



Hotel trade is booming

AN Oxford hotel is set for a major expansion due to a growing demand for rooms in the city. Bosses at the Oxford Spires Four Pillars hotel have applied for planning permission for a new building in the existing grounds that will provide a further 57 bedrooms, extend the dining room and add another 20 car parking spaces. Regional general manager, Wendy Procter (pictured), said: "We have found that in Oxfordshire and Oxford in particular that there is a shortage of beds which is a great position to be in but we are having to turn away business. "There is high demand both from the corporate and leisure markets with major employers such as BMW and the business and science parks, while a lot of people simply want to spend a weekend in Oxford. It is tremendously positive, despite the economy."

The Spires Four Pillars is already the biggest hotel in the city with 220 bedrooms. In 2011 £900,000 was spent on the 16th-century Eastwyke House in the grounds to create ten more boutique bedrooms. Ms Procter declined to say how



much would be spent on the planned extension but she hoped work would start by the second quarter of next year. A planning application has now been submitted to the city council and a meeting with nearby residents to enable them to study the plans has already taken place.

If it is given the green light the development will be the second recent major expansion of a Four Pillars Hotel. Work on the Oxford Thames Four Pillars at Sandford is nearing completion. It will include 22 new bedrooms, a conservatory, gazebo and additional dining and conference space. The Oxford hotel scene is flourishing with the opening of the Vanburgh House Hotel in St Michael's Street last November. Revised plans for a new 83-bedroom Travelodge, also on Abingdon Road, will go before Oxford's West Area Planning Committee on April 25.

Eco-design for Gateway

Two new buildings for St Antony's College in Oxford have been unveiled. The five-storey Gateway Buildings will house 30 staff and offer en-suite accommodation for 54 students. There is also space for conferences and a new porters' lodge. The £11m project was officially opened by businessman and diplomat His Excellency Ghassan I Shaker, after whom one of the buildings is named. The Gateway Buildings include a range of features from 'passive design' principles, such as sensible glazing ratios, natural ventilation

and planted roofs to renewables systems such as ground source heat pumps fed from pipework under the lawned quadrangle and solar arrays for hot water production. Professor Margaret MacMillan, warden of St Antony's, said: "This is a hugely important project for the college both in terms of the increased accommodation and the related income stream it brings us, but also in giving us a new identity that enhances the pride among fellows, staff, and students. "We are sure the Gateway Buildings will greatly aid us in what is becoming an increasingly

competitive global market for post-graduate education." Julian Lipscombe, director of Bennetts Associates which designed the buildings, added: "It is enormously satisfying to add our first completed project to the rich architectural showcase of this remarkable city." Pictured, from left, are Professor Margaret MacMillan, Warden of St Antony's College; his Excellency Ghassan I Shaker; Julian Lipscombe, Director at Bennetts Associates Architects; Professor Nick Rawlins, Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Oxford (Development and External Affairs).

Depot plan could create 700 new jobs for Didcot

A NEW Tesco depot could be one of dozens of businesses creating hundreds of new jobs on the edge of Didcot. London-based Reef Estates wants to develop a 132-acre site bordered by the former power station, a landfill site and the A4130. It comes as Tesco announced it was looking to open a dotcom centre in the area, to serve the chain's online shoppers. Tesco would not say whether a specific site had been chosen, but the developer said its plans would suit that type of use. Reef Estates managing director Piers Slater said the site offered 44.9 acres for employment, a further 17.2 acres for farming, and 70 acres for football, rugby, cricket, tennis, and athletics.

He said 750 jobs could be created in the first phase of development, with projected total employment of 2,000 people. Mr Slater said: "This is a fantastic opportunity offering easy access to Didcot railway station and the Ladygrove estate. The site is ideal for development as it is bounded by the power station, A4130, and landfill to the rear. "I know Didcot well and I know there is a major demand for new leisure facilities and new pitches." Mr Slater said the site would suit all Internet-related distribution uses, and expected demand from the retail and logistics sectors. Tesco spokeswoman Beth Greenhouse said the depot could employ about 700 staff — but could not provide details regarding a

specific site for the development. The land that Reef Estates wants to develop is close to Didcot, but is in the Vale of White Horse District Council area. Vale council spokesman Gavin Walton said: "Our development team is not aware of this proposed development and look forward to the developer contacting them." Didcot Town Council leader Margaret Davies added: "We have not yet been approached by Reef Estates but we will not rule out any option in our search for recreational land. There appear to be quite a number of companies looking to invest, right on the edge of Didcot." Last month Mrs Davies revealed that the town council had launched a £1m bid to turn fields on the edge of Didcot into sports pitches.