be confusing to the public if charges are levied for the use of these spaces, as the four spaces on the southern side of London Road will be on highway land and therefore free of charge. Consequently it is proposed that the spaces within the Cherwell District Council's ownership are also dedicated as highway land. This will make the parking standardised and easier for the public to use.
- 1.13 The principal issue for this Council to consider is the impact on its land comprising the Market Square car park, the loss of public car parking and associated income. 33 spaces will be lost with potential effects on income of £80,000-£90,000 per annum. Some of the lost income from the car park will be displaced to other Cherwell District Council operated car parks within Bicester town centre. However at this time a figure cannot be accurately accounted for, as it is difficult to estimate what this will be once the new town centre development is completed. However it is hoped the new development

will encourage greater activity levels within Bicester town centre which will in turn increase the use of the Council operated car parks. This displacement of car parking however also needs to be weighed against the environmental and wider economic benefits of the scheme. It is also necessary to bear in mind that this scheme will not be built until the new public car park which forms part of the town centre redevelopment has been brought into use.

- 1.14 In addition to the parking implications, there will 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 via a restricted access route within the pedestrianised area. The restricted access route will be the subject of a Traffic Regulation Order and will be available for loading and unloading outside a core period time. This core period has yet to be confirmed but it is proposed to be the same as Sheep Street. However this limited access route will be available at any time for licensed postal operators and emergency vehicles. There would be provision for **24** parking spaces in total; 10 on street limited waiting, 3 disabled, plus 11 taxi spaces. This comprises a reduction of 33 public parking spaces and an increase of two taxi spaces
- 1.15 The final design for the Market Hill area of the scheme is however yet to be confirmed. There will be a minimum of 9 taxi spaces, but small changes may still be made to the number of blue badge holder spaces (minimum will be 3) and a choice will be made about whether to include a loading bay in Market Hill, at the expense of two taxi spaces.
- 1.16 Once this final scheme is agreed, detailed design will be carried out. When detailed proposals have been prepared, there will be further public consultation. This will concern only detailing and not the principle of the scheme. The amendments to traffic and parking orders outlined above will be covered by this second round of consultation.
- 1.17 The date for works to physically commence on site is scheduled to follow on from the completion of the town centre redevelopment works, which will be approximately January 2012. The Market Square development will work subsequently to these works to avoid any highway infrastructure works relating to the town centre scheme.
- 1.18 This final scheme removes Cherwell District Council public off street car parking in both Market Square and Market Hill entirely. This will result in a reduction in car parking income for the Council. There is some on street parking adjacent to London Road but this is anticipated to be free, time limited, parking. A separate report on the wider implications and proposals for the future of pay and display parking is included elsewhere on this agenda.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

- 2.1 The three proposed options presented to the Committee in September 2009 have now gone through a public consultation process and this final scheme is as a direct result of this feedback.

2.2 The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward.

Option One Approve the final scheme for it to proceed to the County Council for approval.

Option Two Reject the scheme. However this may result in a delay to the scheme moving forward, 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. 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 this scheme is £88,154 per annum. (based on 2009/10 car park income figures). Any loss of car park income will need to be considered as part of the 2012/13 Revenue Estimates

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 the proposed final scheme, 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 revised scheme design takes account of the consultation concerns around provision and extension of taxi rank space.

More detail will be required in connection with

landscaping, floral displays and street furniture and there will be revenue implications for this considerably enlarged public space.

Consideration also needs to be given to CCTV and whether further units are required.

The most significant change is with the total removal of paid for parking and the financial effects of this.

Comments checked by Chris Rothwell, Head of Safer Communities, 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
Appendix 1	
Background Papers	
None	
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