DRAFT: Kidlington Public Realm Strategy

Response to the BroadwayMalyan report commissioned by Cherwell District Council (CDC) and presented to Kidlington Parish councillors on 8 February 2024.

General Points

1. Kidlington Parish Council (KPC) generally welcomes the report and is glad to have been consulted even at this late stage. It is however our strong view that had we been consulted before the report was completed it would have been far more useful, because it would have taken fuller cognizance of issues with which the Council has been concerned for some time. As it is we feel that the report has missed several opportunities.

2. The council has concerns that whilst linked to many of the following documents the report does not fully address the issues raised in them:

- Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031
- Kidlington Masterplan SPD (2016)
- Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Partial Review – Oxford's Housing Unmet Need

These are key strategic framework documents.

3. There is a sense that the proposed strategy has been applied as a template, and that limited attention has been given to the particular needs and opportunities of the Kidlington Village Centre. The council is also concerned that if this goes out to consultation to the wider stakeholder community, there will be critism of the failure to deliver the initiatives either already in place or proposed in the past.

4. Nevertheless KPC supports a great many of the report's recommendations, subject to extensive further consultation on details.

Extent of the Strategy

5. The strategy should include the whole of the village centre as per the Local Plan 2011-2031 (Strengthening an Extended Village Centre). This includes the west site of the Oxford Road from Exeter Close northwards to Lyne Road. Reference should be made to the softening of the Oxford Road by a possible table and pedestrian links between each side of the road. The first stage of this has been completed in terms of a 20 mph limit for this section of the Oxford Road

Initiatives implemented but not working.

6. The CDC working with KPC implemented an extension to the High Street pedestrian area with controls some years ago. This included the closure of the entrance to the car park from Curtis Place Curtis Road directing all vehicles to use the entrance by Tescos via Forester's Way. The area freed up at the rear of the precinct was paved with the intention of it being used as an open space for markets and street entertainment or other events (now the Piazza). As part of this a rising bollard was installed at the entrance to the High Street by Watts Way with permits issued to those entitled to off-street parking. This bollard has never worked properly as there is no adequate management regime in place so that the objective of removing cars from the high street between 10am and 4 pm has failed. This needs to be rectified and would be a quick win.

7. We note the strategy wants to reduce the vehicle dominance and we wholly support this, but there are private frontages over which there cannot be any control without agreement.

Links with the Masterplan SPD

8. The Kidlington Masterplan SPD prepared for CDC by Alan Baxter Associates concentrates on Strengthening the Village Centre. It was recognised in that piece of work that "The Village Centre should be the focus for significant change and improvement which will bring obvious benefits to local businesses and residents and will be important in changing wider perceptions of Kidlington for the better" (p.4). Most of the suggestions in the Masterplan have not been brought forward.

9. Kidlington Parish Council has concerns that the present work commissioned by CDC to look at Public Realm in Kidlington has not taken into account the previous work on these themes or consulted with the Parish Council to understand the restrictions and opportunities available.

Opportunities and constraints that need exploration.

10. The report has suggested more tree-planting along the High Street into the street or pavement. This is very welcome, but the Council has been advised by CDC and OCC officers that this is not possible due to restrictions on services.

11. The Council agrees that the street furniture in the village is dated and should be improved to create a more welcoming environment.

12. The extension of the pedestrian area is welcome provided the existing controls are fully operational. There is a potential to review and extend the current pedestrian area with a view to:

- moving the public toilets that blight the paved area at the rear of the precinct—although there appearance has been greatly improved through the addition of screening;
- considering options to provide access to the rear of the North side of the High Street directly to the Oxford Road and to restrict further vehicle access to the frontage of the High Street. There were proposals drawn up by CDC previously, but this has never been revisited;
- consider also possible access arrangements for the rear of the south side;
- deciding if the controlled area could then be extended.

13. The council would like to see a development masterplan including public realm on the Oxford Road between Sterling Approach and the High Street. There is real opportunity to improve this area, although it will need to be with the co-operation of landowners (note this was done in the High Street pedestrianisation). Part of this would be to make the Oxford Road more pedestrian-friendly between Sterling Approach and Lyne Road, creating good connectivity for those living in the west side of Kidlington, and to maximise the opportunities for future development at Exeter Close. This could involve the use of pedestrian tables and corridors.

14. The report should have taken more account of KPC's plans to redevelop Exeter Close as a civic hub, including moving the public library from across the road. It should have given more attention to the aspect and layout of the traffic layby immediately North of the present library.

Other comments

15. We wonder how much real knowledge of the Village the report is based on. We doubt that desktop analysis and a single visit (p.4) is sufficient. The report's lack of real familiarity with its subject is indicated by its remarks on the "Historic mapping and context" of the Village Centre (p.6). To describe the centre as "captivating", "vibrant", "charming" is a considerable exaggeration, as it is to say that "Historic buildings line the streets, showcasing a variety of architectural styles from different eras. The High Street features a mix of independent shops, pubs, and restaurants." There is

DRAFT

too great a predominance of chain and charity shops in the High Street, and only one pub, situated at the very end. These comments appear to be taken from a description of somewhere else.

16. KPC believes very strongly in the potential of Kidlington Centre, but this is currently far from fulfilled. There is a long way to go before the Centre merits the kind of description given here: the real issue is how we can get there, and the major problems that will have to be confronted before we do.

17. We are unsure of the proposal "connections from car park are repaved and improved lighting and street art programme recommended (early win project)" (p.50). The key issue in this area is the unsightly aspect of the backs of the shops on the North side of the High Street and on the West side of the car part access.

18. The strategy wants to "Ensure that proposals reflect distinctiveness of Kidlington and unique character." We are not sure what the unique character is. We have to accept that there is an eclectic mix of architecture and design in the High Street. The issue is to make the most of it.

19. We welcome the improvement to surfaces and endorse any opportunities for environmentally friendly drainage.

DAVID BETTS/ RACHEL FAULKNER/DAVID ROBEY
23 February 2024

DRAFT