

Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Development and Regeneration

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Abingdon redevelopment – Charter area

Recommendation

The committee is invited to note the contents of the report.

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an update on the history of regeneration plans for the Charter area and next steps.

Strategic Objectives

2. The Vale of White Horse District Council Corporate Plan 2016-2020 includes the strategic objective to, “ensure the success of our town centres” and the corporate priority to “explore the potential for redevelopment of the Charter area in Abingdon, building on the success of the Bury Street redevelopment”.

Background

3. In April 2011, the council entered into an agreement with Scottish Widows (now Aberdeen Standard) to lease in respect of the proposed redevelopment of the Charter area in Abingdon (as shown in the plan below).



4. Subsequent to this lease agreement, in July 2012, the council entered into a side letter agreement with Scottish Widows in respect of the un-refurbished parts of the Abbey Shopping Centre (now known as the Bury Street Shopping Centre) should the Charter area be terminated. The purpose of this side letter was to ensure that in the event of the Charter area redevelopment not proceeding the remaining un-refurbished parts of the Bury Street Shopping Centre adjacent to the Charter area, namely the “bookend” units would be required to be developed.
 5. Between 2011 and 2014 Aberdeen Standard worked hard to attract a supermarket operator to anchor the redevelopment of the Charter, working with all of the major supermarket operators. However, at the end of 2014 Aberdeen Standard informed the council that these discussions were not progressing and requested that the Charter agreement be terminated. The main reason for this lack of progress with supermarket operators was down to the change in outlook and investment plans of all major supermarket operators due to poor performance and changing retail patterns. Added to this are the difficulties of making the site viable, given the number of existing buildings and relocations required. On 7 April 2016, an individual cabinet member decision was taken to terminate the agreement with Aberdeen Standard.
 6. The Charter area consists of approximately 2.5 acres, of which the council are the freehold owners, except for the library which is owned on a freehold basis to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). The council owns the GP Surgery which is leased to the Malthouse Surgery on a number of leases, the former Day Care Centre and offices which are leased on short term.
 7. There are a range of potential redevelopment options for the site, include leisure, retail and residential. Officers have continued to work closely with Aberdeen
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Standard to ensure any redevelopment of the Charter area has a strong link to Bury Street Shopping Centre.

8. Officers are actively involved in the One Public Estate discussions for the town which may help provide a more comprehensive discussion about provision of public services in the town and therefore aid the development of the Charter area to progress.
9. Whilst development constraints (including site assembly constraints and relocation of existing uses) are being explored, firm plans and strategic direction cannot yet be determined for the redevelopment of this site. There are a range of potential options. Officers will bring forward a paper to Cabinet in due course setting out options of how a successful plan for the site could be shaped once constraints and options have been fully investigated.

Financial Implications

10. The deliverability of a regeneration scheme for the Charter area will be subject to a viability study. Viability will be subject to proposed uses for the site, the position of existing tenants and will reflect current market conditions.
11. Any future potential financial implications will be subject to the council's normal budget setting process.

Risks

12. In 2011 a supplementary planning document for the area set out the planning and design principles for the re-development of the Bury Street and Charter areas, suggesting the potential for a medium to large foodstore on the Charter. Given the lack of demand for this sort of foodstore and the significant changes nationally in foodstore-led developments and the changes in retail and leisure provision in high streets it would be appropriate for planning officers to review the planning policy approach to this area. Any redevelopment scheme would be required to comply with planning guidelines for the site.

Conclusion

13. The redevelopment of the Charter area is not a simple regeneration project to progress. It depends on a wide number of factors, including viability and re-location of community uses, to ensure that a suitable scheme can be developed.
14. It is anticipated that in the coming months officers will be in a position to bring an updated report by the council's strategic property advisors, Cushman and Wakefield, to Cabinet for determination of the council's strategy and approach on this site.
15. The committee is invited to note the contents of the report.

Background Papers

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