

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	26 MARCH 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	15
TITLE:	ADOPTION OF THE OUTLINE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE SITE OF READING PRISON		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	PLANNING	WARDS:	ABBAY
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JOB TITLE:	PLANNING MANAGER	E-MAIL:	Kieran.roughan@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 On 4th September 2013 the Government announced the closure of Reading Prison. It closed early in 2014 following the approval of orders by Parliament. The Ministry of Justice is considering future options for the site but progressing towards the eventual disposal of the site. It has commissioned various work to enable the site to be put on the market. At the meeting on 17th February 2014, Policy Committee approved a Draft Outline Development Framework for the site for consultation. The Framework contains initial research of the site, particularly its historical significance, and outlines the initial matters that will need to be considered and undertaken by the owners/ potential applicants in preparing proposals for the future use of the site. This report contains the results of the consultation on the Draft Development Framework, provides an update on the situation with regard to the future of the site and seeks approval to adopt the Outline Development Framework.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the results of the consultation on the Draft Outline Development Framework for the Reading Prison Site, undertaken during February, March and April 2014, as set out in the Consultation Statement at Appendix 2, be noted.
- 2.2 That the Outline Development Framework for the Reading Prison Site (Appendix 3) be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Outline Development Framework for the Reading Prison Site will be a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) forming part of the Local Development Framework (LDF). Together, the documents in the LDF set out the planning strategy for Reading. A SPD is a lower-level document that expands upon existing policy within a higher-level Development Plan Document (DPD). In this case, the Brief expands upon policy in the Reading Central Area Action Plan (adopted 2009) and refers to relevant Core Strategy policies and policies in the Sites and Detailed Policies Document.
- 3.2 The main policy that the Framework expands upon is policy RC3 of the Reading Central Area Action Plan (Development in the East Side Major Opportunity Area). This policy identifies the potential future use of the Reading Prison site in the event that the prison use ceases. It further highlights the vital need to take account of its historic nature and the setting of this important site.
- 3.3 In September 2013, it was announced that Reading Prison would be closing. Given the vital importance of the site and its historic significance, it was decided that a Development Framework should be produced for the site to guide development proposals at the earliest possible stage, so that key elements such as consideration of archaeology could be factored into proposals at the very beginning.
- 3.4 The Outline Development Framework was approved by this Committee for consultation on 17th February 2014. Consultation took place between 24th February and 11th April 2014. The Report of Consultation (Appendix 1) describes the consultation process. Work has also continued to research and evaluate the historic significance of the site culminating in 2 studies that have recently been completed and which have provided further detail that has been incorporated into the Framework.
- 3.5 The Draft Framework pointed to the considerable historic significance of the Prison Site. It formed part of the walled precinct to Reading Abbey and falls within the Reading Abbey and Civil War Earthworks Scheduled Ancient Monument. The site contains a part of the Abbey Church itself and would have contained associated buildings. Part of the site may have been a cemetery associated with the Abbey. There is a high potential for archaeological remains from the Bronze Age through to the period of the Vikings in the 9th Century, as well as the medieval and later interest. The site was an important area in the defence of Reading during the Civil War in 1643.
- 3.6 The Prison Building is a Grade II Listed Building, being a notable early example of Victorian prison architecture. It is famous for Oscar Wilde's experience in the prison, related through his poem, "*The Ballad of Reading Gaol*," published in 1898. The site falls within the emerging "Abbey Quarter Area", for which the Council has been successful in

gaining Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) approval of a first round application to their Regional Committee for grant funding towards the repair and conservation of the Abbey Ruins and Abbey Gateway, so they can be reopened to the public. The "Abbey Quarter Area" is an area that the Council and its partners are actively developing and promoting for its historical importance and as an important leisure, learning and interpretation visitor attraction for the future. The Prison Site is an important part of the Abbey Quarter and its future use and development should complement and enhance the whole project.

4. THE PROPOSAL

(a) Current Position

- 4.1 Representations were received from eight organisations or individuals as a result of the consultation exercise, although one of these was merely to state that they had no comments to make. Many of the comments related to the historic sensitivity of the site. Due to the number of responses, there were no particular themes that emerged as a result of the consultation. Comments in the main related to the history of the site and the potential for incorporating different uses as part of the future use of the site. One detailed representation from local residents refers to the need for any development to deal with anti-social behaviour and crime in the area.

Responses have been taken into account in considering any changes necessary to the final adoption version of the Framework. The Report of Consultation (Appendix 1) details individual responses, and sets out how each response has been taken into account.

- 4.2 The final Framework has also been informed by continuing dialogue with the landowners of the site and by continued work on its historic significance, separate from consultation process. Consultants acting for the Ministry of Justice have now produced a detailed desk based archaeological assessment and a desk based Historic Building Assessment. Summaries of the results of these very detailed historical studies have been incorporated into the Framework.
- 4.3 At the current time, the Ministry of Justice has not indicated its intentions for the future disposal of the site. However, it is understood that the Ministry are unlikely to seek planning permission themselves. It is likely that they will seek to dispose of the site and allow the new owners to seek planning permission. This Outline Development Framework provides appropriate advice to inform potential purchasers on the planning requirements for the site.

(b) Option Proposed

- 4.4 Committee is recommended to adopt the amended version of the Outline Development Framework for the site of Reading Prison. The version to

be adopted is Appendix 3 to this report, in tracked changes format, showing how the amended version differs from the original draft. Once adopted, the Outline Development Framework will be used to supplement the Reading Central Area Action Plan for the determination of planning applications on the site, and also for informing any pre-application discussions. Committee is also recommended to approve the recommended responses to representations made on the draft document. These are contained in the Annex 1 of the Report of Consultation on the Outline Development Framework for the Site of Reading Prison (at Appendix 2).

- 4.5 The representations received have led to a number of amendments to the Framework. In addition, the Framework has been amended in places to reflect ongoing assessment of the historic significance of the site and the very detailed historical studies of the site that have been prepared for the Ministry of Justice. None of the amendments proposed alter the overall policy approach from the Draft Framework.
- 4.6 The Framework is a positive document that has responded to matters raised as a result of consultation. The English Heritage case officer who has been consulted on the changes has complemented the revised document. It will help to guide the future of this important highly sensitive site. It is recommended that the Outline Development Framework be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document which will form the basis for considering proposals for the future use and development of the site.

(c) Other Options Considered

- 4.7 The alternative option that could be considered is not progressing or adopting the Outline Development Framework. However, the prison is a highly sensitive site with considerable archaeological and historical interest that needs to be understood fully by prospective developers and other interested parties. The framework provides clear advice on the constraints affecting the site and the approach that prospective applicants will have to adopt in planning the future use and development of the site.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The Outline Development Framework promotes the successful development of the important Reading Prison Site and will contribute to the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets in the town and to producing a sustainable environment and economy within the Borough. It will meet the 2015 -18 Corporate Plan objective for "Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active." Under the heading, Neighbourhoods, the Council's Corporate Plan aims to improve the physical environment - the cleanliness of our streets, places for children to play, green spaces, how we feel about our neighbourhood and whether we feel safe, have a sense

of community and get on with our neighbours. Specifically it will contribute towards the restoration of the Abbey Quarter which is one of the targets under this theme. It will also contribute to providing infrastructure to support the economy and the development of learning and leisure facilities in the town which are also supported under the Corporate Plan.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The Outline Development Framework has drawn upon the results of community involvement on the future of the site, which ran from 24th February to 11th April 2014. The Report of Consultation (Appendix 1) summarises the consultation process already undertaken. The community involvement was undertaken in line with the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), adopted by Council on 27 June 2006 (minute 17 refers).

7. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The Scoping Assessment, included at Appendix 1 identifies that an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is relevant to this document. The EqIA (also at Appendix 1) identifies that there are positive impacts for the protected characteristic of disability, as defined in the Equality Act, because the SPD includes access for people with disabilities within the development principles.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Regulation 12 and 13 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out the requirements for undertaking consultation on Supplementary Planning Documents. Regulation 14 sets out the requirements for adoption. The production of and consultation on the Brief were in compliance with the requirements under the Regulations.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The work undertaken on drafting the documents and the expenditure on community engagement has been funded from existing budgets. There are no other direct revenue or financial implications arising from this report.

Value for Money (VFM)

- 9.2 The contents of the Framework provide a clear vision and principles for the use and development of the site which will bring valuable benefits to Reading, in terms of reuse of a vacant site with substantial historical interest. The preparation of a Development Framework for an important site such as Reading Prison is in accordance with recognised best practice and therefore represents good value for money.

Risk Assessment

9.3 There are no direct financial risks associated with the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Core Strategy (adopted 2008)
- Sites and Detailed Policies Document (adopted 2012).
- Reading Central Area Action Plan (adopted 2009)
- Draft Outline Development Framework for the Site of Reading Prison (February 2014)

APPENDIX 1: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed:

Reading Prison - Outline Development Framework

Directorate: ENCAS - Environment, Culture and Sport

Service: Planning and Building Control

Name: Kiaran Roughan

Job Title: Planning Manager

Date of assessment: 13/03/2015

Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service?

To guide the development of Reading Prison.

Who will benefit from this proposal and how? Various parts of the community will benefit

What outcomes will the change achieve and for whom?

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

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Assess whether an EIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc)

Yes No

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, feedback.

Yes No

If the answer is Yes to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If No you **MUST** complete this statement

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because:

Assess the Impact of the Proposal

Your assessment must include:

- Consultation
- Collection and Assessment of Data
- Judgement about whether the impact is negative or positive

Consultation

Relevant groups/experts	How were/will the views of these groups be obtained	Date when contacted
Local residents, community and voluntary groups, local businesses, relevant developers and landowners, infrastructure providers, statutory consultees	Two consultations have already been carried out on issues for the future development of the centre - see main body of this report. Consultation was in line with the Statement of Community Involvement.	February - April 2012 November - December 2012

Collect and Assess your Data

Describe how could this proposal impact on Racial groups

No impact.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how could this proposal impact on Gender/transgender (cover pregnancy and maternity, marriage)

No impact.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how could this proposal impact on Disability

Disabled access was highlighted as a principle that should be highlighted in the Brief. The Brief expands on this, and ensures that any impacts on disability will be positive.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how could this proposal impact on Sexual orientation (cover civil partnership)

No impact.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how could this proposal impact on Age

The proportion of people in the surrounding three wards (Norcot, Southcote and Tilehurst) that are 0-15 and 60-84 is higher than the Reading average. The

improvements to the centre seek to ensure that the centre appeals to all ages, and the development principles highlight the need to provide for both older people and families with young children.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how could this proposal impact on Religious belief?

No impact.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Make a Decision

Tick which applies

1. No negative impact identified Go to sign off

2. Negative impact identified but there is a justifiable reason

You must give due regard or weight but this does not necessarily mean that the equality duty overrides other clearly conflicting statutory duties that you must comply with.

Reason

3. Negative impact identified or uncertain

What action will you take to eliminate or reduce the impact? Set out your actions and timescale?

How will you monitor for adverse impact in the future?

Policy CS3 of the Core Strategy already includes monitoring proposals with regard to social inclusion in the Borough.

Signed (completing officer) Mark Worringham Date: 27 September 2013

Signed (Lead Officer) Mark Worringham Date: 27 September 2013