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1 Introduction

Progress on the AAP to date

1.1 As part of the overall regeneration plans for Cinderford, a new mixed development is being planned in the Northern Quarter. The plans have been developed over a number of years and some changes are already being implemented.

1.2 The Northern Quarter lies to the northwest of the existing town and includes some previously developed land and an area once worked for opencast coal. It offers an unrivalled opportunity to provide an attractive setting for development and a comprehensive masterplanning exercise is at an advanced stage in order to facilitate this. Complementing this masterplan is an Area Action Plan (AAP). This is a planning document which identifies how the area will develop, what will be delivered and how it will be achieved. A draft of the AAP, called the Preferred Options report, was published late in 2009. The Preferred Options report land uses are illustrated in the map below.
Relationship with the Preferred Options Report

1.3 The Preferred Options report for the AAP was prepared after a significant process of consultation and engagement. The plan was prepared on behalf of the Cinderford Regeneration Board and endorsed by the Forest of Dean District Council. The Preferred Options report identified a number of key proposals and interventions and considered alternative options to deliver underlying aspirations and objectives. An extensive period of formal and informal public consultation was held from May through to the end of 2009, and the results collated for the next stage of plan making.

1.4 In the period following the formal consultation, a number of external factors have had an impact on the AAP strategy. This raised the following questions about specific aspects of the masterplan:

- The way in which important transport infrastructure and the proposed new highways are delivered to help facilitate development,
- The way in which the key education use will be delivered and its precise location.

1.5 Following a period of discussion with key partners, the Council has gone a long way towards resolving these issues and now has greater certainty about how the proposals can be taken forward for the benefit of the area. Some changes to the Preferred Options report and masterplan are proposed in response to these discussions.

Scope of the Further Consultation

1.6 The next formal stage in the evolution of the AAP is to publish a final version and submit it to the Secretary of State for Public Examination, along with any representations received. However, before the final version is submitted there is an opportunity to undertake further consultation about the two significant changes referred to above. This will ensure that consultees and the Council have an opportunity to consider the proposed changes in detail prior to finalising the AAP for examination.

1.7 In order to help with the consultation, some questions have been included in the text of this document. While any views are welcome, the matters raised in the questions are considered especially important in helping to shape the final AAP. The consultation is set up so that they can be answered on line, but you may also respond by e-mails and on paper.

1.8 The purpose of this paper is to explain the two changes currently under consideration which merit this further Consultation. There will be other differences of a more minor nature between the 2009 Preferred option and the final submission version of the AAP. There will be an opportunity to comment on these when that version is published in the spring.
1. Introduction

Taking the AAP Forward

1.9 The main stages in the preparation of the AAP to date have been:

- 2007 preparation of Issues and Options for the AAP
- 2008/9 development of preferred option and informal consultation (May 2009)
- October 2009 publication and consultation on preferred option
- 2010 analysis of responses from preferred options consultation and refinement of this option in the light of external changes

1.10 The next steps are

- Further consultation regarding major changes- February/ March 2011-01-11
- Preparation of responses to further consultation and submission version
- Publication of submission version of the AAP April 2011
- Submission to the Secretary of State June 2011
- Examination process June- December 2011
- Adoption of AAP January/ February 2012.

1.11 The AAP is a plan for the detailed implementation of part of the Core Strategy for the Forest of Dean. This is the overall planning policy document from which other more detailed (area and thematic) policies will be derived. The Core strategy is being submitted to the Secretary of State at about the same time as the AAP and it is expected that the two examinations and the eventual adoptions will run in parallel.

1.12 The Examination is a process whereby an Inspector working on behalf of the Secretary of State assesses the documents, their accompanying evidence and any representations made. As a result a document can be found sound, can be judged sound subject to a number of prescribed changes or can be found unsound. The last course of action would necessitate its removal and rewriting. The middle course, one where the document is found capable of being sound subject to a number of changes is a likely outcome of the process. In this case the changes have to be made if it is to be adopted. Adoption means that the document has the full weight as part of the Council's Development Plan and will govern the way in which a particular place is developed.

1.13 The AAP will serve as a brief for planning applications and the Core strategy an overall pattern against which more detailed plans can be made or applications evaluated. Once the AAP is adopted the expectation is that the development it proposes will take place in the manner shown, though there will be inevitable minor changes.
2. Proposed Amendments to the Preferred Options

Spine Road Alignment

Description of 2009 Preferred Option

2.1 In the Preferred Option of 2009, the Northern Quarter site was to be served by a new road access from the north, which would form a spine road through the development. A network of secondary and tertiary streets was proposed to provide access and connections across the site.

2.2 The proposed spine road route connected Broadmoor Road in the south with the A4136 to the north and ran through the centre of the Northern Quarter site in a relatively straight alignment. The route passed through woodland to the south of the proposed A4136 junction. Part of the route would therefore not be fronted by built development. The road was to be largely publicly funded and was to be developed early in the plan period.

2.3 The advantages of the spine road in this alignment were that it would offer an attractive new gateway to the Northern Quarter and serve as an alternative access for Cinderford from the A4136. It would provide a means of access to the proposed development, including public transport connections to the proposed education facility and would offer relief to the existing Nailbridge junction and the northern part of Steam Mills Road (possibly alongside some restriction to the use of the Nailbridge junction).

Description of new route alignment

2.4 An alternative alignment for the spine road in the northern part of the site is now suggested. It is proposed that the spine road is diverted to the west of the forest and past the Northern United area of development. This western route was previously intended as a secondary street to serve the Northern United area of development and was to be constructed in the mid phase of the AAP period. Under this option the original north south spine road would not connect to the A4136 except via the western link to Northern United unless the need for it was proven at some future date. The AAP would provide for this future connection but its implementation would not depend on it.

2.5 This alternative spine road alignment would run south from a junction with the A4136 past the Northern United area and through to the core of the AAP area and the proposed educational facility before connecting with Broadmoor Road.

2.6 The A4136 junction would be in the same place as the present entrance to the Northern United site but would require some improvement. The nature of the improvement depends largely on how much traffic is to use, or to be encouraged to use the new route.
2.7 The previous and the new route alignments are shown in the map below.
2. Proposed Amendments to the Preferred Options

Reasoned justification for new proposal

2.8 Since publication of the Preferred Options it has been assessed that the cost of delivering the road in the Preferred Options alignment presents a significant risk to delivery, given that the forest section of the road would not be fronted by built development, could therefore not elicit contributions from frontagers, and would need to be developed early in the plan period.

2.9 The new route proposed will enable sites served by the western route to be developed at an earlier date than the preferred option 2009 and will provide the all important through connection for buses. It will run only through areas which accommodate built development and removes the need for a road crossing the forest. This both reduces the overall cost and reduces ecological severance through the forest.

2.10 The spine road and junction on to the A4136 will as before, provide an alternative access to Cinderford and will reduce the traffic using Nailbridge junction.

Technical background

2.11 In evaluating the changes, a technical report (Evidence Base) has been produced and the implications of the changes have been considered in the manner of the original sustainability review undertaken when evaluating the previous route alignment.

Question 1

Do you prefer the new proposed road layout (partly using existing tracks) to the original new route from the A4136?

Question 2

Do you have any other views on the proposed change?
Location of Education and Skills Facility and Associated Uses

Description of 2009 Preferred Options

2.12 At the time of the Preferred Options report, a single educational facility occupying a plot of approximately 1.75ha was proposed in the centre of the Northern Quarter to the east of the spine road. It was located adjacent to an indicative 1.19ha plot earmarked for dedicated car parking. These proposals were flexible, pending agreement on the precise nature of the educational use, but a central principle was that any facility should occupy a key location in the layout. Its location was designed to be close to proposed public transport links. It presented an opportunity for a landmark building or buildings acting as a focal point at the heart of the development.

2.13 One of the possible occupiers for the education facility was the Royal Forest of Dean College. The College was, at the time of the Preferred Options report, discussing re organisation. There were also other less well defined options arising out of the review of secondary education that was taking place and the then Government's Building Schools for the Future Programme. Although the final occupier was uncertain, there was clearly potential for a new education facility within the Northern Quarter. The Preferred Options consultation went ahead on that basis. The principle of accommodating an educational facility received a high level of support from those responding during the consultation exercise.

Description of the new proposed educational facility location

2.14 Changes of Government, the demise of the Learning and Skills Council and other events beyond the control of the AAP, including the continuing review of local secondary education, led to uncertainty and for several months it was unclear whether the intended educational facility would be deliverable.

2.15 However, there have recently been some important changes. The Royal Forest of Dean College has announced its decision to merge with GlosCol, which currently has sites at Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury. As the existing Forest of Dean College operates from two sites (Mitcheldean and Five Acres near Coleford), it is likely that its accommodation needs will be under review as a result of the merger. One option will be to consider an entirely new site to replace either or both of the existing ones.

2.16 The educational facility was intended as the focal point of the AAP in recognition of the need both to provide a stimulus for better educational attainment and as a physical entity capable of providing an anchor for the northern quarter site. It was intended as a focus of activity, but also as a point of reference. These remain key aspects of the revised proposal.
2.17 The locations of the education site and supporting associated car parking within the AAP masterplan are currently under reconsideration, with a proposal to move the education facility to the west of the spine road and include an element of car parking accessed via a new junction off Broadmoor Road, rather than accessed from the spine road as previously set out.

2.18 The number of parking spaces, access arrangements for vehicles, buses and pedestrians / cyclists and the floorspace of the facility will be determined once an occupier is known. However there is a clear preference for a site to the west of spine road and for that reason we have included this option within the current period of consultation.

2.19 Further traffic modelling and assessment of the impacts on junctions on Broadmoor Road in the vicinity of the site will be necessary to confirm the acceptability of the car park in the revised location. This work will be completed alongside any other revisions to the transport strategy, assessment and modelling that are required prior to the AAP submission, when the site brief is more clearly understood.

2.20 This option would provide a site that is both attractive and visible from its immediate surroundings and from afar. It is a key location within the Northern Quarter and is on the main transport axis. The proposed activity centre and Eco-Visitor Centre, shown separately in the November 2009 consultation, could become part of the education use.

2.21 In addition to parking, an open area containing a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) would be available in that area. The design of this area and the precise locations of the land uses proposed will need to take account of the potential flood risk that affects the land.

2.22 The option is illustrated in Plan 2 below
2. Proposed Amendments to the Preferred Options

Question 3

Do you prefer the new proposal (educational uses on the lakeside and housing/employment located to the east of the spine road) to the Preferred Option 2009 (housing on the lakeside, employment fronting the spine road, and educational uses to the east of the spine road)?

Please provide your main reasons.
Question 4

Whatever your views on the new location, what do you consider important about the proposed education use?

Siting (eg close to lake in an attractive part of the northern quarter)?

Easy access (on what will be a main bus route)?

Appearance?

Use of local materials?

Energy rating (low running costs and use of sustainable materials and construction techniques)?

Anything else?

Other Minor Changes

In response to the Preferred Option consultation, a number of minor changes are being considered. These changes will be set out in the publication version of the draft AAP. They are not considered to significantly alter the Preferred Option and are therefore not specifically addressed as part of this further Consultation.

Question 5

Are there any other points that you want to make about the proposed AAP (these need not be connected to the proposed road or educational facility but will be considered before the document is finalised)?
3 Next Steps

How to comment on the Further Consultation Paper

3.1 The purpose of this document is to inform a six week period of consultation focused specifically on the proposed changes to the education and spine road locations outlined above. This is to enable views to be exchanged and taken into account in the compilation of the final version of the AAP and associated documents (including the Sustainability Appraisal).

3.2 Comments on any other aspect of the emerging AAP are however welcomed and will be considered prior to its final publication.

3.3 This Consultation is informal with the intention of being more in the form of a dialogue. All comments received will all be published together with the Council’s response.

3.4 There are complex regulations which govern the preparation of planning policy documents including this AAP. Advice is available from the Council’s Forward Plans team. If you want to make representations that will be considered by the independent Inspector as part of the examination process, it is essential that these are made in full to the Council following the publication of the AAP. Material submitted now in response to this interim document will need to be re-submitted if you are not content with any response from the Council.

Question 6

Did you find this consultation clear and useful? Please add any comments.

How to Reply

3.5 The electronic version of the consultation is at http://fdean-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal, and responses using that will automatically be received as soon as they are completed, otherwise please e-mail mailto:ldf@fdean.gov.uk, or post any representations to the address below. If you use e mail or paper please indicate if you would like to be involved in any further AAP consultations.

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