
Meeting: Executive
Date: 15 March 2011
Subject: Dunstable Town Centre Final Masterplan
Report of: Cllr Matthews, Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Skills and Regeneration
Summary: The report seeks endorsement of the Dunstable Town Centre Final Masterplan as Interim Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities
Contact Officer: Liz Wade, Assistant Director Economic Growth, Skills and Regeneration
Public/Exempt Public
Wards Affected: Icknield, Watling, Northfields and Dunstable Downs
Function of: Executive
Key Decision Yes
Reason for urgency/ exemption from call-in (if appropriate) N/A

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Dunstable Town Centre Final Masterplan will comprise part of the Local Development Framework and is a fundamental part of the Council's key aim to manage growth effectively.

Financial:

The Dunstable Town Centre Masterplan was produced with financial support from Growth Area Funds (GAF III). The Masterplan provides a guiding vision for the Dunstable town centre that has been shaped by public consultation and professional advice over a number of years. However, over the next 15 years, development and investment projects within the town centre will reference and benefit from the vision set out in the Masterplan. This makes for a more efficient and directed planning system which results in best use of public funds, investor's funds and local community contributions.

Legal:

As set out in paragraphs 2 and 14 of the report.

Risk Management:

Failure to endorse the Town Centre Masterplan, which sets out a clear vision for the town centre together with development objectives and key principles, would risk the future regeneration of, and new investment in the town centre. The Masterplan will provide greater clarity and guidance for those planning new developments, investment and improvements in the town centre.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

Not applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

Dunstable Town Centre has the greatest town centre need for regeneration in the Central Bedfordshire area, as measured by retail indices including vacancy levels. Dunstable Town centre serves a mixed population including the priority neighbourhoods of Downside, Tithe Farm and Parkside. Successful town centres are often a reflection of the wider well being of the communities they serve.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and there are no outstanding issues.

Community Safety:

The implementation of the Town Centre Final Masterplan whilst bringing substantial economic and social benefits to the town would have a significant and positive impact on community safety. The increase in businesses and residential dwellings will lead to additional pressures on local policing and support from partner agencies and the Council who deal with community safety issues including environmental crime and anti social behaviour. The Masterplan, will however bring forward considerable opportunities to address some of these issues during the design and implementation/delivery stages, including any redevelopment of the Quadrant shopping centre. 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:

The proposed Dunstable Town Centre Final Masterplan will initially form part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework (LDF) for the southern part of Central Bedfordshire. The LDF embraces sustainable development as its overarching aim and has and will continue to be subject to a sustainability appraisal. The regeneration of Dunstable Town Centre is a critical part of the proposals to deliver sustainable growth for the area.

Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Comments:

At its meeting on 14 December 2010 the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation relating to the outcomes of the consultation on the Dunstable Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan prior to its endorsement by the Executive. The Committee noted the consultation responses received on the Draft Dunstable Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan and agreed the following: - **‘that the Executive be informed that it is the view of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Dunstable Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan should be endorsed’.**

Further details relating to these recommendations are contained in Appendix 2 and the issues raised are covered in paragraphs 12 and 13 of this report.

RECOMMENDATION:

To endorse the Dunstable Town Centre Final Masterplan to be used as Interim Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes.

Reason for Recommendations: To enable the Town Centre Final Masterplan to provide a strategic lead regarding the delivery of the regeneration of Dunstable Town Centre.

Executive Summary

The report seeks the endorsement of the Dunstable Town Centre Final Masterplan as Interim Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes, pending its formal adoption as part of the LDF.

Purpose of the Masterplan

1. The Masterplan sets out a vision for the town centre and development objectives and key principles to help guide emerging proposals as they come forward. It is important to emphasise that the Masterplan is a vehicle to guide and promote renewal, redevelopment and improvement of the town centre. It is not a blueprint. It sets out important guiding principles and policies, but retains flexibility to enable market led solutions to come forward and be considered. The proposals included in the Masterplan are illustrative only and it may be that the eventual development that comes forward is different from what has been shown in the document.
2. The Masterplan cannot to be adopted as formal policy at this stage as the joint Core Strategy for the southern part of Central Bedfordshire and Luton has yet to be adopted. However, given the level of public engagement/consultation carried out during the development of the Masterplan, it would be a material consideration and form a framework to be used to evaluate planning proposals in the town centre.

Background

3. The masterplan consultants (AECOM) were appointed in December 2008 to carry out a masterplan exercise for Dunstable Town Centre. As an integral part of the exercise, the consultants were also required to produce a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.
4. The Final Masterplan has been the subject of extensive public and stakeholder engagement at various stages of the process including the baseline, options development and draft consultation stages. These included stakeholder workshops, public exhibitions, meetings with resident groups and interested parties and public consultation questionnaires.

5. The Draft Masterplan was subject to a 'statutory consultation' process during September and October 2010 which included three staffed public exhibitions, the further display of exhibition material for four weeks in the town centre, meetings with 'affected' residents, landowners and interested parties, presentations to the Dunstable Town Council, the Dunstable Town Centre Management Committee and the Chiltern Vale Health Consortium Board. Statutory consultees were formally consulted as well as local stakeholders and interest groups.
6. Some 4,000 consultation leaflets and questionnaires were distributed and made available around the town centre and the questionnaire was available to be completed on-line. Full analysis of the findings of the statutory consultation process was carried out and the findings together with recommended amendments to the Masterplan were reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 14 December 2010.

Final Masterplan

7. The Dunstable Town Centre Final Masterplan proposes the concentration of the main retail core of the town centre to the Quadrant shopping centre area, with a substantial increase in retail floorspace with associated car parking provision within this area. The refurbishment/redevelopment of the Quadrant shopping centre is considered crucial for the delivery of the masterplan and the wider regeneration of the town centre. Other parts of the Final Masterplan are dependant on achieving this key objective.
8. The Masterplan concept proposes to deliver a consolidated larger retail offer with ancillary car parking in the Quadrant shopping centre area. It is also proposed to include a new medical centre and a replacement library as part of any redevelopment in this area. It also proposes the retention of smaller independent retail units along High Street North and South, linked to significant public realm improvements once the A5-M1 Link has been built enabling the detrunking of the A5 through the town centre. The Masterplan also indicates the potential for the creation of approximately 170 new dwellings throughout the town centre.
9. The Masterplan focuses on a number of key elements however, a more detailed summary can be found at Appendix 3.
 - (a) Retail - The creation of substantial additional retail floorspace, with the majority being created in the Quadrant shopping centre area but would involve a proposed extension to the existing town centre boundary;
 - (b) Community and Leisure - The provision of a new medical centre incorporating a new ambulance station facility, a replacement library facility and a new cinema within the new retail area;
 - (c) Housing - The potential for the creation of approximately 170 new dwellings which would predominantly deliver elderly and family housing;

- (d) Car parking – Replacement car parking to be provided adjacent to new retail accommodation in the form of multi-storey car parks, but the retention of car parking in other parts of the town centre.
 - (e) Public realm improvements – The provision of improvements, including proposed works to the A5 (High Streets North and South) following its detrunking, post A5 – M1 Link road. The introduction of ‘shared space’ concept has also been identified within the Masterplan.
 - (f) Conservation/heritage - A Conservation Area appraisal has been undertaken in parallel with the Final Masterplan to ensure that new development takes full account of Dunstable’s archaeological and historic heritage.
10. The Masterplan indicates the delivery of the proposals over a fifteen year period, divided into 3 five year phases.
- (1) The first phase would concentrate on a couple of key sites which could be brought forward as ‘quick wins’ and could include the new medical centre.
 - (2) The second phase would focus on improvements to existing public owned car parks and also improvements along the High Street North and South once the A5 de-trunking has been carried out. The redevelopment of the existing medical centre, adjacent to Priory Gardens, for residential purposes within this time-frame could also be carried out if the new medical centre has been built.
 - (3) The final stage would include the redevelopment of the existing Quadrant Shopping Centre to create a considerable increase in the amount of retail floorspace together with associated car parking provision. It would also be envisaged that the re-alignment of Court Drive towards High Street North could also take place during this time. The final element would be the redevelopment of the Ashton Square and West Street car parks, as a residential-led neighbourhood once the Quadrant Shopping Centre redevelopment had been completed.
11. The Quadrant Shopping Centre has been marketed for sale for the last several months. If the ownership of the centre changes, there is a possibility that the new owners may have plans to redevelop/refurbish the centre considerably sooner than is indicated in the Masterplan.

Issues Raised by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12. The following issues were raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting held on 14 December 2010:
- (a) Compulsory purchase orders were a last resort and should only be considered if it was in the public’s interest. The Council would seek negotiation before considering serving a compulsory purchase order.
 - (b) The importance of fully integrating the four quadrants of the town centre within the town centre strategy and masterplan.

- (c) The importance of ensuring that proposals in the masterplan relating to traffic and freight movement in Dunstable were fully integrated with the Local Transport Plan 3 and the Local Area Transport Plan for Dunstable.
 - (d) Officers were requested to ensure that the Masterplan reflected the turnaround in retail in Dunstable town centre and some elaboration on the principles of shared space.
13. The following responses are in respect of the issues raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
- (a) The compulsory purchase of land is intended as a last resort in the event that attempts to acquire by agreement fail. The Council have allocated a Community Development Officer to liaise with the residents and specialist consultants have also been appointed to assist them during this process. If formal compulsory purchase procedures are required, these will be the subject of separate and comprehensive reports to Members.
 - (b) Alternative sites for car parking around the town centre have been considered however commercial advice recommends that customer car parking to serve the new retail area needs to be in close proximity to the new shopping area.
 - (c) The Masterplan proposes to retain an element of car parking within the four quadrants of the town and to create a larger car park to the rear of the Dunstable Conference Centre/Community Church in High Street North.
 - (d) The Masterplan document has been updated to incorporate the latest information regarding the Local Transport Plan (LTP3) and the Local Area Transport Plan for Dunstable, the upturn in the vacancy rates in the town centre and 'shared space' concept.

Conclusion and Way Forward

14. The Final Masterplan can form part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework and can, in due course, be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) once the proposed amendment to the town centre boundary has been formally incorporated into the LDF. Until this time, however, it is recommended that the Masterplan be endorsed as Interim Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Dunstable Town Centre Final Masterplan (**circulated separately to Executive Members**)

Appendix 2 - Recommendations from the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee 14 December 2010

Appendix 3 - Summary of Dunstable Town Centre Final Masterplan

Background Papers:

- Dunstable Town Centre Masterplan Baseline Report www.dunstablemasterplan.info
- Dunstable Town Centre Masterplan Options Development Stage Report www.dunstablemasterplan.info
- Dunstable Town Centre Draft Masterplan Statutory Consultation Findings (November 2010) www.dunstablemasterplan.info
- Dunstable Town Centre Masterplan Equality Impact Assessment www.dunstablemasterplan.info

Location of Papers:

Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk,
Chicksands, Shefford. SG17 5TQ