
Meeting: Executive
Date: 12 July 2011
Subject: Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan
Report of: Cllr Nigel Young – Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities Planning and Strategy
Summary: To seek agreement to the adoption of the Strategy and Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document.

Advising Officer: Alan Fleming, Interim Director of Sustainable Communities
Contact Officer: Liz Wade, Assistant Director Economic Growth, Skills and Regeneration
Public/Exempt Public
Wards Affected: Biggleswade North and Biggleswade South
Function of: Executive
Key Decision Yes
Reason for urgency/ exemption from call-in (if appropriate) N/A

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 Section 106 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 of 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):

Not applicable.

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.

The Council has a statutory duty under Section 17 of the Crime & Disorder Act to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime & disorder. As part of the planning and development this duty will be considered at all stages.

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.

Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Comments:

At the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the 21 June Members received a report and presentation regarding the draft Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and the outcomes of earlier public consultation.

The Committee noted the consultation responses received and the amendments proposed and agreed that a recommendation be made 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).**

Further details relating to these recommendations are contained in Appendix 2. No further issues were raised by the Committee.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. to agree to adopt the Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document as part of the Local Development Framework for Central Bedfordshire (North).**

<i>Reason for Recommendation(s):</i>	<i>To enable the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan to provide a strategic lead regarding the improvement and regeneration of Biggleswade Town Centre.</i>
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Executive Summary

The report seeks the adoption of the Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document as part of the Local Development Framework for Central Bedfordshire (North).

Purpose of the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan

1. The overarching purpose of the Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan is to ensure that ***growth is managed sustainably and that the opportunities presented by growth are secured for all users of Biggleswade town centre.*** The Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan (hereafter referred to as the 'Masterplan') provides an overall framework with which to achieve this purpose and thereby enhance Biggleswade town centre so that it is able to meet the needs of those who visit, work and live here both now and in the future.
2. The Masterplan acts as a vehicle to help guide and promote renewal, redevelopment and improvement of the town centre. It is not a fixed blueprint. It aims to guide developers and public sector organisations as to what the Council would like to see happen in the town centre. The masterplan seeks to secure the best opportunities presented by growth whilst mitigating any negative impacts.

Background and early stage consultation

3. Biggleswade is one of the largest settlements in Central Bedfordshire. It has a population of 16,420 which over the next 10 to 15 years is expected to grow by 40%. 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 and released to the market.
4. Whilst Biggleswade town centre as a whole is performing reasonably well it does have a number of issues concerning secondary retail and service areas. This includes the Bonds Lane/Foundry Lane areas and Hitchin Street. The Bonds Lane/Foundry Lane area is dominated by derelict and underused premises and poor layout.
5. Poor public realm as well as limited linkages to the rest of the town centre combines to reduce the investment appeal of this area and any prospects for regeneration. In Hitchin Street, the level of vacancies rises as you move south along it whilst at the same time the quality on offer decreases.
6. The Council's predecessor, Mid Beds District Council, began work on developing a Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan in December 2008 on receipt of GAF funding. The Biggleswade Town Centre Partnership (BTCP) comprising members of the Council, Biggleswade Town Council, Chamber of Trade and Biggleswade Town Plan group was established by the Council on a task and finish basis to provide local guidance and advice to the project.
7. In April 2009, Central Bedfordshire Council commissioned the planning and regeneration specialists, Savills, to support the Masterplan preparation. Savills began this process by preparing a detailed evidence base that would be used to inform the Masterplan.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 (options consultation)

8. The evidence baseline was further informed by two stages of public consultation with key partners and the wider local community. Stage one began with detailed discussions with stakeholders as part of a series of 'partner' workshops held between July and September 2009 to identify key priorities of existing and potential delivery partners. A public exhibition was also held during this period as well as targeted events with local groups including school children and community organisations. Stage one was used to identify the priorities from which three options were developed based on low, medium and high impact scenarios. These options formed the basis for further public engagement during the second stage consultation held during July and August 2010.

Final round of consultation and development of the Draft Masterplan

9. The next step in this process was the development of the Draft Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan based on a preferred option. The document focused on key objectives or themes encompassing Living and Working, Playing, Environment and Moving. Within these themes a number of proposals or principals were developed, these include:
 - (1) Creation of a public transport interchange centred on Biggleswade Rail Station, combining bus, rail and taxi facilities.
 - (2) Public realm enhancements including the piloting of shared space principles in targeted areas, decluttering and improved way finding.
 - (3) 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 retail/service sites for intensification.
 - (5) Identification of key highways and transport based priorities including priority junctions for improvement.
10. As part of the Masterplan, the delivery of indicative projects has been divided into three distinct and estimated time periods, 0 to 5 years, 5 to 10 years and 15 years plus. In no order of preference, the short term 0 to 5 year projects identified include the following key interventions:
 - (1) Transport Interchange at Biggleswade Rail Station - Phase One (bus re-routing).
 - (2) Removal of Market Square bus loop, provision of new bus shelters (if appropriate) and redevelopment or re-use of Century House.
 - (3) Hitchin Street - (Shared Space and Public Realm Improvements) pilot scheme.
 - (4) Wayfinding Improvements and decluttering of key areas including Market Square.

- (5) Bonds Lane and Foundry Lane Area redevelopment.
- (6) Phased implementation of car parking strategy.
11. The medium to longer term proposals in the Masterplan are focused on more substantial infrastructure (completion of transport interchange proposals) and the development/redevelopment of identified key sites based on demand and commercial viability.
12. The Draft Masterplan was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Development Strategy Task Force on the 15 December 2010. Subject to a number of minor amendments the Task Force approved the Masterplan to go forward to the final round of statutory consultation.
13. The final statutory consultation took place during February and March 2011. The consultation programme began with a main public exhibition held on Saturday 26 February in the town centre 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.
14. A summary of the main proposals and questionnaire was circulated to all businesses in the town centre and made widely available to residents and other users of the town centre at public facilities such as the Town Council, Library and Rail Station.
15. A considerable amount of publicity was generated for the proposals through local press and also through the use of a dedicated project website (www.biggleswademasterplan.info) which enabled people to view all the background information concerning the masterplan and submit their views via the online questionnaire form. In addition to this, a street survey was also carried out in Biggleswade town centre on Wednesday 30 March in order to capture as many views as possible on the proposals.
16. 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. The vast majority (86%) of those who completed project questionnaire (86%) 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.
17. Following completion of this final round of consultation a list of final proposed amendments was prepared and reviewed by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The most significant change proposed (as a direct result of the statutory consultation) was the addition of an additional site (existing Royal Mail sorting office 3, Station Road, Biggleswade, SG18 8AA) for consideration as a location for '*Appropriate town centre uses with active ground floor frontages*'. The document also includes further clarification in response to a few issues raised by English Heritage, Anglian Water and the Environment Agency.

18. In addition to this change a number of minor text edits, clarifications and corrections were made to the document. All of these changes are highlighted within the revised and final Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- 19 The proposals contained within the Masterplan have been subject to considerable community consultation and engagement with key partners. All have secured broad support from the community.

It is therefore recommended that the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan is adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document to ensure the proposals contained within it carry weight and significance in planning terms to guide future investment and development of the town centre.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan

Appendix 2 – Recommendations from the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21st June 2011

Background Papers:

- Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan Baseline Report
www.biggleswademasterplan.info
- (Regulation 18) Summary of Community Consultation (Stage Three)
www.biggleswademasterplan.info
- Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan Options Consultation Report (Stage Two) www.biggleswademasterplan.info
- Biggleswade Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan Equality Impact Assessment
www.biggleswademasterplan.info

Location of Papers:

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