

**PROBATION ESTATE**

**Thames Valley Probation Area, Oxford Division  
Consolidation of Abingdon, Banbury, Cowley and Oxford City Offices  
Full Business Case**

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**1. Executive Summary**

**Project description**

- To acquire and fit out new premises in Oxford to relocate and consolidate staff from offices at Abingdon, Banbury, Cowley and Oxford.

**Business need**

- The offices at Abingdon, Banbury and Cowley are not fit for purpose and need to be replaced.
- Service consistency and efficiency would be better achieved with all staff at the same site.
- The current Oxford office (Albion House) is already at capacity. Further, the current lease expires in March 2010 and there is no chance of an extension.

**Proposal**

- Acquire a fit-for-purpose core office for 120+ staff in the City / Osney / Botley Road area of Oxford. A site in the ideal location has been identified (Trajan House in Mill Street, Oxford) with a possible alternative recently placed on the market.
- Relocate all remaining staff from Abingdon, Banbury, Cowley and Oxford City Offices to the new core office.

**Timing**

- Late 2009 in advance of the lease expiry on Albion House.

**Costs**

Item	Cost / (Saving or Revenue)	
<b>Non-Recurring Costs</b>	<b>Proposed £000</b>	
Refurbishment costs		
Resource – cash		
Resource – non cash		
Sale of freeholds (net)		
Dilapidations		
Contingency		
Irrecoverable VAT		
<b>Total</b>		
<b>Annual Operating Costs</b>	<b>Proposed £000 p/a</b>	<b>Current £000 p/a</b>
Non-pay		
Staff		
<b>Total</b>		

**2. Project Description**

To acquire and fit out new premises in Oxford and to relocate and consolidate staff from existing offices at Abingdon, Banbury, Cowley and Oxford.

Non-recurring costs are synthesised from recent work at Greyfriars House, Reading.

£ of initial cost is for long-term provisions and tax. The nature of the exit from Albion House will be such that no dilapidation expenses should be incurred there.

### 3. Introduction

Oxfordshire Division, in Thames Valley Probation Area, comprises four offices at Abingdon, Banbury, Cowley and Oxford. Without exception, the current offices are not fit for purpose and operational effectiveness and efficiency are impacted. To address this it is proposed to relocate staff from the current offices to a new location in Oxford.

This business case is to obtain Probation Property Board approval to acquire new premises and relocate staff within the Division.

### 4. Business Need

The offices at Abingdon, Banbury and Cowley are considered generally as not fit for purpose ~

- 1-3 Ock Street, Abingdon is a freehold, Grade II Listed Building. A limited, secure offender area has been provided but this does not meet the requirements of the "Design Standards for Probation Service Non-Hostel Buildings" due to the constraints of the building. Fire Risk Assessments have also highlighted that there is no automatic smoke detection or fire alarm panel and that various doors and the cellar ceiling are not 30 minute fire resisting.
- Temple Cottage, Cowley is a freehold, two-storey property. The office is a converted house/doctors' surgery and has no secure offender area, no Pinpoint alarm system, does not conform to the "Design Standards" and is not fit for purpose.
- Banbury is a two storey property on which the lease expires in 2011. This building does have a secure offender area for interviewing but there are no facilities for Programmes / TVSOP (Thames Valley Sex Offender Programme). This office covers Bicester and Witney and offenders from the former report to our Talisman House office which means that staff are more often than not away from their Banbury base. This in turn causes problems in staffing the latter safely and effectively. Bicester and Witney are accessible to Oxford and it is felt that in the interests of consistency and efficiency of service delivery this will be better achieved with all staff working from one site.

Albion House, Oxford is a leasehold property. It is a three-storey building, ideally located in the heart of Oxford City, close to the Magistrates' and Crown Courts, Police Station and town centre amenities. The ground floor is the main entrance, with offender and staff working areas on the first and second floors respectively with a secure offender area. Staff work in an open plan office with some cellular offices for managers. This is a heavily used Probation Office with three group work rooms, video surveillance room and only five interview rooms, where space has been at a premium for many years. The property has a new landlord - Pembroke College - and the lease will expire in March 2010. Pembroke is purchasing other property on Littlegate Street and there is already a project in progress to provide student accommodation to the rear of Albion House. The lease will not be extensible beyond March 2010.

None of these offices is DDA compliant; there are steps/stairs with no lifts and because of the nature of the buildings adaptations will be difficult. This is further exacerbated by the lack of dedicated parking. Even allowing for "managed solutions" (as opposed to building alterations) we do not have an accessible office for disabled persons within the Oxford City area – the nearest compliant office is Talisman House, Bicester.

In 2005/06 financial year Thames Valley Probation (TVP) was informed by Roger Hill, Director of Probation, that funding had been made available in 2006/07 to amalgamate Abingdon, Albion House and Temple Cottage offices based on the recommendations of the former NPD Estates team and in line with the estates strategy outlined in NPD's Business Plan. This reflected the priority given to situations where leases were due to expire and the need to improve efficiency and deal with major maintenance and compliance issues.

The pressing needs to be addressed are to achieve ~

- DDA/fire compliance.
- Consistency of Offender Management Unit functioning (individual offices currently have a variable ability to achieve OM model structure due to building and location constraints).
- Optimal staffing to enable cover for all aspects of operations (Cowley, Abingdon and Banbury offices often struggle to achieve adequate cover to stay open on Health & Safety grounds).
- Maximised interventions input (i.e. more room for programmes, supervision centre etc.).
- Economies of scale through process and systems efficiency via single-site administration
- Improved building maintenance efficiency.
- Enhanced partnership profile - a large building would enable us to host partnership events/meetings, which are not feasible currently.
- Staffing expansion (via new funding to enhance community sentencing).
- Continuity of service past the lease expiry of Albion House in March 2010.

## 6. The Options

This section sets out the options that were considered in deciding on the preferred scheme:-

- Option 1 “Do Nothing”
- Option 2 “Do Minimum”: Retain current offices, renew leases on Oxford\* and Banbury and undertake essential building regulations compliance work (\*not possible).
- Option 3: Acquire premises and relocate from Abingdon, Cowley, Banbury and Oxford.

### Option 1 “Do Nothing”

#### Proposed Works

- There are no works associated with this option.

#### Advantages

- No immediate additional capital or resource costs.

#### Disadvantages

- Staff working in offices that are not compliant with regulations.
- Continued operation from offices which are not fit for purpose.
- Restricted operation at Oxford due to the shortage of space.
- Inability to provide service after lease expiry of Oxford in 2010 and Banbury in 2011.
- Continued difficulties in achieving consistency of service delivery, maximising interventions and operating efficiency, with restrictions on future expansion of the service.

#### Costs

Item	Cost / (Saving or Revenue)
<b>Non-Recurring Costs</b>	<b>£</b>
Capital costs	
Resource costs – cash	
Resource costs – non cash	
Profit from sale of freehold available for re-investment	
Dilapidations	
Contingency	
Irrecoverable VAT	
<b>Total</b>	
<b>Annual Operating Costs</b>	<b>£p.a.</b>
Non-pay costs	
Staff costs	
<b>Total</b>	

Key assumptions ~

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**Option 2 “Do Minimum”: Retain current offices, renew leases on Oxford and Banbury and undertake essential building regulations compliance work**

**Proposed Works**

- Renew leases on Oxford\* and Banbury (\*not possible).
- Undertake minimum works necessary to comply with building regulations.

**Advantages**

- Ensures that offices comply with building regulations, but at no small cost.
- Avoids loss of service on lease expiry of Oxford in 2010 and Banbury in 2011.

**Disadvantages**

- Continued operation from offices which are not fit for purpose and expensive to make so.
- Restricted operation at Oxford due to the shortage of space at all locations there.
- Continued difficulties in achieving consistency of service delivery, maximising interventions and operating efficiently.
- Restrictions on future expansion of the service.

**Costs**

Item	Cost / (Saving or Revenue)
<b>Non-Recurring Costs</b>	<b>£</b>
Capital costs	
Resource costs – cash	
Resource costs – non cash	
Sale proceeds for re-investment	
Dilapidations	
Contingency	
Irrecoverable VAT	
<b>Total</b>	
<b>Annual Operating Costs</b>	<b>£p.a.</b>
Non-pay costs	
Staff costs	
<b>Total</b>	

Key assumptions ~

**Option 3: Acquire premises and relocate from Abingdon, Cowley, Banbury and Oxford**

**Proposed Works**

The aim is to have a fit for purpose core office for the Oxfordshire Division, within the Oxford City/Osney/Botley Road area. The core office will be large enough to allow room for growth and be flexible enough to allow change to working practices as and when required. The property needs to accommodate 120 or so staff. Judging by the current numbers of offenders on our books, there will be approximately 650 offenders through the door each week for supervision, groupwork, B2E, specialist drug and alcohol appointments. It is envisaged that this office will mirror the facilities at Reading, Greyfriars House site (we relocated to here in May 2006), refurbished in line with the “Design Standards”. The offender population in the Oxfordshire division is, however, greater than the Reading area so offender facilities will need to be enhanced to manage this demand.

- Trajan House, Mill Street, Oxford, has been identified as a suitable property. It meets TVP’s needs in terms of location, is ideally placed for the rail station and bus routes, is of the right size and has no other tenants. The property is a two storey building (with a proposed third floor - planning permission is being sought). Informal discussions have indicated that the planners are amenable to this development. Suitable property in Oxford, of the size required, is few and far between. Trajan House is sited in a preferred location, meets policy criteria,

hence is a real find and one that cannot be dismissed without very careful consideration.

### **Advantages**

- Operations concluded from offices which are not fit for purpose.
- Un-restricted operation at Oxford due to the extra space.
- Easier to achieve consistent service delivery, interventions and operations.
- Facilitates future expansion of the service.

Funding was made available in the 2005/06 financial year by the then NPD Estates team to enable the Oxfordshire re-site to be realised. This has not happened because of changes in probation estate management, as opposed to any in TVP's business. The shortcomings in the aforementioned properties are the same now, although more pressing, as they were over five years ago when the issues were first brought to the attention of NPD Estates.

- To provide a core, fit for purpose office to house the entire operation for the Oxfordshire Division under one roof, providing optimal staffing mass to enable cover for all aspects and risks of operations. The office will provide a safe working environment and conform to necessary legislation from a fire risk/health and safety perspective. There will be ~ the necessary secure offender area away from the staff working area; CCTV and pinpoint alarm systems in situ; one-way mirrors; alternative exit routes, etc; adequate space to allow us to expand; sufficient Interview/groupwork rooms to enable us to deliver the vast number of accredited programmes and other core groupwork needs; B2E assessments; supervision centres; a sound training facility for staff and sufficient meeting space/quiet rooms, etc; well designed, open plan areas with cellular offices for Managers; tea points and a staff area; good toilet/shower facilities; photocopier and storage areas.

Do optimum – it is envisaged that this option will support TVP's present operational needs and any future requirements for at least ten years.

### **Disadvantages**

Insofar as TVP is concerned, there no disbenefits are associated with this option. To stay as we are will cause increasing difficulties that will inevitably come to a head when the lease on Albion House expires in 2010. To stay as we are poses more of a risk due to the inadequate facilities ~ the lack of secure offender areas with the necessary security systems; the fire precaution needs not meeting statutory requirements; the offices no longer large enough to meet the numbers of staff/offenders that work / are supervised on these premises week in week out.

Finding the required solution has proved difficult. This raises the question as to what happens in the interim and how we address it. There is also the need to maintain access to offenders in outlying areas. It is accepted that there will be the inevitable temporary, instability of staff and the likelihood of a temporary drop in performance during the course of securing a suitable property, the tender/specification/fit-out stages and the final relocation.

Some staff will inevitably leave due to the need to relocate and a small number of posts will be reduced, where there will be the one facility as opposed to four (e.g. reception and security staff) plus the ability to provide more flexible working arrangements, i.e. all staff working, in the main, from one site. Offenders will be dealt with more efficiently as the building will be fit for purpose and will have the required secure offender facilities to meet the needs of interviewing/groupwork. Staff will also have an open plan working environment with much needed meeting/training facilities. It is anticipated that the maintenance of a single facility, of a suitable standard, will be easier to manage and be more cost-effective than the current four properties.

Costs	
	<b>Cost / (Saving or Revenue)</b>
	<b>£000</b>
<b>Non-Recurring Costs</b>	
	<b>£000 p.a.</b>
<b>Annual Operating Costs</b> increase (decrease)	

Key assumptions:-

- The Abingdon office has been estimated to realise about £ when sold, whilst Temple Cottage is expected to realise £ as offices or possibly £ if planning consent is given for residential use.
- At present, it is unknown exactly what major plant will be the responsibility of HOPG. However, the identified property, Trajan House, will be undergoing a full refurbishment to bring it up to Class A specification and, as such, normal, essential maintenance programmes will be in place thereafter.

## 7. The Preferred Option

The preferred option is Option 3 0 - Acquire new premises and relocate staff from Abingdon, Cowley, Banbury and Oxford. It is the only option that adequately addresses the business needs.

Key project details	
Start Date	a.s.a.p.
Completion Date	estimated late 2009
Duration:	26 weeks for TVP fit out, following completion of developer extension works. Construction period estimated at 35 weeks.
Total Non-Recurring Costs	see above
Change in Annual Operating Costs	

Spend Profile					
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Non-Recurring Costs	Capital				
	Resource				
	Total	over ten years			
Operating Costs (vs. current)					

## 8. Other Projects that could be undertaken at the same time

- There are no other projects identified that should be undertaken at the same time.

## 9. Conclusion

The proposal represents an updated version of one developed and submitted several years ago. The previous submission was approved but then affected by the reclassification of capital. The urgency of the proposal has increased year on year and now the timescales for replacement of existing leasehold properties is very tight. The pressing need to leave both of the freehold properties is self-evident; they have not been fit for purpose for some years. We are now in the position that not one of our properties across Oxfordshire is DDA compliant and all reasonable adjustments that could be made have been made. We cannot accommodate the growth in staff and variety of services to be delivered. We cannot provide programme delivery rooms to meet the demand or the standard. Interview facilities are insufficient and in two offices we fail to provide the necessary separation to safeguard staff.

The risks of not progressing this proposal are considerable for Thames Valley Probation. It is necessary, proportionate and thought through.

The main driver for this scheme is the PS policy of concentrating resources into and on main centres that will facilitate efficient and sustainable activity. The current location in Oxford must be vacated in early 2010 when the lease expires. A replacement building will be required and the most suitable (for operations and much else) has been found at Trajan House. This has the exceptional attribute of being centrally placed within Oxford itself and the geography of the Oxfordshire division, both being at the hub of the town and county public transport network. No other local town offers the same inter-connections and have been ruled-out of consideration for this reason.

Premises have been sought on local business parks, etc., to attempt cost savings but the rents quoted have been of the same order as Trajan House without concomitant benefits. Nowhere has been found that would avoid the initial fit-out expenditure. A long-term satisfactory solution will not be attained trying to save a small value. Oxford city is a place that attracts a premium on property. As we must have a presence there a realistic price has to be paid. Multiple searches have been made but that unproductive process cannot continue as the timescale for acquisition of a new site, planning for and executing the move to it, must be commenced before the end of 2008 to avoid the real risk of disruption to service.

### executive summary

	Cost / (Saving or Revenue)	
	proposed £000	
<b>Project Costs</b>		
Refurbishment (major) works		
Revenue works (cash)		
Revenue works (non-cash)		
Deficit (Surplus) on disposal		
Dilapidations		
Contingency		
VAT (non-recoverable)		
<b>Total</b>		
<b>Operating Costs</b>	proposed £000 p/a	current £000 p/a
Staff		
Non-pay (estimate of actual)		

Revenue (non-cash)
VAT (non-recoverable)
<b>Total</b>