
Meeting: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 06 March 2012

Subject: Development Brief - Land at Stanford Road, Shefford

Report of: Cllr Ken Matthews, Executive Member Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development

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

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities

Contact Officer: Carry Murphy, Principal Planning Officer, Local Planning and Housing Team

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: Shefford

Function of: Executive

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Development Brief will support the Council priority of managing growth effectively. |
|--|

Financial:

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. The creation of the development brief will not represent a financial burden on the Council. Many of the costs for creating the development brief have been borne by the promoters. Furthermore, a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA), 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 any future planning applications. |
|---|

Legal:

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. None. |
|--|

Risk Management:

4. Policy HA10 of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (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 PPA timelines may result in the Council being forced to pay back a meaningful proportion of the monies secured through the PPA. An adopted development brief will give more certainty to the development management process, although there are still risks associated with this separate statutory stage such as securing adequate planning obligations to meet the needs of the development and a failure to meet the public's expectations of the development.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. Central Bedfordshire Council has 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.
7. The Site Allocations DPD Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) 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 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.
8. 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.
9. 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, and development briefs 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.

10. Sections 21- 28 of the report highlight the key design principles of the development brief, many of which will address key equality issues such as affordable housing and Lifetime Homes.

Public Health

11. The Assistant Director of Public Health is currently considering any implications and a formal response is expected shortly. This will be verbally reported at the committee meeting.

Community Safety:

12. 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 planning design guides.

Sustainability:

13. The Site Allocation DPD was assessed under the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment requirements as set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 12 (PPS12). The entire document is aimed at promoting and enabling sustainable development and Shefford has been identified to take further housing and employment land growth. The proposed development would contribute toward the vitality and viability of local facilities, thereby reducing the need to travel.

Procurement:

14. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to endorse the Development Brief and recommend to Executive that it be adopted as technical guidance.

Purpose of the Development Brief

15. The draft Development Brief (at Appendix A) provides the background and policy context for this site and its allocation for residential development. It also sets out the aims for the development identifying the particular constraints and opportunities of the site and confirms the range of technical work which any planning application must address.

16. The brief 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. Nevertheless, it does provide a mechanism through which members of the public and other interested parties can have a greater involvement in the development of proposals for the site and provide some certainty as to the future development of the site. Once approved, the brief will act as development management guidance and any future planning applications will be considered against the background of the adopted brief.
17. The Council has been working in partnership with the developers for the site, Bloor Homes, on the preparation of a development brief for this site. Representatives from Bloor Homes have been invited to carry out a short presentation to the Committee to explain the work carried out and to be available to answer any queries relating to their development proposals.

Background

18. In November 2009, the Council adopted the Core Strategy and Development Management DPD (for the former Mid Bedfordshire Area) following an Examination in Public that 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 150-250 should be provided in Shefford (Policy CS5: Providing Homes).
19. In April 2011, the Council formally adopted the Site Allocations DPD following an examination in late 2010. Policy HA10 allocates the land at Stanford Road for approximately 100 dwellings, open space provision and associated infrastructure. There is also a requirement in the policy for a Development Brief to be prepared to help inform subsequent planning applications and guide the development.
20. In preparing the draft brief the Council Officers from a wide range of service areas have been working with the developers Bloor Homes to identify the design principles for this site. A planning performance agreement (PPA) has been entered into between Central Bedfordshire Council and the developer. 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 developer. Whilst it offers project management certainty, this does not mean a favourable planning application outcome is guaranteed.

The Development Brief

21. Land off Stanford Road, Shefford comprises of an 8 hectare site located northwest of the town centre. A location plan is shown on page 6 of the brief.
22. The site is in single ownership and may be described as comprising three distinct areas, as illustrated on page 8 of the document:
 - (a) The developable area to the north of the river Flit beyond its floodplain. Within the curve of Stanford Road, used as arable land;
 - (b) The County Wildlife site, on the north bank of the River Flit; and

(c) The island meadow to the south of the River Flit adjacent to the Millennium Green.

23. In accordance with policy HA10, the brief outlines the range of uses that are considered suitable, subject to details, for the site. The brief aims to ensure that quality design is achieved throughout the development, providing an attractive environment that enhances the existing character of Shefford and its environs.
24. The brief sets out a number of design principles (page 11 onwards with accompanying concept diagram on page 12) to which any development proposals will need to adhere. In particular, housing mix and type (including affordable housing and lifetime housing provision), scale, massing, layout, drainage and landscape requirements will need to be carefully considered. In response to addressing these issues in any layout scheme the developer will need to take account of the site constraints and opportunities associated with the site (identified on pages 9 and 10) together with other relevant urban design principles set out in the Council's adopted Residential Design Guide to address, for example, parking and the street hierarchy.
25. The brief also sets out the Council's specific requirements for access and connectivity both within and immediately surrounding the site. There will be the provision of new roundabout on Stanford Road to serve the new development. There is also an opportunity to improve linkages to existing paths to the south of the site including the provision of a new pedestrian bridge over the river to promote sustainable modes of transport to other parts of Shefford.
26. Given the extent of the green infrastructure to be provided and enhanced as part of the proposed development a high quality landscaping scheme is crucial to its overall success. A landscape concept plan has therefore been prepared and is shown on page 15 of the brief.
27. As set out in the policy HA10, the brief is explicit in that appropriate solutions for dealing with the drainage requirements of the development will need to be investigated and addressed as part of any planning application package.
28. The brief also sets out the Council's requirements for developer contributions in line with the adopted Planning Obligations Strategy.

Public consultation

29. Informal public consultation was carried out jointly with the developer during September 2011. The purpose of the consultation was so that residents and other stakeholders could engage in the process to help shape the brief at an early stage. This included holding a public exhibition in the town at which over 100 people attended and a number of completed questionnaires returned. A copy of the details of the consultation undertaken are summarised in a draft consultation report – see Appendix B.

30. On 22 December 2011, delegated authority was given for the commencement of a formal public consultation exercise. In doing this the Director of Sustainable Communities consulted the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development and Ward Members in respect of the draft document. At their request some amendments to the document were taken on board, prior to the document being finalised for consultation purposes.
31. The consultation period ran for a total of four weeks (from 9 January to 10 February 2012) which was considered an appropriate timescale given the previous consultation undertaken. Residents, consultees and other interested parties were written to by letter and appropriate advertising of the consultation in accordance with established procedures took place. Copies of the document were made available to view on the Council's web-site, at the various Council Offices as well as Shefford Library and Shefford Town Council's offices. A questionnaire was available to fill in and return.
32. A total of 77 completed questionnaires and responses have been received which has shown a good level of interest in the proposals. The comments have primarily been from members of the public residing in a number of different locations within the town. A breakdown of the comments may be found in Appendix C and these will be included in an updated version of the draft consultation report for the Executive meeting on 27th March.
33. A number of comments received have been about the principle of development itself and in the context of Shefford being able to absorb further development. Adopted planning policies also prevail and therefore comments which relate to dwelling numbers, mix and tenure, for example, are not pertinent. Comments have also included suggestions about what residents would like to see included within the development. Whilst valuable, they are not salient to informing the development brief given its purpose is to identify key principles for the site, opportunities and constraints and are therefore more relevant to any subsequent planning application.
34. Some comments of a technical nature from Officers of the Council have also been received and are largely concerned with clarification being made in the brief on the requirements for the development.
35. One further formal response from the Environment Agency has been submitted. This confirms that the Agency is content with the proposed layout of the site and a sequential approach (as detailed within Planning Policy Statement 25: Development and Flood Risk) to locating the more vulnerable built residential development outside of the floodplain and the retention of existing (water compatible) uses within it.

36. As a result of earlier discussions between Officers and Bloor Homes regarding the nature of the links from the site to other parts of Shefford, the questionnaire did ask for views on whether connections should consist of both a footpath and cycle way across the meadow area linking in with existing paths to the south of the site. The results of the consultation indicate that whilst there is support for improved links there are significant concerns about practical arrangements of introducing a cycle track (either separate or shared with a footpath) across the meadow. Also, it has been highlighted any route would need to link in with areas directly beyond the site boundary where there are restrictions for cyclists along some of these routes, for example, the Millennium Green. This feedback has been extremely useful on firming up the extent of the proposed improvements to the paths – see section 38 to 41 below on the proposed changes to the brief.
37. Other comments received of relevance to the development itself are as follows:
- a) Access to and from the site (vehicular, pedestrian and cyclists)
 - b) Use of the meadow area located to the south of the site
 - c) Housing numbers and housing mix
 - d) Density of development
 - e) Heights of buildings
 - f) Drainage and flooding
 - g) Potential impact on the natural environment (including the County Wildlife Site and the river setting)
 - h) Provision of play areas
 - i) Integration with the existing neighbourhood

Changes to the Development Brief

38. Some proposed changes to the development have been identified and these are indicated as underlined text or deletions in the following sections of the document.
39. i) Section 1.6 - has been amended to include details of the most recent public consultation exercise.
- ii) Section 5.14 - further details added on the need for the development to reflect 'Manual Streets 2' technical guidance in relation to the use of shared surfaces for different road users.
- iii) Section 5.15 – The text has been updated to reflect the outcomes of the public consultation referred to in paragraph 36. The intention is that new footpaths to be created in the meadow area should be dedicated as public rights of way. (Section 3.2 – The Context Plan will be updated to illustrate the status of the footpaths in close vicinity to the site.)

- iv) Section 5.18
 - Bullet points 6 and 9 - the document now provides more details on the intended positioning and form of the structural planting.
 - Bullet point 7 - To clarify a locally equipped area of play is to be provided as part of the play facilities for the site.
- v) Section 5.22 - to include a reference on the need to put in place the necessary on-site infrastructure to ensure future connectivity to superfast Broadband services.

40. The updates to diagrams are as follows:

- i) Constraints and Opportunities Plans (pages 9 and 10)
 - Exact locations of Otter Holts removed as this is potentially sensitive data.
- ii) Concept Plan (page 12)
 - Some urban design features have been added to emphasis important design parameters such as key frontages, arrival points and gateway features.
 - Additional footpath through the meadow on a south west desire line has been added.
 - Notation "Future Access" arrow removed.
 - Notation "Village Green" replaced with "Central Open Space".
- iii) Landscape Concept Plan (page 15)
 - Clarity added regarding on-site and off-site buffer planting

Conclusion

41. Consideration has been afforded to the consultation exercise and where appropriate amendments have been made to the Brief. As a technical document, the Development Brief is fit for development management purposes.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Development Brief and proposed changes (February 2012)

Appendix B – Draft Statement of Community Involvement (January 2012)

Appendix C – Summary of consultation responses (February 2012)

Background papers and their location:

Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD

Site Allocations Development Plan Document

Location of papers: Priory House, Chicksands