

Date:

09/12/2024

Planning Policy Team
Oxford City Council
Town Hall
St Aldate's
Oxford
OX1 1BX

Via email - planningpolicy@oxford.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam,

LITTLEMORE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN CONSULTATION

Introduction

Bidwells LLP write on behalf of Pioneer Group in response to the current consultation on the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan.

Pioneer Group is currently undertaking pre-application engagement with the planning authority and wider community in relation to proposals for the comprehensive redevelopment of the Ozone Leisure Park in southeast Oxford.

Pioneer Group is Europe's leading vertically integrated platform curating innovation-focused ecosystems that increase the chance of business success. They own, develop and operate innovation focussed campuses; build innovation ecosystems for the business of science; and deliver accelerator programmes and venture capital funds to turn ideas into reality. Pioneer's mission is to help life sciences and high-tech businesses thrive in tackling human and planetary health challenges.

Pioneer have established a partnership with The Crown Estate (TCE) and Oxford Science Enterprises (OSE) to assist in delivering the necessary real estate to match the ambitious pipeline of the University of Oxford's research output to ensure that Oxford's best ideas stay in Oxford and solve some of the greatest challenges at unprecedented speed.

In support of this ambition, Pioneer Group is developing plans to redevelop the existing Ozone Leisure Park site (as appended). The vision is to provide a home-grown community innovation district which addresses the poor urban design of the existing development and responds to the demographic challenges within the surrounding neighbourhoods. Pioneer is engaging with Oxford City Council to progress this ambition and have attended two pre-application meetings to date. It is intended that community consultation will be launched in January 2025.

The Project Vision

At the heart of the delivery of a home-grown innovation district on the Ozone Leisure Park site, is an ambition to celebrate Oxford's world leading research, to inspire the local community, and provide accessible jobs for all. Recognising the significant changes planned in this part of the city, the team is



Eaton House, Wal brook Court, North Hinksey Lane, Oxford OX2 0QS

seeking to push the boundaries of quality, density and place making to deliver a pioneering new destination for collaboration and innovation. In addition to providing c. 500,000 sq.ft. NIA of Class E floorspace to support Human and Planetary Health research and development, a key element of the brief is the incorporation of complementary community-centred uses (Class E and F) which will anchor the site in wider redevelopment opportunities at The Kassam Stadium and Land South of Grenoble Road. The development will be accessible to the city centre and beyond through the planned Cowley Branch Line (CBL).

Currently the Leisure Park fails to make effective or efficient use of land, and it does not contribute towards the creation of an inviting, safe and healthy place. The existing site predominantly comprises a mix of commercial leisure and entertainment uses (Class E and Sui Generis). This includes food and beverage units, a bowling alley, laser tag centre and cinema.

Nationally, retail and leisure sectors have undergone significant transformation in recent years, driven by shifting consumer preferences and economic trends. As a result, the existing Ozone Leisure Centre has become operationally inefficient, struggling to adapt to the changing nature of demand with various units within the development vacant and those that remain scaling back their spaces. Given the current leases, it will be completely vacant by 2030.

Whilst providing community use within the development forms an integral aspect of the project brief, the applicant team is considering alternative strategies and uses to those that currently exist to ensure that the proposed facilities are, and continue to be, in demand into the future. The exact mix and nature of uses is to be determined through future engagement with the local community. We anticipate that the proposed uses could include facilities such as childcare provision, a more appropriately scaled cinema, bowling lanes, convenience shopping, café, bar/pub, community library, and exhibition space etc..

National Planning Policy

As summarised in Practice Guidance (Reference ID: 41-065-20140306), paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as applied to neighbourhood plans by section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 sets out a set of “basic conditions” to be applied to the neighbourhood plans. This includes:

1. having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State (i.e. the National Planning Policy Framework and other ministerial statements);
2. general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area; and
3. contributing towards the achievement of sustainable development with improvements in environmental, economic and social conditions.

We take these factors into account in the submission of these representations.

Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan

Given the project aspirations outlined above, Pioneer Group **SUPPORT** recognition within the draft Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan that the area around the Kassam Stadium will be developed during the next few years and that in the next 15 years Littlemore and the surrounding areas will continue to change. This is aligned with the adopted Oxford Local Plan 2036 which establishes the Cowley Branch Line Area as an area where significant change is expected over the plan period, as was also noted in the now paused emerging Oxford Local Plan in which the Ozone Leisure Complex was proposed for allocation as having potential for redevelopment within Use Class E.

In particular, Pioneer **SUPPORT** the Neighbourhood Plan’s belief that *‘if there is to be substantial development around the Ozone Leisure Centre/Kassam Stadium and/or on land south of Grenoble Road, this area should be seen increasingly as a significant hub of activity (or as a Local Centre) (with*

the consequent implications in terms of the provision of facilities and public transport). We agree that the site's proximity to the proposed Littlemore Station and CBL, presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a world leading campus on the site and transform the eastern edge of Oxford.

We also recognise the concern raised within the Plan that many residents do not see the existing facilities at Ozone Leisure Park as part of Littlemore. This is on the basis that they are used mostly by people who drive in from a much wider geographical area. A key part of Pioneer's vision for the Ozone Leisure Park is to address such matters through the development of accessible community facilities which respond specifically to local demand and contribute towards resolving demographic challenges within the vicinity.

With this ambition in mind, we **OBJECT** to Draft **Policy CIS1 (Replacement of community facilities)** as it is currently written, and would like to request the following changes:

Where the loss of a community facility is unavoidable because of development, a replacement ~~of that facility~~ community facility (the same size or larger, and with the same or improved facilities social contribution) should be provided as near to the facility as possible, or at a location equally or more accessible to Plan Area residents by walking, cycling, and public transport. Replacement facilities that would result in an overall improvement on the existing facility in terms of size, amenity, or enhancement to the Plan Area will be supported. Proposals to change the facilities at the Ozone Leisure Park, the Community Centre or the Village Hall will be supported only if the range and or quality of facilities there is maintained or improved. In particular, proposals to improve the facilities at and adjacent to the Community Centre and the Village Hall, and to secure the funding via Section 106, Community Infrastructure Levy, or similar schemes will be supported.

These changes are sought to safeguard the community provision, but to ensure greater flexibility in respect of function and viability. The alternative would require reprovision of inefficient, oversized and declining uses on the site contrary to the NPPF. The proposed development provides a unique opportunity to rethink the entertainment offer on the site to ensure a leisure offering which meets the specific needs and desires of the Littlemore community in a manner that makes efficient use of land and is conducive to long-term success and viability.

Paragraph 128 of the NPPF outlines that Planning Policies should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account local market conditions and viability, the identified need for development, and the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed. It is considered that the detailed wording of Policy CIS1 in its current form fails to do so and instead unwelcomingly necessitates the reprovision of the same facilities, regardless of viability or demand.

Requiring facilities to be the same size or larger is also conducive to inefficient land use in a manner similar to the existing Ozone Leisure Park. In this vein, Policy CIS1 is in conflict with Policy AOC7 (Cowley Branch Line) of the adopted Oxford Local Plan 2036 which specifically expects development within this area to make more efficient use of space, and Policy RE2 which outlines that planning permission will only be granted where development proposals make efficient use of land. On this basis Policy CIS1 is considered to conflict with the NPPF, which at paragraph 13 states that '*Neighbourhood plans should support the delivery of strategic policies contained in local plans*'.

We reiterate our support in principle and confirm that we would be willing to discuss these comments with you in more detail if that is deemed to be useful. We look forward to receiving acknowledgement of receipt of these representations and would ask to be kept informed of all future updates on emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

Yours faithfully,

Jonathan Bainbridge
Partner, Planning

For and on behalf of Bidwells LLP

Appendix 1 – Proposed Ozone Leisure Park Redevelopment

