

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

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| TO:              | STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE |              |  |
| DATE:            | 5 APRIL 2016  | AGENDA ITEM: | 8  |
| TITLE:           | ENDORSEMENT OF REVISED GREEN PARK MASTERPLAN, 2016      |              |  |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | COUNCILLOR PAGE   | PORTFOLIO:   | STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT                                    |
| SERVICE:         | PLANNING  | WARD:        | WHITLEY  |
| LEAD OFFICER:    | KIARAN ROUGHAN  | TEL:         | 0118 9374530   |
| JOB TITLE:       | PLANNING MANAGER  | E-MAIL:      | <a href="mailto:kiaran.roughan@reading.gov.uk">kiaran.roughan@reading.gov.uk</a> |

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Oxford Properties, the new owners of the Green Park Business Park have been invited to present their Revised Masterplan proposals for Green Park to this Committee. This report sets out the context and the main changes to the existing Green Park Masterplan that are proposed by Oxford Properties, in their Revised Masterplan for the Park. It seeks the Committee's comments on those changes and on a draft letter of endorsement of the Revised Masterplan that has been requested by Oxford Properties. The Revised Masterplan will form the basis for guiding the evolution of the Park and preparing planning applications for future developments but will carry no material weight in decision making.

**2. RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- 2.1 That Committee notes, welcomes and endorses the Revised Green Park Master Plan 2016 as the basis for preparing planning applications for future developments in Green Park, subject to the various caveats set out in the report and in the draft letter attached at Appendix 2.
- 2.2 That Committee notes and comments on the draft letter of endorsement that officers propose to send to the owners of the site, Oxford Properties;
- 2.3 That Committee agree that the letter to be sent to Oxford Properties by the Head of Planning Development and Regulatory Services be

agreed by the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport and the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee.

### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Reading Business Park (now known as Green Park), situated alongside the M4 Motorway, was originally identified for development in the 1980's. Outline planning permission for the Park, broadly in its current form and extent, was granted in the mid 1990's. The various outline consents for the development of the park as a whole, which lies mainly in Reading but which includes land that is in West Berkshire and Wokingham was for a total of 244,000m<sup>2</sup> floorspace. The outline proposals were built upon and developed into a formal masterplan produced by Foster and Partners in 1999.
- 3.2 The original masterplan was based on American examples of business parks at that time. These were generally low density developments in well landscaped parkland settings often based around lakes and other water features. They were generally served by loop roads and were based largely on travel by car and the provision of high numbers of car parking spaces.
- 3.3 It is not clear whether the original masterplan was endorsed in any way by the Council. Nevertheless, subsequent reserved matters and full applications have generally followed the principles in the 1999 Masterplan. Green Park has been successful in attracting a range of international companies with a notable recent increase in lettings. The development and the businesses that it has secured have made a very valuable contribution to the economic growth, development and prosperity of Reading in the last 15 years. Green Park provides high quality, modern, well designed business accommodation within a high quality landscaped business park setting. It provides high levels of car parking but has also invested in fast bus services into Central Reading and appropriate cycling and pedestrian facilities.
- 3.4 Oxford Properties has also been in discussions with West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough Council's over the Masterplan. However the major part of the site is in Reading Borough and the main impacts of any development fall within Reading Borough.

### 4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Since acquiring the Green Park Business Park, the new owners, Oxford Properties, have undertaken a thorough review of the working of the area and their future development options. As part of the review, they have commissioned the preparation of a Revised Masterplan by Auketts. The new owners are seeking an evolution of the 1999 Masterplan to reflect the way the site and the surrounding area has matured since the masterplan was produced. It also takes account of modern business

needs and practices and current office property trends. It takes account of feedback from their property agents and from current occupiers of the park.

- 4.2 The Revised Masterplan has sought to make use of potential development opportunities and to intensify the amount of development on the sites which remain to be developed. It seeks the introduction of additional retail/leisure uses, primarily aimed at serving users of the park. This includes the provision of a new hotel, again primarily to meet the needs of businesses in Green Park. It also seeks to further develop the impact and visual presence of the park, particularly in relation to passing traffic on the M4 Motorway. Copies of the Illustrative Masterplan Map and the Illustrative Masterplan - Aerial View are attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.3 The key changes proposed in the 2016 Revised Masterplan compared to the 1999 Masterplan can be summarised as follows:
- 1) Two new plots - the Gateway site and the new Hotel site;
  - 2) 600 South Oak Way is proposed as 10 storeys - this was identified as a landmark building within the 1999 Masterplan (8-10 storeys);
  - 3) 500-600 Longwater - larger and more intensively developed than the illustrative plan in 1999 masterplan;
  - 4) 700-900 South Oak Way - located closer to M4;
  - 5) Landscape and setting adjustments - to give greater presence of buildings to roads through the site;
  - 6) Revised Flood Management Strategy;
  - 7) Some broadening of uses to include new retail and leisure users primarily aimed at serving the users of Green Park;
  - 8) The Revised Masterplan proposes an overall uplift of floorspace 50,000m<sup>2</sup> (approximately a 19% uplift overall) within the plots with existing unbuilt consents these unbuilt consents currently amount to 93,125m<sup>2</sup>);
  - 9) Improvements to signage, way finding and branding.
- 4.4 To improve the appearance of the entrance to Green Park and assist with the branding, a new gateway building of between 5 and 8 storeys is proposed off Brook Drive. This is a rather tight site close to the A33 carriageway, which has to date been viewed as part of the deep building line and wide landscape setting to the A33. While the Council is not against the principle of a building or structure to announce the entrance to Green Park in this location, it will need to be very carefully designed.
- 4.5 A new, 150 - 200 bedspace hotel of up to 8 storeys in height is also proposed on the lakeside area on what is known as the Lily Pond Site between Plot 400 Longwater Drive and Plot 600 South Oak Way, at the south western end of the lake. This utilises a rather narrow area of land between Longwater Drive and the lake that formed landscape areas at the end of the lake in the 1999 masterplan. The land has been raised out of floodplain. There is no objection in principle to additional

development in this area although any planning application for a hotel in this location would be subject to a sequential test.

- 4.6 On the remaining undeveloped plots, the Masterplan proposes more intensive development than previously envisaged. The Revised Masterplan proposes 3 blocks on Plot 600 South Oak Way in place of 2 blocks in the 1999 Masterplan. The tallest block will be 10 storeys although the original 1999 Masterplan did suggest a building of 13 storeys on this area. The blocks step up from 6 - 10 storeys from east to west. These blocks stand close to the boundary of the site with the M4 Motorway and the height and additional bulk of the buildings means they will be very visible to passing traffic.
- 4.7 Plots 500-600 Longwater Drive will be reconfigured and developed more intensively than indicated on the 1999 Masterplan and under the current planning permission for the site (These plots are in West Berkshire). Three large buildings are proposed to replace the grouping of smaller buildings proposed under the current approval. Buildings will be brought closer to Longwater Drive to give greater presence and a more urbane feel in this part of the Park. The layout of 700 -900 South Oak Way is proposed to be reconfigured by moving the access road to the north of the buildings which brings the buildings southward and thus gives a greater presence to the M4 Motorway. The added advantage is that the access road could provide access to currently unallocated land (within West Berkshire) to the north of the site, outside the area of the existing Green Park outline planning consents. Oxford Properties has made representations to West Berkshire seeking the allocation of this land for future development.
- 4.8 Limited consultation has been undertaken in relation to the proposals in the Masterplan. Comments have been received from Highways England, the Office of Nuclear Regulation (in relation to the operations at Burghfield) and RBC Transport, and the Natural Environment Team. The Environment Agency has been consulted on the Revised Flood Management Strategy as part of pre-application process. A response is awaited.
- 4.9 Officers have engaged with the team representing Oxford Properties in the preparation of the Masterplan and, as indicated, have undertaken limited consultation with statutory stakeholders. Concerns have been raised in relation to the fairly significant uplift in floorspace and the resulting likely substantial increase in trips.
- 4.10 The proposal for a new office block on the gateway site and the proposals for a hotel on the Lily Pond Site will need new planning permissions. The intensification of development of the existing undeveloped areas, Plot 400 Longwater Drive, Plot 600 South Oak Way and Plots 500-600 Longwater Drive will need to be the subject of new planning permissions. Oxford Properties have not yet clarified whether they intend a new outline permission to cover all the changes proposed

under the Revised Masterplan or whether they will be dealt with by individual applications. Any subsequent planning application(s) will need to be accompanied by a Transport Assessment(s) to assess the implications of each proposal. They may need to be considered on a case by case basis if individual applications are made for each plot.

4.11 The Revised Masterplan refers to the prospect of a new Green Park Station being provided in the future. The South Reading MRT scheme, when fully implemented (which will be dependent on securing significant developer funding contributions) will also enable additional capacity to be realised in this area to support future development. Green Park was also developed as a result of a highly engineered flood management scheme and additional development will need to ensure that this is not compromised by the additional development.

4.12 It should be noted that while new development is CIL liable, the current CIL Charging Schedule has a £0 charge for offices and £120/m<sup>2</sup> for the proposed hotel use in this location. The development might need to provide infrastructure to meet site specific impacts through a S106 agreement. However, currently, the proposed additional office floorspace will not make any contribution towards any off site transport provision. Therefore, it will not currently aid the delivery of Green Park Station or South Reading MRT.

4.10 Oxford Properties accept that any future applications will need to be supported by various evidence and assessments, particularly in relation to transport, flood management, etc, to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the additional floorspace and range of uses.

4.10 Oxford Properties are seeking a letter of endorsement from officers of the general principles set out in the Revised Masterplan. Officers are now reasonably satisfied, subject to a number of caveats mainly related to transport and flood management, but also including design and appearance, that the general principles set out in the Revised Masterplan can be supported. A draft letter of endorsement, which contains suitable caveats, is attached at Appendix 2. Committee is requested to note and comment on the contents of the letter.

## 5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The Planning Service contributes to the Council's strategic aims in terms of:

- Seeking to meet the 2016 -19 Corporate Plan objective for "Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active."
- Seeking to meet the 2016 -19 Corporate Plan objective for "Providing homes for those in most need."
- Seeking to meet the 2016 -19 Corporate Plan objective for "Providing infrastructure to support the economy"

5.2 Future development of Green Park will contribute, to achieving the strategic aim of keeping the town clean, safe, green and active and to providing infrastructure to support the economy.

## **6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

6.1 Community engagement has been not been undertaken as part of this pre-application process. Limited consultation has been undertaken with relevant statutory bodies. Any proposals within the Revised Masterplan produced by the landowners will be subject to future planning applications upon which there will be full consultation with interested parties.

## **7. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT**

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has not been carried out at this stage. However, it is not anticipated that the planning applications that might be submitted in future will lead significant equality impacts.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The Revised Masterplan is being reported to a Council Committee for information and comment. While it is recommended that officers sign a letter of endorsement of the Masterplan, any such endorsement is subject to caveats in relation to significant potential issues. These will need to be considered fully as part of any future planning applications. The Council will therefore not be legally bound by any decisions in relation to the Revised Masterplan. It will have no material weight in decision making. Any future planning application proposals will be subject to determination in accordance with relevant Council policies and other material considerations at that time.

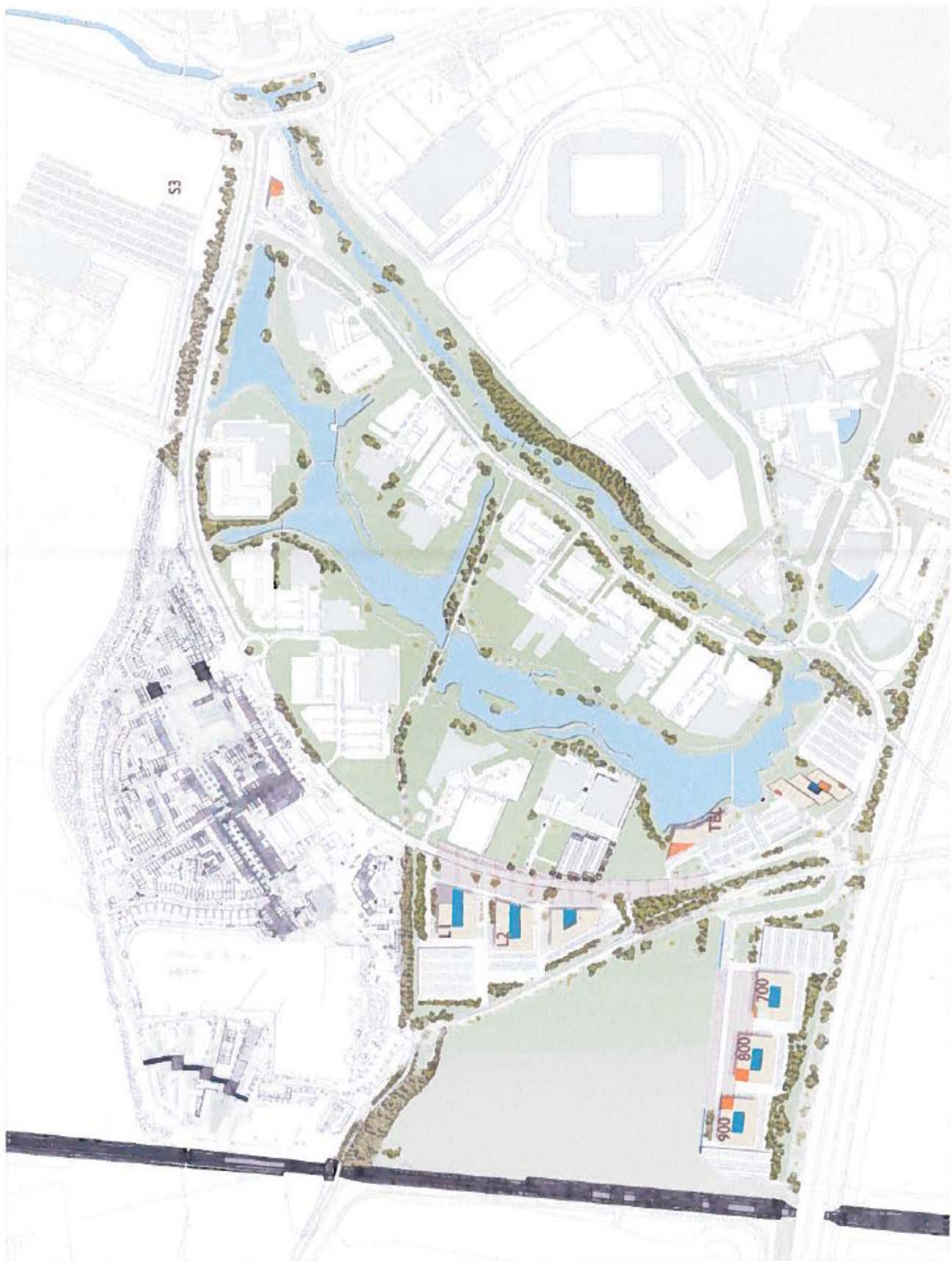
## **9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Green Park Masterplan, Oxford Properties, December 2015

Appendix 1 - Copy of Illustrative Masterplan.



## Appendix 2: Draft Letter of Endorsement of Revised Masterplan.

100 Longwater Avenue  
Green Park  
Reading  
RG2 6GP

December 2015

Reading Borough Council  
Civic Offices  
Bridge Street  
Reading  
RG1 2LU

To Whom It May Concern

### **Green Park, Reading, Updated Masterplan**

Outline planning permission was granted for Green Park in 1995. In 1997 a masterplan for Green Park was approved. The original Masterplan underwent much consultation with Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Council (then Newbury). The majority of Green Park is located within Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

The original masterplan was produced by Foster and Partners, and took its origins from business park trends across the USA and in particular Silicon Valley. The Foster masterplan envisaged a highly landscaped, parkland setting, with buildings placed close to newly created water bodies, allowing occupiers to enjoy the new parkland and waterside environment. Foster's masterplan has guided the design of Green Park over the past 15 years and still provides an important framework for future delivery.

Notwithstanding this, it is recognised that as time has moved on, so has the modern office environment and the demands of tenants. Green Park is now a highly successful business community and an asset to Reading and the wider area. It is therefore important that the future development of Green Park has an equally strong vision and masterplan for future development, as it did in 1997.

To refresh the masterplan, the owners of Green Park began consultation with the adjoining Councils in December 2014, and continued a process of dialogue via workshops, face to face meetings and written advice.

This draft masterplan has now been refreshed and updated by Aukett Swanke (dated December 2015), with technical input from Peter Brett Associates (PBA) to ensure the infrastructure requirements and environmental constraints of Green Park are also captured and refreshed and not compromised by future development.



The updated masterplan remains firmly connected with the original masterplan principles, however, it proposes an uplift of approximately 19% in overall development compared to the original masterplan. Any uplift in unconsented floorspace and specific detailed schemes will be subject to the detailed development management process (including the requirement for technical flooding and transport assessments and achieving high quality design and appearance), consultation and consideration by officers and Councillors.

Council officers understand that the revised Masterplan is intended to provide a non-statutory framework, with no formally approved status, which sets out the future development aspirations of the owners of Green Park. The Masterplan will have no material weight in decision making. Officers support the continued valuable contribution of Green Park and have welcomed the opportunity given by the owners to comment on their revised Masterplan. Officers remain committed to a continuing dialogue on the future development of Green Park.

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Giorgio Framallicco  
Head of Planning Development and Regulatory Services  
Reading Borough Council

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Green Park