

The process Thames Valley Probation (TVP) has had to undertake for a new office in Oxford:

TVP doesn't own its properties. Management of the National Probation estate is the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice as the estate is treated as a part of the Government's overall civil estate.

The estate strategy decisions are taken by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) within the Ministry of Justice. NOMS makes use of Home Office shared services' General Property team (HOPG) to execute property transactions and delivering accommodation projects. HOPG employs contractors that provide these services to a range of clients including NOMS.

When a probation area needs a new building, it submits an outline business case justifying, very simply, the reasons as to why it's needed. If approved, a property search is instructed through HOPG's estate management contractor, in this case DTZ.

They then come back to the probation area with suitable properties within the search criteria and then the probation area will go through the list with the estate management contractor and jointly visit all properties. The probation area then completes its full business case, recommending the most suitable property.

All the costing figures are prepared by NOMS centrally and then the full business case goes to the national probation property board who decide if it will be approved.

In Thames Valley, we first started asking for funding for a new Oxford office in 2005 but funding was not confirmed at the time. In February 2008, NOMS gave us the go ahead for a search and we outlined the search criteria and, in April 2008, DTZ came back to us with the initial list of properties. The process above was then followed, all properties in the search were examined carefully against the criteria and we submitted our business case in July 2008, recommending Trajan House as the suitable building.

The business case was approved by the Probation Property Board in late 2008.

In January this year there was a meeting with representatives from HOPG and TVP to discuss taking this forward and business case project management consultants were appointed in March.

Before we could go any further, the news was leaked to the press and the West Oxford campaign against it began.

Since then, we have held an open day in Oxford to give more details of our plans and agreed to a 6-week freeze on negotiations over Trajan House. This has given time for appointment of an additional local agent, with detailed knowledge of the area and our criteria. The agents have re-examined the 13 sites in the original search, plus examination of new ones which have been added in (including ones put forward by WOCAMP protesters).

The deadline for that six week freeze is August 14, 2009, when a report will be returned to HOPG

The timing and nature of decisions that the Ministry of Justice then take will depend on the outcome of that report. It may be, for instance, that in a wider public interest,

commercial considerations may preclude a speedy announcement about the selection of a particular property.

We will have to wait and see what the report contains.

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