
Meeting: Executive
Date: 27 March 2012
Subject: Leighton Buzzard Opportunity Sites Planning and Development Briefs
Report of: Cllr Ken Matthews – Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Economic Development
Summary: To seek agreement to the adoption of the two Planning and Development Briefs as Technical Guidance for Development Management.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities
Contact Officer: Jon Cliff, Head of Economic Development and Physical Regeneration
Public/Exempt Public
Wards Affected: Leighton Buzzard North, Leighton Buzzard South and Linslade
Function of: Executive
Key Decision Yes
Reason for urgency/ exemption from call-in (if appropriate) N/A

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

1. 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:
 1. creating the conditions for economic success and community prosperity; and
 2. raising standards and tackling inequality.
2. These themes will enable the Council to deliver 26,000 new homes and 27,000 new jobs by 2026 supporting the Council’s key priority of managing growth effectively.

3. The Economic Development Plan recognises the importance of investing in the regeneration of our Town Centres. They are at the heart of our communities and are central to creating the right conditions for economic growth. The emerging Central Bedfordshire Council medium term targets will monitor the progress being made against the Town Centre master plans and briefs.
4. The implementation of the two Planning and Development Briefs is a fundamental part of the Council's key priority to 'manage growth effectively'. Leighton Buzzard is growing and the endorsed Core Strategy for Luton and South Bedfordshire plans for further growth. Regeneration of these two sites will provide enhanced services within and close to the town centre. Once endorsed, the two Planning and Development Briefs will form Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes and will form part of the Council's Development Strategy.

Financial:

5. The preparation of the two Planning and Development Briefs has been funded from the Government's Growth Area Fund (GAF3). Many of the proposals in the two development briefs will depend on private sector investment and do not commit any further public expenditure. Where the Council proposes to inject its own resources into future development proposals normal revenue and capital budgetary approval processes will need to be followed.

Legal:

6. It is a statutory requirement to produce a Development Plan. The planning and development briefs cannot be adopted as formal policy at this stage but can be endorsed as Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes. However, it remains our intention to adopt these documents as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's) once Central Bedfordshire Council has adopted its emerging Development Strategy in 2014.
7. Planning Blight – reference is made to this in paragraph 42.

Risk Management:

8. The endorsement of the two Planning and Development Briefs will give more certainty to the development management process by providing a framework for the evaluation of planning proposals and development as they come forward. This reduces the risk of new development and related improvements failing to meet local needs or requirements. They will therefore provide greater clarity and guidance for those planning new developments, investment and improvements in the town centre. The identified risks will be managed throughout the development process.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

9. Not applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

10. 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 these two Planning and Development Briefs. The implementation of these two documents will have a largely positive effect due to enhancements in the town centre and the provision of an improved range of centrally based services including health and education which are accessible to all.
11. The consultation findings demonstrate a good level of support amongst the majority of respondents.
12. Part of one of the sites is currently occupied by a family of Travelling Show People. This land is not in Council ownership. The land is being promoted for alternative uses by the owner and a planning application for an access road has been submitted. The Council has consulted with both the site owners and the occupiers to try to find a solution to this issue. The Council is very aware of the potential difficulties faced by the residents of this site. There is specific wording in the final document which highlights the need to provide appropriate alternative accommodation for those affected by the development. This is an ongoing issue and will be picked up by the Delivery Plan which will be commissioned to inform delivery of these two sites. Separately, there will be a Development Plan Document (DPD) on Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs which could pick this specific need up if required.
13. Existing social care provision within the site will be re-provided and Social Care colleagues have been involved in this work from an early stage.

Public Health

14. Delivery of these briefs can improve access to a wide range of healthcare, including amongst vulnerable groups. Delivery can also enable better access to open space and improve physical activity by providing greater opportunities for walking and cycling.

Community Safety:

15. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on councils to do all they reasonably can to reduce crime and disorder locally and improve people's quality of life as a result. The duty requires the Council to consider and do all that is reasonable to support the reduction of crime and disorder in our area.

16. Implementation of these planning and development briefs, and regeneration of these two sites, would have a positive impact on community safety. The sites' regeneration would bring back into use under used parts of the town and create footfall throughout the day and evening. This would give opportunities for improved natural surveillance and potentially contribute towards the reduced fear of crime.
17. In developing the sites our duty under section 17 will be complied with and we will work with community safety colleagues both internal and external, including Bedfordshire Police, to ensure that consideration is given to all opportunities to reduce crime and disorder and reduce the fear of crime.

Sustainability:

18. The two Planning and Development Briefs promote the principles of sustainable development. They seek to improve facilities within Leighton Buzzard Town Centre which is an accessible location, and will improve access to services by walking, cycling and public transport. Equally, their implementation will improve employment opportunities within the town and will give more people the opportunity to work locally. They will in due course form part of the Council's new Development Strategy which will have sustainable development as its overarching aim and will be subject to a sustainability appraisal.

Overview and Scrutiny:

19. The Sustainable Communities OSC received and considered the development brief at their meeting on 6 March 2012. The Committee also received proposed changes to the draft planning and development briefs as a result of consultation that have been included in the final versions submitted to the Executive. The Committee unanimously supported the proposals and resolved as follows:-

RECOMMENDED to Executive that the planning and development briefs for Bridge Meadow and land south of High Street, Leighton Buzzard be adopted as technical guidance.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **To agree to endorse the Planning and Development Briefs for Bridge Meadow and Land South of High Street in Leighton Buzzard as Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes.**

<i>Reason for Recommendation:</i>	<i>To enable regeneration of these two sites to provide a range of improved facilities for current and future residents, businesses and visitors to Leighton Buzzard.</i>
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Executive Summary

20. The report seeks the endorsement of the two planning and development briefs as Technical Guidance for Development Management purposes. These will guide and attract regeneration of the two sites and will enable the sites to provide a range of improved facilities for the town.

Purpose of the Planning and Development Briefs

21. The overarching purpose of the planning and development briefs is to guide and attract comprehensive development and regeneration on these two sites. It is important to stress that the briefs are not blueprints, but instead set down appropriate uses and guiding principles and policies, but they retain flexibility so that market led solutions can come forward. The documents seek to secure positive benefits for the town as a whole and mitigate any negative impacts.
22. The planning and development briefs cannot be adopted as formal policy at this stage. However, it remains our intention to adopt these documents as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's) once Central Bedfordshire has adopted its emerging Development Strategy.

Background

23. Leighton Buzzard is the largest settlement in Central Bedfordshire with a population of around 37,000. Committed housing development in the south of the town is still being built out, and the endorsed Core Strategy for the area makes provision for substantial housing and employment growth to 2026. As a result, the population of the town is likely to rise significantly.
24. Whilst Leighton Buzzard town centre as a whole is performing reasonably well in terms of vacancy rates in retail units, it does have a number of areas where scope for improvements have been identified. The town loses a lot of retail expenditure to neighbouring areas, in particular Milton Keynes, and footwear and clothing have been identified as particular deficits. There is a need to reinforce the town centre to support the committed and planned growth. As well as retail, this would include a range of uses and services which can be located within, or close to, a town centre such as primary healthcare and further education where there is a need to provide improved provision.
25. The two sites, Bridge Meadow and Land South of High Street, have long been seen as presenting opportunities for comprehensive regeneration owing to their position and proximity to the town centre, current uses and the piecemeal nature of their previous development. Plans of the two sites in their current form are included as Appendix A.
26. The Council began work on developing planning and development briefs for these two sites in early 2010 on receipt of Growth Area Funding (GAF). The Council formed a project team consisting of officers from key areas, Leighton Linslade Town Council and, until they were disbanded, Luton Gateway.

27. In April 2010, the Council commissioned the planning and regeneration specialists GVA, working with Think Place and WSP Ltd, to work with the Council to develop the planning and development briefs. GVA began this process by undertaking a stakeholder workshop, followed by a ward Member workshop to identify needs and opportunities, and used this to prepare a detailed evidence base that would be used to inform the rest of the work. The evidence base covered issues such as planning, retail, market analysis, heritage, urban design, transport, environment and sustainability as well as land ownership and site assembly issues.

Options Consultation and Further Work

28. The evidence baseline was enhanced by further discussions with stakeholders and this led to the development of two possible options for each site. These options were the subject of public consultation in January - March 2011. There was a public exhibition in the town centre on a Saturday followed by a static display in the town's library. There was also a separate consultation exercise involving local schools. The responses from this consultation were collated and analysed further and this was used to inform development of the draft briefs.

The Draft Planning and Development Briefs and Statutory Consultation

29. The briefs propose a vision for each site underpinned by a number of objectives. These have been developed into a land use plan which identifies appropriate uses on particular areas of the two sites. This is attached as Appendix B and the Vision and Objectives are summarised below:

30. Land South of High Street – Vision

The site will be redeveloped to provide a new retail led mixed use quarter which acts as a sustainable extension to the town centre's Primary Shopping Area and creates a destination for residents and visitors.

31. Development Objectives

- (1) Create a retail destination that will attract high profile retailers and visitors and retain local expenditure in the town.
- (2) Attract complementary uses and operators to those found on the High Street to help foster a vibrant and more competitive town centre.
- (3) Deliver the highest standards of urban design that complements the town centre's existing architectural and heritage assets and strengthens the town centre's high quality sense of place.
- (4) Enhance the existing identity of the town and reinforce its distinctiveness and sense of place.
- (5) Enhance permeability onto the site to allow for greater ease of movement around the site.

32. **The Bridge Meadow site - Vision:**

The site will be redeveloped to provide a new quarter which is accessible to the community and visitors, designed to open up the town's natural assets of the river and canal and to deliver facilities to meet the future needs of the community, alongside housing and commercial development.

33. **Development Objectives**

- (1) Introduce a new mix of complementary uses which meet the aspirations and needs of the local community.
- (2) Enhance access to, and enjoyment of, the canal and river through sensitive development along the edges of the site.
- (3) Enhance the Leighton Road frontage in order to create a more attractive gateway into the town centre.
- (4) Strengthen the linkages between the towns of Leighton Buzzard and Linslade.
- (5) Create an identity for this part of the town and reinforce the sense of place.

34. The Vision and Objectives are developed further by the identification of appropriate uses on particular areas of land within the sites. The Land Use Plans are attached as Appendix B.

35. Soft market testing of potential retail and other occupiers and developers, and viability appraisals, have formed a key part of the development of the two briefs, but it is acknowledged in the documents that their redevelopment will depend upon occupier demand and commercial viability, issues relating to land ownership and existing uses, and of course the global and national economic situation. It is felt that their redevelopment will be phased covering a period of ten years or more.

36. The statutory consultation began on 19 November 2011 and ran until 6 January 2012. The consultation programme began with a public exhibition held on Saturday 19 November in the town centre and was supplemented by a static exhibition at Leighton Buzzard Library which was manned for two afternoons and one evening. The information and a questionnaire were also available on the Council's website. Collection points for completed questionnaires were set up in the library, in the offices of Leighton Linslade Town Council, and in the Council's Customer Services Centre at Bossard House. In addition, the Head of Economic Development and Physical Regeneration and the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing met users and their relatives of the Council's Day Centre and Westlands Residential Care Home informing them of the consultation, explaining how proposals might affect them and seeking their views.

37. All landowners, residents in the immediate area and statutory consultees were sent a letter informing them of the consultation and inviting them to take part. Alongside this there was publicity in the local press and posters put out around the town.
38. In total, 68 questionnaire responses were received during the consultation. Of these, 21% of respondents were below the age of 44, 38% between the ages of 45 and 64 and 40% of respondents were above the age of 65. The vast majority (85%) of those who completed project questionnaire were residents of Leighton Buzzard or Linslade. Overall, there was a good level of support for the proposals with between 56% and 77% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposed uses on different parts of the site, and only between 8% and 17% who disagreed or strongly disagreed with proposals. In addition to the questionnaire responses received there were 17 written representations in either letter or email form submitted to the Council within the consultation period. As noted above, the findings of the consultation are collated in the Consultation Report and they have been presented to Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
39. 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 on 6 March 2012
40. In addition to this change a number of minor text edits, clarifications and corrections were made to the documents along with the addition of wording covering connectivity to superfast broadband, following approval of the Local Broadband Plan. All of these changes have been incorporated within the final Planning and Development Briefs which have been provided to the Executive.

Next Steps

41. The Planning and Development Briefs will provide a framework for the comprehensive regeneration of both sites. A delivery plan, which will determine how best to move both sites forward to delivery will be undertaken jointly by Economic Growth and Property Assets, and will form the basis of a separate report to Executive in early Autumn 2012. The delivery plan will be based on land assembly, commercial discussions with landowners, public bodies such as health, education and the fire service, and the development of a decanting strategy where this is necessary. In turn this will be informed by a full review of public buildings usage and community access to public services that operate across Leighton Buzzard being undertaken by the Assets team.

42. Planning proposals can in some cases have an effect on property and land values so that an owner-occupier is unable to realise the market value that would have been obtainable had the land not been affected by the proposals, either because prospective purchasers are deterred or, having learned of the proposals will only offer a lower price. This is generally referred to as 'planning blight' and sections 149-171 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 are designed to relieve hardship by making it possible, subject to conditions, for owner-occupiers or mortgagees of certain properties to require the relevant authority to purchase their interests. A provision has been made in the Capital Programme to cover this possibility, and if this were to transpire any expenditure would be offset by the improved use/value of the Council's assets.

Conclusion and Way Forward

43. The proposals contained within these two Planning and Development Briefs have been subject to considerable community consultation and engagement with key partners. All have secured broad support from the community. Regeneration of these two sites will provide significant benefits and new facilities for Leighton Buzzard.
44. It is therefore recommended that the Planning and Development Briefs for Bridge Meadow and Land South of High Street are endorsed as technical Guidance for Development Management purposes to ensure the proposals contained within them carry weight and significance in planning terms to guide future investment and regeneration of the two sites.
45. As noted above, delivery plans for both sites will be the subject of separate reports to Members in early Autumn 2012.

Appendices:

Appendix A – "Red Line" plan showing Land South of High Street and Bridge Meadow sites, Leighton Buzzard

Appendix B – Land Use Plan for Land South of High Street and Bridge Meadow sites

Appendix C – Recommendations from the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee 06 March 2012

Background Papers:

- Bridge Meadow Leighton Buzzard, Planning and Development Brief
- Land South of High Street Leighton Buzzard, Planning and Development Brief
- Leighton Buzzard Planning and Development Briefs Consultation Report
- Leighton Buzzard Planning and Development Briefs Equality Impact Assessment

Location of Papers:

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