

Welcome to this edition of Peabody and Oxford City Council's newsletter to update the community on the regeneration of Blackbird Leys

You may know that we submitted a planning application to the Oxford City Council planning authority for the Blackbird Leys regeneration project in February 2023.

This newsletter is a Q&A with more information about the **details in the planning application, its current status, and next steps for the community centre.**



Q&A

Update on the project

A planning application was submitted in February 2023. We expect that this will be decided by the local planning authority in summer 2023.

What do the proposals include?

Oxford City Council and Peabody (formerly Catalyst) are working together to bring new homes, shops and community spaces to the heart of Blackbird Leys. The project focuses on the District Centre (including the 'top shops' and Blackbird Leys Community Centre) and land between Knights Road and the Kassam Stadium.

Across the two sites, the plans include 294 new affordable homes, as well as a new community centre and shop spaces, landscaped green and open space and other community benefits.

The housing will include 174 rented homes and 120 as shared ownership. All homes will have areas to work, and access to private outdoor space (either a garden or a balcony).

What’s happened with the project so far?

In 2019, Oxford City Council and Peabody partnered up to deliver the regeneration. We’ve since led over three years of engagement with people who live in Blackbird Leys, including more than 15 events, both in person and online. Many of the ideas in our planning application come from feedback from the community – thank you again to everyone who has been involved.

Throughout this, we’ve faced some challenges that have caused delays in the programme. This includes how the project is funded, and wider factors affecting many projects like inflation and price increases. These are still being worked through, and we will continue to monitor this risk. The Blackbird Leys development project is an important focus for both Peabody and Oxford City Council, and we are working hard to make sure this will be delivered.

What’s happened since the planning application was submitted?

Since we submitted our planning application in February, Peabody and Oxford City Council have decided that some of the designs should be updated before the decision of the application. This is because of changes in regulations around building safety and environmental performance. It’s also to stay ahead of other changes to regulations that we expect from government. These changes will protect the development for the future and will have minor impact on the overall scheme.

The main changes include:

- Adding an additional staircase in Block A, to provide an extra escape route in the event of a fire
- Changing a two-bedroom flat on each floor in Block A to a one-bedroom flat, to create space for the additional staircase
- Small changes to some of the building layouts to allow for the added staircase

Where can you find out more about this?

If you're interested in more details of revisions, you can read about them on Oxford City Council's planning portal via bit.ly/blackbirdleys (reference number: 23/00405). The document 'Planning addendum' has a summary of the key changes made since the application was submitted in February 2023.

You can also view a summary document of our February 2023 planning application via the Blackbird Leys website at www.blackbirdleys.co.uk.

How have Oxford City Council and Peabody engaged the community so far, and what engagement is still to come?

Since 2019, we have held over 15 events both in person and virtually, carried out door knocks and leaflet drops, and offered one-to-one phone calls and meetings.

There have been over 1,500 comments from the community, with almost 500 people attending our events. More information about this can be read in the Statement of Community Involvement, which is on Oxford City Council's planning portal here: bit.ly/blackbirdleys.

The table below is a summary of engagement so far, and what we expect next steps to look like.

The process so far	
March 2019	We first shared the vision for Blackbird Leys with the community.
April / May 2019	We held public events, including drop-ins, community centre meetings, pop-ups, school workshops and community planning days.
March 2020	We began developing proposals, and we asked the community to feed back on plans at consultation events.
October / November 2020	We held a detailed design consultation for the community on the Knights Road and District Centre sites.
March 2021	We continued our detailed design consultation. This focused on the community centre and the wider District Centre.

August / November 2021	We held a further consultation on the Knights Road and District Centre sites.
February 2023	The planning application was submitted to Oxford City Council.
March 2023	Following submission, we held events to update the community on the plans.
May 2023	We submitted some revisions to the planning application.
What's next?	
Summer 2023	The planning application will be decided by Oxford City Council.
Summer / autumn 2023	Community centre engagement: We'll hold further events with chances for the community to contribute to the design of the community centre. We'll then ask for feedback on detailed plans.
Autumn 2023	If approved, early work could begin on site.
Winter 2023 / 2024	We aim to submit a further detailed application to Oxford City Council planning authority for the community centre.
2024	The detailed application for the community centre will be decided by Oxford City Council planning authority, and work will continue on site.
2025	Phase one work (including the community centre) should complete.

Community centre

The community centre is central to Blackbird Leys, and we're committed to delivering it at the same time as the new homes.

We listened to feedback from the early stages of the project, and we understand how important the facility is – we want to create it together with the community. This will make sure it is fit-for-purpose, well designed and meets the needs of all future groups.



Why was detail for the community centre not included in the February 2023 planning application?

In our February 2023 planning application, we included an 'outline' plan for the community centre and public spaces around Block A. Given the size of the proposals, we had always planned to submit an outline application.

We would then follow up with a detailed application for the community centre, working with residents as part of a separate, dedicated consultation process. We explained this during community engagement in 2021. Hybrid approaches like this are also quite common, especially on large sites such as this.

As the local planning authority needed several months to review our planning application, we had planned to engage with the community during this time. We would then submit a detailed application ahead of decision by the local planning authority on the overall application.

This was so that proposals for the community centre would 'catch up' – and be looked at together with the planning application. Unfortunately, the challenges we've mentioned caused delays to the design process. Now that we've submitted our planning application, we're focused on working with residents of Blackbird Leys on the design of the community centre.

What do next steps for consulting the community look like?

You are vital to shaping our proposals. We are planning a series of sessions for later in the year, which will be a mix of in-person workshops and events. There will also be chances for you to share your views online. [We'll provide further details about next steps shortly.](#)

Oxford City Council is working with specialists who are experts in community engagement and will help make sure the Blackbird Leys community is at the centre of the design process. You'll be able to speak with the architects and other members of the design team who are bringing the community centre to life.

Will Oxford City Council and Peabody need planning permission for detail on the community centre as well?

Yes – we are aiming to submit a further detailed application in winter 2023/24. This will have technical information about the community centre's layout and appearance. We are committed to completing the community centre before new houses are retail units are occupied. Oxford City Council's communities team is supporting tenants to find other spaces in the meantime, and many already have other venues lined up.

What is the proposed size of the new community centre, and is this bigger or smaller than the current space?

The proposed minimum area for the new community centre is 1,200 sqm – we set this out in our planning application. While the total area will be smaller than the existing space, which is 1,636 sqm, only 1,431 sqm of this can be let. A higher amount of the new community centre will be usable.

This is because the new centre will have a more efficient layout. We'll achieve this through better distribution of rooms and facilities like toilets, which will make the space more practical, flexible and accessible.

How will Oxford City Council and Peabody make sure the new centre caters to the community?

We are planning to work with current and future tenants to decide the exact mix of uses within the community centre. We'll need to make sure that it is designed for the future, meaning that there are lots of different spaces which meet the changing future needs of the community.

How was the location of the community centre chosen?

The community centre's location was explored in early public workshops. The current location was first presented to residents in June 2019, following our first and second stage of engagement. A drawing of this map can be viewed on page 30 of the Statement of Community Involvement that was submitted as part of the planning application.



Retail space

The amount of retail space that can be let in the new scheme will be larger than it is currently.

How big is the proposed retail space?

The proposed retail area is over 900 sqm of lettable space. This is larger than the current lettable area of 853 sqm – the final number will depend on the locations of partition walls, which are currently undefined to allow flexibility.

The overall area in the proposals, including back-of-house servicing, is up to 1,211 sqm of retail and commercial floorspace. The existing retail area is up to 1,417 sqm overall.

How will the new retail space be better for businesses and customers?

The new retail units will fit modern space standards, and will offer combined back-of-house servicing. This will include access, heating, energy, mechanical plant provision, a shared retail refuse store and an underground sprinkler tank, in line with modern fire safety regulations.

This will create more efficient and usable space for tenants, as individual shop-units will not need their own bins or mechanical plant equipment.

Overall, the modern design, generous floor-to-ceiling heights, and building structure separating retail space from homes above will provide much greater flexibility and a more efficient layout of retail units.

What about current tenants? Will they be guaranteed space?

All current commercial tenants have been told they will have the opportunity to lease the new units.



Parking

We have made sure that no existing parking spaces at the District Centre are lost – the current number is 44, and this will stay the same.

What parking will be provided at the District Centre as part of proposals?

There are 44 parking spaces included in proposals for the District Centre. This will be parking for existing residents, short-stay car parking for community uses, and for customers visiting the retail units. There will also be three new car club spaces, and wheelchair accessible homes will each have their own parking space.

All other homes will be car free, in line with local policy from Oxfordshire County Council. While there will be no standard residential parking for new residents, there will be some retained car parking for existing residents.

What about parking at Knights Road?

At Knights Road, there will be one car parking space per home, which is 84 in total, as well as one car club parking space

Contact details

Thank you for reading this edition of the Blackbird Leys newsletter.

If you have any questions or would like further information about the Blackbird Leys regeneration, you can contact us at bblregen@oxford.gov.uk or visit www.blackbirdleys.co.uk.