

# **PROPOSED PROBATION OFFICE IN TRAJAN HOUSE, MILL STREET, OXFORD**

## **Questions and Answers**

### **Why are you relocating now?**

- Our main Oxford City site has a lease that runs out in March 2010 and the landlords wish to develop the site for student accommodation.
- Also our other Oxford City site, in Temple Cowley, is inadequate and not fit for purpose or development. Incidentally, it is in a residential setting.

### **Why are you wanting to consolidate all your services into Oxford City?**

- We are not: we provide programmes at Bicester for many offenders from North and Central Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.
- Also our Community Payback scheme which used to be based in Osney Mead, is organised in Bicester.
- Our Abingdon office is in a listed building and is unsuitable for its purpose or development and the transport links to Abingdon from any where except Oxford are not good.
- Our Banbury office is often not full because staff have to work at other locations as many offenders come from the Witney or Bicester area. They can travel more easily to Oxford than to Banbury. We will however be retaining a presence in Banbury possibly co-locating part of the team with a partnership agency.
- It will reduce staff travel time.
- By putting so many offenders in one place we can arrange economies of scale and make cost savings for the tax payer without compromising public protection (staff cover, frequency of provision, needs of specific groups) and make it worthwhile for other organisations to provide services in our premises.

### **What sort of offenders will use Mill Street?**

- The full range of offenders will be required to report there on occasions in order for us to write reports about them for the courts, or as part of their supervision under a court order or licence. For example, a drink drive programme is run on Saturdays. All of them will be known to us and therefore to the police.
- Services for offenders to help them overcome some of their skills gaps would include information advice and guidance about literacy, numeracy and social skills; support to access accommodation; help with finance management and debt counselling.
- Offenders educational and training needs are addressed in separate community adult education settings across the Thames Valley. These services are provided under the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) that is separately managed by the Learning and Skills Council. Employment advice is similarly provided at other locations by JobCentre+.

- We also work with the victims of serious and violent crime and will use this office for the Oxfordshire part of that service.
- We will also do some staff training there.

**Will there be groups of intimidating young men – or their friends – hanging around at or near Trajan House?**

There is no evidence that this will be the case. Most offenders come to their appointments on their own, but there will be a waiting area inside the office and a designated area outside where offenders and staff will be able to smoke. This area will be covered by our own CCTV.

**What about the nearby nurseries that the offenders will have to pass to reach the office?**

- There are no nurseries or schools in Mill Street.
- There are almost no locations that are good for public transport access that do not require offenders going past some schools, nurseries, parks, etc. Mill Street is actually more accessible with fewer such locations than many others.
- We like to establish relations with neighbours and would be keen to have periodic meetings with residents, or residents associations to exchange information and share concerns and solutions. We seek to do this most often in our residential settings, of which there are two in Oxford.
- With the police and others we are involved in Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements to manage more high risk offenders. They can consider whether some level of disclosure is appropriate in certain cases – to a school or nursery, or estate office or club. That largely concentrates on where people will live (Trajan House is not intended for residential use), but also includes where they might work or spend their time.

**Why did you choose Mill Street?**

- What we sought was an Oxford City location on the market, which could accommodate our plans for consolidation and which was close to bus, coach and train stations. Trajan House was the only such location identified over a lengthy period for the time that we first submitted our business plan to the Home Office Property General, who are responsible for all property management nationally (it used to be local until 2003).
- Mill Street is only 5 minutes walk from the train station, 10 minutes walk from the bus station; Abingdon and Park and Ride buses stop nearby. Mill Street is only 15 minutes from Courts and from Council Offices, etc.

**Would it not be better located in the City Centre, near the courts and police station?**

- This would not make a difference – offenders can get to the office easily and will have no reason to stay in the area once the office is closed. Our staff also attend courts in Banbury, Witney, Bicester and Didcot and it makes little difference for offenders attending to report to supervising officers.
- On the rare occasion police are needed they can provide a mobile unit. Some offenders have to report to police stations, but always in their local areas.

- Service maps of the City include Mill Street within the City Centre.

### **Why not find a location somewhere (anywhere) else in Oxford?**

What we sought was an Oxford City location on the market, which could accommodate our plans for consolidation and which was close to bus, coach and train stations. Trajan House was the only such location identified over a lengthy period for the time that we first submitted our business plan to the Home Office Property General, who are responsible for all property management nationally (it used to be local until 2003).

### **We think crime will go up in our street?**

- We know of no evidence at all to suggest that properties near probation offices are more vulnerable or that people living and working near probation offices are more vulnerable.
- The police attend our offices for meetings quite often, the neighbourhood officers will have regular contact with our staff.
- We have supervised offenders in the Mill Street area before – we have provided offenders to projects to improve the area and make it safer, and we are keen to ensure offenders are given visible hard work to make reparation to the wider community against which they have offended.
- It is worth remembering that offenders coming to the office do so as part of their punishment by the courts. If they fail to attend or do not co-operate they are taken back to court or returned to prison.
- Thames Valley has a very positive record of enforcing orders and licences and of effectively managing higher risk offenders in the community through stringent assessment and rigorous enforcement. Where we think risk cannot be managed we work with the police to have people taken out of the community.
- Following rumours, we can confirm there is no probation hostel, or office in Iffley Road

### **Why can't we have consultation? Why did you not tell us before?**

- All probation offices in the country are B1 office designated. We have never consulted before in Thames Valley or elsewhere because there is no change of use.
- We are happy to consult about how to make local residents as confident and reassured as we can, and are keen to establish relationships with local residents, tenants associations, police, schools, British Rail, etc.
- The lease has not been signed yet. We considered that there was no advantage in getting into local discussions unless the lease was guaranteed – for us or for local people and businesses.
- There has been no such reaction about any of our offices before, even in very obvious residential locations and we are surprised and disappointed at the nature and vehemence of the reaction to our plans.

### **What will be the impact on traffic numbers?**

- Many/most offenders do not have cars and have to use public transport.

- Most of our staff already have to use public transport as we have no parking spaces in the City Centre office and hardly any in Abingdon or Cowley. Our staff use Park and Ride.
- We have almost no deliveries to the office – only stationery, occasional caterers; our visitors tend to be police or housing or partner agencies.
- The impact of the development of the building is not likely to be more significant than any other development on that site. We would readily have discussions about the impact of the building works in due course.

**What about the offenders? Will they not feel exposed having to go down a residential street where most people recognise one another? Are they less likely to comply?**

Most offenders have had to deal with the shame of being identified often, in their home areas or in the press. They are already in the wider community and face its disapproval. They attend probation offices as part of their punishment.

Offenders have to travel already for different appointments as part of their order or licences. To Bicester for Community Payback or some groups; to Oxford or Abingdon or Banbury for interviews and assessment. There is no evidence that the length of journey involved makes some people less likely to comply, or even be less punctual.

**Do you feel you have risked the good will of many supportive citizens as a result of these proposals?**

We have appreciated the supportive comments about our work in many of the letters that have been sent to challenge our proposals. We know we need the support of communities if we are to work successfully, and if offenders are to be successfully rehabilitated and the public protected. We hope we can work with local residents and businesses to allay many of the fears which we think are exaggerated, and to investigate those which we think have more force. We do understand fear of crime as well as crime itself.

**Value for Money and Procurement Rules**

Thames Valley Probation put forward the business case based on arguments for effectiveness and efficiency, rather than simple cost saving. We pay per square metre whatever and where ever the office is. We are not directly involved in the procurement or identification of the property or the contractors or the developers. We made our case and then took the view that the identified premises and location would be suitable.

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