

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 27 February 2014.

PRESENT

Cllr D McVicar (Chairman)
Cllr A R Bastable (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs K M Collins
Ms A M W Graham
R W Johnstone

Cllrs K C Matthews
B Saunders
P Williams

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs T Nicols

Substitutes: Cllrs

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs P N Aldis Mrs A Barker	Chairman of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
	R D Berry A D Brown	Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development
	I Dalgarno	Deputy Executive Members for Sustainable Communities - Services
	C C Gomm D Jones B J Spurr	Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services
	M A G Versallion	Executive Member for Children's Services
	B Wells	Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services
	R D Wenham	Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
	J N Young	Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development

Officers in Attendance:	Mr M Coiffait	– Community Services Director
	Mrs S Farrier	– Acting Senior Planning Officer, Local Planning and Housing Team
	Mr R Fox	– Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy
	Ms C Frost-Bryant	– Acting Principal Planning Officer, Local Planning and Housing Team
	Ms L Kitson	– Green Infrastructure Co-ordinator
	Mr J Longhurst	– Director of Regeneration and Business Support
	Mr J Partridge	– Scrutiny Policy Adviser
	Mr T Saunders	– Assistant Director, Planning
	Ms S Wileman	– Service Development Manager

Others in Attendance

SCOSC/13/10 **Members' Interests**

None.

SCOSC/13/11 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman advised the Committee that due to public interest in the Arlesey Masterplan he would reorganise the agenda so that this was the first item of business.

SCOSC/13/11 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meetings of the Sustainable Communities OSC held on 14 January 2014 and 22 January 2014 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SCOSC/13/11 **Petitions**

None.

SCOSC/13/11 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The Chairman informed the Committee that seven persons had registered to speak on the Arlesey Masterplan. Members of the public would be invited to speak at the start of that item.

SCOSC/13/11 **Call-In**

None.

SCOSC/13/11 **Requested Items**

None.

SCOSC/13/11 **Arlesey Masterplan**

The Chairman invited six speakers to address the Committee on this item. In summary the speakers raised issues regarding the following:-

- Support for the Masterplan from Arlesey Residents Association, who felt the Masterplan would enhance the town and encourage inward investment, subject to amendments.
- The proposed relief road, which had been inappropriately designed.
- The disproportionate and unsustainable level of development in relation to the size of Arlesey and the lack of certainty with regards housing numbers and density.
- The interim transport assessment, which residents considered to be flawed.
- The importance of environmental enhancements within the Masterplan.
- The need to fully understand the cost of proposed infrastructure and whether it was viable before the Masterplan could be approved.
- A petition that was currently circulating local residents and would arrive in due course, which demonstrated that people did not understand how they could influence the content of the Masterplan or how it would impact on Arlesey.
- The need for more meaningful engagement with local residents particularly in relation to the Section 106 (S106) agreement. There were concerns that consultation had not adhered to the Council's Statement of Community Involvement and it was unclear how responses provided by local residents had informed the draft Masterplan. During the consultation there had been insufficient copies of documentation available or use of social media, which had impacted on residents' ability to respond.

In addition to the comments above the following suggested amendments to the Masterplan were proposed by members of the public:-

1. The removal of paragraph 5.11 as regards the demolition of two of the properties at 133-139 High Street, which had been the subject of a previous appeal decision.
2. Endorsement of the Masterplan should be delayed until such time as the issues raised by the public had been resolved.
3. The need to highlight that critical infrastructure and traffic calming measures should be completed as soon as possible.

In addition the promoters of the Masterplan addressed the committee as members of the public. The developer commented that the Masterplan built on the Council's agreed planning policies and the Council's Assets team continued to be engaged developing proposals.

In response to the issues raised by members of the public, Cllr Young commented on the importance of the Council agreeing a Masterplan in order to retain control over future development of an important site that had been allocated in the Local Development Framework (LDF). S106 contributions were determined by a specified formula and local ward Members would influence this to ensure that contributions were appropriate.

The Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy confirmed that the Planning Inspectorate had dismissed a previous appeal for an application for the demolition of two properties at 133-139 High Street. He pointed out that

the appeal proposal was for a primary access to serve five properties, not a secondary access as indicated in the Masterplan. He agreed with the Inspector that as an access to serve five properties it was over engineered. He referred to the appeal decision letter and the Inspector's comments that the issue of access at this point in the High Street was a matter for the Masterplan. An informed decision regarding S106 contributions could only be made once a planning application had been submitted but officers considered the proposals in the Masterplan to be viable. It was also confirmed that traffic calming measures could be delivered up front as critical infrastructure and the Masterplan would be amended to that affect.

The Committee received a presentation from Ms S Farrier that outlined the key issues raised during the consultation and how the Masterplan had been amended as a result.

In light of the issues raised by public speakers and the information presented to the Committee the following issues were discussed in detail:-

- Some residents had engaged with the Council in the past but many had engaged too late in the process as the land had already been allocated in the LDF. In response Cllr Young commented that residents generally did not engage in proposals for developments until a planning application had been submitted, even if significant consultation of the development had previously been undertaken locally. Whilst the Council went out of its way to engage local Ward Members and residents, he would look again in future at whether even more could be done to attract engagement with residents earlier in the development process.
- Further work was required in relation to the transport assessment, particularly in relation to ascertaining the level of public transport available in Arlesey and the ways in which residents could be encouraged to walk/cycle. Additional housing developments would impact on accessibility and this needed to be taken into account in modelling traffic flows. The Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy commented that the interim transport assessment was sound. In any event a full transport assessment would be required to be submitted alongside any planning application.
- Concerns regarding access to and the integration of development on the land to the West of Arlesey.
- The lack of safe walking routes to Etonbury school across the A507 and whether this could be required in the Masterplan. In response Cllr Young stated that the Masterplan would be amended to require an additional crossing over or under the A507 provide convenient walking and cycling access to Etonbury School.
- The need for further investment in publicly owned homes for rent.
- Whether there were opportunities for more meaningful engagement with the public, particularly with vulnerable residents and the importance of taking into consideration the issues that had already been raised.
- The importance of suitable drainage solutions for the development, noting the flooding that had recently occurred at Arlesey Train Station.
- Whether a maximum number of homes could be stated within the Masterplan.

- The need to better understand the S106 elements of the Masterplan and what local benefits could be viably delivered by the development. There was a need for more proactive engagement with residents in relation to S106.
- Whether developers would consider the types of development that were considered appropriate by the Council. In response Cllr Young commented on the critical importance of the Council's Design Guide to advise developers on the necessary quality of development it would expect. Although the design standards within the Guide could not be required they provided an appropriate indication of acceptable materials.
- Whether the relief road could be constructed up-front as critical infrastructure. The Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy commented on the difficulty of the viability of the relief road if it was required to be provided up-front. 'Triggers' had been included in other developments so that once a number of homes had been completed specified pieces of infrastructure were also required. Any proposals to forward fund the infrastructure could not be considered until a planning application was received by the Council. If necessary, other short-term access routes via the East of the site had been considered prior to the construction of the relief road. The Assistant Director, Planning commented that the Council as landowner was in a position to influence the delivery of the relief road.
- The possible impact on traffic in Arlesey and in the local network due to the cumulative impact of housing developments in neighbouring areas.
- The need to consider public transport into and out of Arlesey and whether there were sufficient services in order to meet demand.
- The need to clarify references in paragraph 5.11 to highlight that the Council was not advocating on-street parking on roads of three-metre width.

NOTED the concerns of the public and the Committee in relation to the interim transport assessment and the need for this to be addressed prior to a planning application being submitted. The Committee also noted concerns regards the manner of consultation that the Council undertakes in relation to Masterplans generally and the manner in which responses are used to inform the Masterplan.

RECOMMENDED to Executive that the Arlesey Masterplan be adopted as Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes subject to the following amendments:-

- 1. That local traffic calming measures be considered 'essential'**
- 2. That an additional crossing to Etonbury School be provided over or under the A507**
- 3. That further clarification be provided in relation to the width of streets and parking measures detailed at paragraph 5.11**

(adjourned at 1137 and reconvened at 1145hrs)

SCOSC/13/11 Executive Member Update

Cllr B Spurr advised the Committee of a recent restructure, the outcomes of which would be reported to Members at an appropriate time. It was also

commented that there had been no serious floods in Central Bedfordshire during the recent heavy rainfall.

Cllr N Young advised the Committee of a range of issues including:-

- The Council had recently been awarded recognition in national Best Practice guidance for its work on planning performance agreements.
- A one-month delay in relation to the Development Strategy, due to the need to develop the market assessment for Luton and discuss the results of that with Luton and neighbouring authorities under the Duty to Co-operate.
- The consultation for the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan, which was underway.
- The proposed development for Land North of Houghton Regis, which had not been called in by the Secretary of State. The Section 278 agreement for the A5- M1 link road had not yet been signed although it had been approved by the Highways Authority.

SCOSC/13/111 **Central Bedfordshire Design Guide**

The Chairman invited a representative of Bloor Homes to speak at the commencement of this item. The representative raised a number of issues that were in summary as follows:-

- The potential impact on investment decisions of changes in policy.
- The need to clarify the way the Council would deal with existing reserved matters applications.
- Whether the Council would allow some schemes to come forward without being subject to the guidance in the Design Guide.

Cllr Young clarified that developers were requested to comply with both the Design Guide and Design Codes on specific sites. The Council had tried not to be prescriptive so as not to obstruct new development.

The Committee received a presentation from the Acting Principal Planning Officer that outlined the rationale for updating the current Guide in addition to outlining several key issues and the ways in which the Council planned to address them. In light of the presentation and the points raised by the speaker the Committee and other Members in attendance discussed the following issues in detail:-

- Concerns regarding revisions to parking standards, which some Members perceived were being 'watered down', and the need to design developments in such a way to minimise the need for enforcement. In response, Cllr Young detailed the rationale for the parking standards and commented that many residents did not make appropriate use of allocated parking spaces. The Council would more proactively enforce on-street parking to encourage residents to use allocated parking spaces. Where appropriate, developers would be required to provide enforcement on housing estates. Cllr Young agreed to further clarify references within the Guide in relation to parking standards.
- Whether the use of communal bins could be considered more widely during the planning stage for new developments in Central Bedfordshire. In response the Acting Principal Planning Officer commented that the Guide proposed better design for communal storage of bins rather than

encouraging shared bins. Cllr Young agreed that the Guide should encourage the wider provision of communal bins in relation to new housing developments.

- The need to work with Bedford Borough Council (BBC) to encourage similar design standards on adjacent developments, such as Wixams. In response, Cllr Young commented that officers communicated with colleagues at BBC but there would be a different approach to design and overall layout.
- The need to consider the long-term maintenance costs of some building materials. In response Cllr Young commented that the Council was considering both the engineering approach to street maintenance and the repair strategy for materials to address this concern.
- The potential benefit of service trunking so that the Council could more accurately locate facilities under the pavement/road.
- Whether the principles of the Design Guide could be a mandatory requirement for new developments. In response, Cllr Young stated that the Guide had to be adhered to but some flexibility was needed and if it was mandatory it would lead to an increase in planning appeals and the Council may lose control of the planning process. Cllr Young also pointed out that whilst some flexibility was appropriate, consistent and clear application of the Guide to all developments was equally important so that all developers knew where they stood and had as much certainty as possible.
- The need to amend references to public art to provide wider reference to the 'public realm'.
- The importance of maximising opportunities to travel by walking, cycling and public transport and that town or neighbourhood centre should ideally be within walking distance of residential developments.
- The importance of ensuring that primary roads in a development are an appropriate width so as to allow car parking where appropriate without impeding traffic flow.

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That the Executive adopt the Design Guide as technical guidance for development management purposes subject to references to 'public art' being amended to 'public realm'.**
- 2. That the Executive delegate to the Director of Regeneration in consultation with the Executive Member (Strategic Planning and Economic Development) the authority to make any minor amendments to the document prior to final publication.**

SCOSC/13/111 Planning Guidance on Sustainable Drainage

The Green Infrastructure Co-ordinator delivered an overview of the Council's responsibilities in relation to Sustainable Drainage and the manner in which the guidance aimed to provide clarity over the manner in which SuDS would be expected within new developments.

The Committee commented on the excellent nature of the guidance and in response to the presentation queried local drainage rates and the level of run-off created by new developments, particularly in the context of the changing climate. In response the Committee were informed that drainage rates were

provided by Defra, who provided nationally defined standards for sustainable drainage across England and Wales that took into account major national events. Members also queried the timescales for implementing the guidance, which were determined by Defra.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the SuDS guidance as Supplementary Planning Guidance in support of current adopted planning policy and Technical Guidance for the purposes of Development Management, in support of policy in the emerging Development Strategy.

SCOSC/13/12 Local Area Transport Plans Programme 2014/15

Cllr A Brown introduced a report that proposed the endorsement of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) capital funding split for 2014/15 together with details of several scheme programmes for Local Area Transport plans (LATPs). In response Members raised concerns that £120k allocation for road safety was insufficient. It was however clarified that if additional funding was required it would be found from other sources.

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That the LATP programmes for Leighton Linlade, Ampthill and Flitwick, Marston Vale, Shefford, Silsoe and Shillington and Heath and Reach, Barton Le Clay and Toddington in 2014-15 be endorsed.**
- 2. That the Rural Match Fund proposals to be implemented following a bidding process by Town and Parish Councils be endorsed.**
- 3. That the Road Safety Financial Allocation be endorsed.**
- 4. That the use of the development fund in 2014/15 be endorsed.**

SCOSC/13/12 Work Programme and Executive Forward Plan

The Committee received its current draft work programme for 2014/15 and noted that an item on the Community Infrastructure Levy would be presented to the Committee in June 2014 subject to any possible amendment to the receipt of the Development Strategy.

RECOMMENDED that the work programme be approved subject to the addition detailed above.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.53 p.m.)