



Summary of Progress on the Barton Area Action Plan

The Inspector's Final Report has now been published, and will go to the Council Meeting on 17th December with a recommendation that Members adopt the Barton Area Action Plan. It's virtually certain that the Councillors will vote to adopt it as it now stands.

The Council ran a series of consultations on the BAAP, and two Public Hearings were called by the Examining Inspector; Stoke Place residents and the Friends of Old Headington were represented throughout, and all relevant documents can still be seen on the Council website. The main decisions which affect this part of Headington concern

- The Ruskin Fields
- Stoke Place
- The plans for the A40

Ruskin Fields

The Inspector has ruled out the inclusion of any development of the Ruskin Fields as part of the BAAP, saying "development, no matter how sensitively designed, would inevitably ... have an adverse impact on the distinctive character of the Conservation Area. I conclude that such harm to the Conservation Area would not be outweighed by the individual or cumulative benefits of affordable housing and open space provision and improvements to pedestrian and cycle links".

This statement, coupled with the Conservation Area Appraisal and the Council's own arguments against including Ruskin in the current BAAP should secure the fields as green space for some time, though Ruskin are of course at liberty to submit planning applications to the Council whenever they wish to.

Stoke Place

The Inspector has modified the previous version of Policy BA7 on Pedestrian and Cycle links which originally began

- "New direct, safe and attractive cycle and pedestrian links will be provided as part of the strategic development, including: re connecting Stoke Place bridleway with the existing footpath running north south across the strategic development site
- upgrading Stoke Place to an appropriate standard for a cycle route and footpath and in a manner that is sensitive to Stoke Place's role and character in the Old Headington Conservation Area

- a crossing of the A40 ring road included in the new junction or roundabout
- enhancement of the existing crossing between Barton and Headington ”

The policy now begins

- “New direct, safe and attractive cycle and pedestrian links will be provided as part of the strategic development, including:
- a crossing of the A40 ring road included in the new junction or roundabout
- enhancement of the existing crossing between Barton and Headington ”

and adds in a subsidiary position that

“There may be an opportunity to re connect Stoke Place bridleway with the existing footpath running north south across the strategic development site.

Any link would need to ensure safety for all users.

It would require the upgrading of Stoke Place to an appropriate standard for a cycle route and footpath in a manner that is sensitive to Stoke Place's role and character in the Old Headington Conservation Area”.

Elsewhere the implication is that the Inspector doesn't favour crossings of the A40 at street-level. So while the Stoke Place crossing option remains open, it is no longer the primary choice.

Plans for the A40

The Inspector wasn't convinced by the Council's proposed reduction of the speed limit from 70mph to 40 mph in pursuit of their 'integration' vision.

She said “I conclude that a reduction of the speed limit would result in some environmental benefits for both the existing and new communities in the AAP area. However, the transformational aspirations of policy BA1 [“Transforming the Ring-road”] are not justified by robust evidence, it does not demonstrably reflect the most appropriate strategy and therefore it is not justified. Implementation is dependent upon a separate public consultation process, the outcome of which cannot be assumed to be favourable. Therefore, it is not effective. The supporting text to Policy BA7 also refers to possible surface level crossings of the A40. It is, therefore, unsound for similar reasons.”

Regarding the central reservation she stated “I consider also that the visual benefits of re-landscaping the central reservation have been over-estimated. Whilst it would increase inter-visibility between the communities north and south of the A40, this does not necessarily

result in transformation of the ring-road or greater integration. The reduction in the density of the mature trees would reduce their softening effect and could increase the harsh visual and adverse noise and air quality impacts of 4 heavily trafficked lanes of highway for communities to the north and south. It would also detrimentally affect views into and out of the Old Headington Conservation Area.”

In brief, the policy is now headed simply “The Ring-road” and is much more flexible and open to negotiation:

“In order to secure a reduction in traffic speeds, traffic management and safety measures will be put in place and design principles applied to the A40 ring road between the western approach to the new junction/roundabout and the Headington roundabout.

Innovative solutions to the form and layout of development will be sought to facilitate integration and secure good quality living conditions, especially adjacent to the A40 ring road. There may be an opportunity to provide homes adjacent to the northern side of the ring road; however such development must not be accessed directly from the ring road

Development on the strategic site must be set behind a buffer to the A40 ring road. This should include a combination of landscaping, open space, pedestrian/cycle ways and a service road and informal car parking where appropriate.

The landscaping of the central reservation and either side of the ring road should be managed in order to facilitate safe movement and access for all modes of travel.

Where relevant, any development adjacent to the ring road and any changes to the existing landscaping must consider views into and out of the Old Headington Conservation Area.”

The document can be viewed in full here:

<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/Library/Documents/Barton%20AAP/Inspector%27s%20Barton%20AAP%20Report%20Final%20Version.pdf>

and is also available in public libraries and at the Council Offices in St. Aldate’s.

There was also a piece about the Inspector’s Report in the *Oxford Times* in the last week of November.

So – pending the Sites and Housing report expected in January – we have nothing more to do at present regarding the BAAP. When individual detailed applications relating to the Barton West scheme are submitted by the Council and their co-developer Grosvenor, there will be an opportunity to comment on those.

Friends of Old Headington Committee