
Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 21 June 2011
Subject: Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)
Report of: Cllr Nigel Young, Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities Planning and Strategy
Summary: The report requests the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the responses to the public consultation on the Draft Strategy and Masterplan carried out earlier this year. The report also asks the Committee to note and comment on proposed changes to the Draft Strategy and Masterplan in response to the consultation that will be considered by Executive prior to the adoption of the Strategy and Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities
Contact Officer: Jon Cliff, Head of Economic Development and Physical Regeneration
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: Biggleswade North and Biggleswade South
Function of: Executive

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The vision of the Sustainable Community Strategy is “To ensure Central Bedfordshire is Globally Connected, Delivering Sustainable Growth to ensure a Green Prosperous and Ambitious Place for the Benefit of All”. The strategy will be delivered through two underpinning key themes of creating the conditions for economic success and community prosperity and raising standards and tackling inequality in order to deliver 26,000 new homes and 27,000 new jobs by 2026.

The implementation of the Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan is a fundamental part of the Council’s key priority to ‘manage growth effectively’. The Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan is aligned with and will form part of the Council’s Local Development Framework (LDF) for its north area.

Financial:

The preparation of the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan has been funded from the Government’s Growth Area Fund (GAF3). Many of the proposals in the Strategy and Masterplan will depend on private sector investment and development. Public funding is likely to be limited but may include Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding. Some S106 funding (secured or to be negotiated) will contribute towards priority public realm, highway, transportation and other improvements.

Legal:

It is a statutory requirement to produce a Local Development Framework under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The Local Development Framework process is regulated by the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 and subsequent amendments. The Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan is to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and will consequently form part the Local Development Framework's suite of planning documents. As an SPD it will therefore form a material consideration in the determination of planning applications in the town centre area.

Risk Management:

The Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan, sets out a clear vision for the town centre together with development objectives and key principles focused on Living and Working, Playing, Environment and Moving. The Masterplan is to guide investment and provide a framework for the evaluation of planning proposals and development as it comes forward. This reduces the risk of new development and related improvements failing to meet local needs or requirements. It will therefore provide greater clarity and guidance for those planning new developments, investment and improvements in the town centre.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None

Equalities/Human Rights:

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. An equalities impact assessment has been carried out on the proposals outlined in the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan. There are no negative impacts identified. The implementation of the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan will in fact have a positive effect. The functioning of the town centre will be improved across a range of areas relevant to Equalities/Human rights including for example, access, which will be improved by improvements to transport connections.

Community Safety:

The implementation of the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan would have a significant but positive impact on community safety. The Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan's aspirations concerning design principles for example would, if implemented, increase natural surveillance and therefore contribute to reduced fear of crime and potentially decreased levels of criminal incidences. The Strategy also outlines a series of potential public realm and highways (junctions) improvements to the benefit of highway safety.

Sustainability:

The Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan promotes the principles of sustainable development and will form part of the LDF for the north part of Central Bedfordshire.

The LDF itself embraces sustainable development as its overarching aim and has and will continue to be subject to a sustainability appraisal.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- 1. that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the outcome of the statutory consultation held during February and March 2011 and the proposed changes arising to the Draft Strategy and Masterplan;**
- 2. that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Executive that the Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document as part of the Local Development Framework (North).**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Biggleswade is the third largest settlement in Central Bedfordshire and also a key growth area. Over the next 10 to 15 years the town's population is expected to grow by 40% from 16,420 to in excess of 22,000. This growth is largely being delivered by the eastern extension of Biggleswade (Land East Of Biggleswade development) where up to 2,100 new homes are currently being built.
- 1.2 To ensure that the town centre can continue to meet the needs of its population, businesses and other's who use its services and facilities the Council began work towards developing a town centre strategy and masterplan in April 2009.
- 1.3 The primary objectives of the strategy and masterplan are to:
 - Ensure the town centre continues to meet the needs of the wider population and catchment area of Biggleswade.
 - Take advantage and realise benefits that can be derived from population growth, e.g. new retail and leisure facilities generated through increased demand.
 - Provide a long term framework for improving the town centre and its facilities.
 - Realise a joint long term vision for the town centre shared with key partners such as Biggleswade Town Council.
 - Act as supplementary planning guidance including local development principles to guide planning proposals and assist with decision making on them.
- 1.4 The Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan that has been produced focuses on key themes encompassing Living and Working, Playing, Environment and Moving. Within these themes a number of proposals have been developed, the key one's of which are:
 - Creation of a public transport interchange centred on Biggleswade Rail Station.
 - Public realm enhancements including the piloting of shared space principles in targeted areas.
 - Redevelopment of sites for retail - potential for up to 9,000 sq metres of new retail within town centre area increasing to 19,400 sq metres for mixed use developments.
 - Identification of key highways and transport based priorities

2.0 Consultation

- 2.1 Over the last two years the Council has undertaken a comprehensive consultation and involvement process with the local community and key stakeholders. This has included the establishment of a Biggleswade town centre partnership (consisting of business, community and town council representatives) with the specific purpose of supporting the development of the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan on a task and finish basis.
- 2.2 Two initial statutory rounds of public consultation were held in July 2009 (stage one) and July/August 2010 (stage two). Stage one was designed to identify key local priorities which could form Masterplan options, and stage two to present these options based on low, medium and high impact.
- 2.3 Upon completion of the stage two options consultation, the responses received were reviewed and a draft Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan based on the preferred option was prepared. This document was considered by the Development Strategy Task Force on the 15th December 2010 ahead of the final stage three round of formal statutory consultation held during February and March 2011.
- 2.4 The stage three statutory consultation as required under Regulation 17 of the Local Development (England) Regulations of 2004 as amended in 2008 and 2009 began with a main public exhibition held on Saturday 26th February and attended by approximately 150 people. This was supplemented by several mini exhibitions of the masterplan proposals at Biggleswade Library and the offices of Biggleswade Town Council. In addition, a street survey was also carried out in Biggleswade town centre on Wednesday 30th March.
- 2.5 In total, 155 questionnaire responses were received during the consultation period. In terms of respondent age breakdown, 28% were below the age 44, 25% between the ages of 45 and 59 and 45% of respondents were above the age of 60. 2% did not provide an answer. The vast majority (86%) of those who completed project questionnaire were residents of Biggleswade. In addition to the questionnaire responses received there were nine formal written representations submitted to the Council within the consultation period. A full breakdown of the consultation findings is appended to this report.
- 2.6 On conclusion of the final stage three consultation at the end of March, all responses received were analysed and reviewed. The vast majority of responses received were supportive of the masterplan, its general approach and key proposals. A number of suggestions and formal requests for amendments were made to the proposed Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan. One additional redevelopment opportunity, has been identified at the Post Office Sorting Office on Station Road and this been added to the document.
- 2.7 A summary of the community consultation is appended to this report. An overview of these findings and resulting amendments will be made in a presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 21st June.
- 2.8 A summary of comments and written representations received in addition to the overall consultation analysis is available to download and view on the project website at www.biggleswademasterplan.info. Also available to download on the project website is a copy of the full Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan which includes the proposed amendments arising from the final statutory consultation (highlighted in blue).

3.0 Conclusion and Next Steps

- 3.1 Subject to the Committee's comments with regard to the final proposed changes to the Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy & Masterplan the document will be considered by the Executive on 12 July 2011 with a recommendation for formal adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document

Appendices:

(Regulation 18) Summary of Community Consultation (Stage Three)

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan (SPD)

Location of papers: Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford, SG17 5TQ and also available at www.biggleswademasterplan.info.