
Meeting: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 24 January 2012

Subject: Site Allocations Policy HA4 – Development Brief for Land West of Abbey Lane, Ampthill

Report of: Cllr Matthews, Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Economic Development

Summary: The report recommends that Sustainable Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the Development Brief and that Executive adopt it as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.

Given the short lead-in times between Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee, a verbal update (together with any Overview and Scrutiny recommendation) will be given at Executive Committee (14th February 2012).

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities

Contact Officer: Trevor Saunders, Assistant Director Planning

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: Ampthill

Function of: Executive

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS
Council Priorities:
1. The Development Brief will support the Council priority of managing growth effectively.
Financial:
2. The creation of the Development Brief does not represent a financial burden on the Council. The costs for creating the Development Brief have been borne in their entirety by the promoters. Furthermore, a Planning Performance Agreement (a collaborative project management tool) has been entered into which secured funding for the administration and supervision of the Development Brief and subsequent determination of future outline planning applications.

Legal:

3. None.

Risk Management:

4. Policy HA4 of the Site Allocations DPD makes clear the requirement for the production of a Development Brief for the site. A failure to endorse the Development Brief and determine any subsequent planning applications in accordance with the agreed Planning Performance Agreement timelines may result in the Council being forced to pay back a meaningful proportion of the monies secured through the Planning Performance Agreement.
5. An adopted Development Brief will give more certainty to the development management process.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

6. Not applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

7. Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and to foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Site Allocations DPD Equality Impact assessment highlighted the need for:

- The delivery of affordable housing within towns and villages throughout Central Bedfordshire north area.
- The selection of housing sites on the basis that that future residents live in locations close to services and public transport routes.
- Provision of land for community facilities.
- New employment units allocated close to centres of population in order to increase job opportunities locally and help to address unemployment and out-commuting.

The DPD EIA concluded that the emphasis placed on ensuring that developments are allocated within sustainable locations and ensuring that residents are able to access employment opportunities, facilities and services to meet their everyday needs should help to ensure a positive impact for all sections of the community.

8. In addition data suggests that there will be also be a rapid increase in the elderly population in coming years. Providing appropriate accommodation for this age group will therefore also become a priority. In order to provide accommodation for the increasing elderly population, development briefs and masterplans for large housing sites should make provision for housing suitable for the increasing elderly population and for disabled people, through the provision of Lifetime Homes.

Section 27 of the report highlights the key objectives of the development brief, many of which will address key equality issues.

Community Safety:

9. The Council will need to ensure that it complies with its statutory duties under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act and that all plans fulfil the criteria set down for community safety within the Adopted Central Bedfordshire Design Guide.

Sustainability:

10. Within the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (DPD) for Central Bedfordshire (North), Ampthill has been identified as a major service centre capable of entertaining additional housing and employment provision. The proposed development would contribute toward the vitality and viability of local facilities thereby reducing the need to travel. Notwithstanding this, the Site Allocations DPD has been the subject of a Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Procurement:

11. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to:-

1. To endorse the Development Brief and recommend to the Executive that it be adopted as technical guidance.

Purpose of the Development Brief

12. The Development Brief provides the background and policy context for the site and its allocation. It sets out the aims for the development to deliver and identifies the constraints and opportunities which any planning application must address.
13. It is a high level document whose purpose is to set out general principles; the more concentrated and detailed work is a matter to be addressed at the planning application stages of the process.

14. Once adopted, the Development Brief will then support the submission of an Outline Planning Application and assist Development Management in determining the application. Design Codes would then follow the grant of an Outline Planning Application.

Background

15. The Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan (2005) identified the Warren Farm site as safeguarded or “white land” excluded from the Green Belt. In November 2009, the Council adopted the Core Strategy and Development Management DPD following an Examination in Public in June/July of the same year. The Core Strategy required the delivery of at least 17,950 new homes between 2001 and 2026 with 5,000 new homes required in addition to those already committed (such as those allocated in the Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan 2005). Of these 5,000, the Core Strategy stated that 250-500 should be provided in Ampthill (Policy CS5) with the Safeguarded Land identified as being brought forward to accommodate these new homes.
16. As part of the documentation prepared in support of the Site Allocations DPD, the Council was required to prepare a housing trajectory to demonstrate that it has allocated sufficient and suitable land to meet both its 5 and 15 year land requirements. The purpose of the housing trajectory is to act as an estimate of when various sites will come forward for development and the rate at which they will be built out. It is not a phasing policy and does not attempt to enforce a strict phasing regime; it simply indicates the priority order in which it is expected that sites will come forward. Within the updated housing trajectory (that was part of the evidence base subject to the Examination), Warren Farm was identified as coming forward in 2012/13. As the Council, our intention remains to review the housing trajectory annually and if sites have not come forward as anticipated, the Council will encourage the earlier development of other allocated sites.
17. In April 2011, the Council formally adopted the Site Allocations DPD (for the former Mid Bedfordshire Area) following an examination in October 2010. Policy HA4 of the Central Bedfordshire Site Allocations DPD (April 2011) allocates the land west of Abbey Lane, Ampthill (now known as Warren Farm) for the development of a minimum of 410 dwellings.
18. A Planning Performance Agreement has been entered into between Central Bedfordshire Council and the Applicants. The Agreement identifies a shared vision and identifies key milestones and timescales for the delivery of a planning decision by both Central Bedfordshire Council and the Applicant. Whilst it offers project management certainty, this does not mean a favourable planning application outcome is guaranteed.
19. A Stakeholder Group was established in June 2011 by Central Bedfordshire Council with assistance from the applicants’ and their consultation team; its purpose to discuss local issues and the emerging Development Brief for the site. As set out in the agreed Terms of Reference, the group has no legal status but exists to provide a forum for local groups and individuals to help inform the creation of the Development Brief and to have an input in the preparation of the application scheme. Beyond the planning application stages, it is hoped that the group can develop into a community based forum.

20. The Stakeholder Group meets monthly and comprises:
- Ampthill Development Action Group (ADAG)
 - Local Members:- Councillor Duckett (Chair), Councillor Smith and Councillor Blair
 - Ampthill Town Council
 - The Greensand Trust
 - REVAMP:-Group established to implement actions within Ampthill Town Plan
 - Ampthill Chamber of Commerce and Trade
 - Ampthill Community Safety Action Group
 - Redborne School
21. A dedicated website was launched (www.warrenfarmampthill.com); its purpose to provide general information, stakeholder agendas and minutes together with a platform for the subsequent public consultation and exhibitions.
22. On 27th October 2011, delegated authority was afforded for the commencement of formal public consultation. The public consultation period ran for a total of 4 weeks which was considered appropriate given the existence of the Stakeholder group.
23. On 17th November 2011, a presentation was given to Development Strategy Task Force. Its purpose was twofold:-
- i) To notify Task Force that consultation had begun
 - ii) To discuss the purposes of the Development Brief and the Warren Farm objectives.
24. The Development Brief was received favourably by Development Strategy Task Force who commented that the brief was fit for purpose.

Consultation

25. Public consultation began 7th November and concluded 5th December 2011. As part of this, a 2 day public exhibition was held 18th and 19th November 2011 to inform local residents in advance of an outline planning application being made in 2012.
26. The exhibition was also attended by a representative of REVAMP (Ampthill stakeholder group) who used the event as a way of seeking public opinion on town centre priority schemes. Whilst not formally part of the consultation exercise for the Development Brief, the REVAMP presence was a valuable way of seeking local opinion on town centre issues with these findings likely to inform any future review of the Ampthill Town Plan.

The Development Brief

27. As a high level document which sets out general principles, our expectation is for the Development Brief to be succinct in its nature; its key objectives being:-
- a) **Housing:-** In accordance with Policy HA4 of the Site Allocations DPD, a target of 410 new dwellings be delivered across the site. This will include the provision of a wide range of housing types and sizes based on an assessment of the need in this area in accordance with Policy DM10 of the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD. Densities will vary across the site to allow the creation of different character areas in order to give the development a sense of place.
 - b) **Affordable Housing:-** In accordance with Policy CS7 of the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD, the objective is to deliver 35% of the total number of houses as affordable. A mix of tenures will be required that includes open market rent, social rented, low cost market rent and shared equity.
 - c) **Planning Obligation:-** The promoters are to enter into a planning obligation in order to make contributions towards necessary community facilities and services in accordance with Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD. This will include the provision of additional school places when required. These contributions will be provided through entering into a S106 Agreement with the Council in accordance with the Planning Obligations Supplementary planning Document (SPD) or any future Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule. As well as new school places, the planning obligation will, where appropriate, also include contributions towards sustainable transport measures, healthcare, sport and recreation facilities, local community facilities and any other requirements as agreed by the Council. Draft Heads of Terms are to be agreed and submitted with the Outline Planning Application.
 - d) **Connectivity across the site:-** The scheme is to allow for convenient movement, whilst ensuring a sense of security to allow the creation of a successful place.
 - e) **Integration with the existing neighbourhood:-** The successful integration of new housing with the existing community, both physically and socially.
 - f) **Access:-** Pedestrian and vehicular access together with the treatment of roads is a key objective.
28. The Development Brief identifies those Constraints which any future planning application will have to consider. A detailed description of these can be found within the Development Brief which is Appended at A.
- a) Topography
 - b) Existing Landscape Features
 - c) Access

- d) Gas Main/Easement
- e) High Pressure Water Main/Easement
- f) Electricity Pylons
- g) Existing Neighbours
- h) Highways Junction Capacity
- i) Utilities Infrastructure Capacity

29. The Development Brief identifies those opportunities which any future planning application will have to consider. A detailed description of these can be found within the Development Brief.

- a) New homes for Ampthill
- b) Quality of Design
- c) Open Spaces
- d) Gateway Features
- e) Positive Integration with the Existing Community
- f) Improved access to the Countryside
- g) Improving Existing Drainage Issues

Analyses from the Consultation Exercise

30. The full results of the public consultation exercise can be found at Appendix B within the Draft Statement of Community Involvement. A final version of the Statement of Community Involvement will be submitted as part of the outline planning application. In brief, 173 visitors attended the exhibitions, 44 feedback forms were completed (and either returned at the exhibition or posted back at a later date). A further 26 responses were received by email including one response from Ampthill Development Action Group which makes reference to an ADAG petition with nearly 2,000 signatures.
31. Objection has been raised on the grounds of prematurity given that Warren Farm is shown not to come forward until 2021/22 (within the previous draft submission Housing Trajectory). Whilst we are mindful of the objection, no weight can be afforded to it given that it is based on a draft submission trajectory which since publication in January 2010 has been superseded following consultation with the developers of the site. As set out at paragraph 16, the Housing Trajectory is not a phasing policy and does not attempt to enforce a strict phasing regime; it simply indicates the priority order in which it is expected that sites will come forward.
32. The high level of attendance and interaction by those who attended the exhibition showed that there is a good level of interest in the scheme proposals and the Development Brief.

33. The consultation on the Development Brief received very little direct feedback with the overwhelming majority of comments being about the principle of development itself, or what residents would like to see included within the application and the development. This suggests that the content of the Brief itself is not contentious.
34. Comments of relevance to the Development Brief include:-
- a) access to and from the site (opportunities and constraints)
 - b) housing numbers
 - c) density
 - d) proportion of affordable housing

Changes to the Development Brief

35. The proposed changes to the Development Brief are also identified at Appendix A (with text underlined – paras. 2.5 and 4.11). Section 2 – “Background and Planning Policy” has been amended to include details of the public consultation exercise and Section 4 – “Constraints” been amended to include reference to S106 contributions toward education provision.
36. The majority of comments received were of a detailed nature directed at the subsequent planning application stages. Whilst valuable, they are not salient to informing the Development Brief given its purpose as a high level document which identifies key principles that include the constraints and opportunities that the site affords. The purpose of the Development Brief is not to be prescriptive in any way. Furthermore adopted Policy prevails and therefore comments which relate to housing numbers and housing density are not pertinent.

Conclusions

37. Consideration has been afforded to the consultation exercise and where necessary, changes made to the Brief. As a technical document, the Development Brief is fit for development management purposes.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Warren Farm Development Brief and Proposed Changes.

Appendix B – Draft Statement of Community Involvement.