
Meeting: Executive
Date: 2 October 2012
Subject: Houghton Regis North Framework Plan
Report of: Cllr Nigel Young, Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development
Summary: The report recommends that Executive adopt the Framework Plan as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities
Contact Officer: Lachlan Robertson, Consultant Project Manager for Central Bedfordshire Council
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: Dunstable wards, Heath and Reach, Houghton Hall, Parkside, Tithe Farm and Toddington wards
Function of: Executive
Key Decision Yes
Reason for urgency/ exemption from call-in (if appropriate) N/A

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Framework Plan will support the Medium Term Plan priorities of 'Enhancing Central Bedfordshire' and delivering 'Better Infrastructure'.

Financial:

1. The creation of the Framework Plan will not represent a financial burden on the Council. The costs for creating the Framework Plan have been borne in their entirety by the promoters. Furthermore, a Planning Performance Agreement (a collaborative project management tool) has been entered into which secured funding for the administration and supervision of the Framework Plan and subsequent determination of any future outline planning applications.

Legal:

2. Once adopted as technical guidance the Framework Plan will constitute a material planning consideration to be taken into account when determining applications made in respect of the site.

Risk Management:

3. A failure to endorse the Framework Plan would potentially risk the cohesive development of the urban extension. The uncertainty may limit the Council's ability to meet agreed Planning Performance Agreement timelines, which may result in the Council being forced to pay back a meaningful proportion of the monies secured through the Planning Performance Agreement. Ultimately, the lack of coherence across infrastructure provision could result in the urban extension not being delivered.
4. An adopted Framework Plan will give more certainty to the development management process.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation 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.

Many parts of Houghton Regis are in the most deprived 50% in England, including two areas in the most deprived 20%. Houghton Regis' unemployment rate is higher than the Central Bedfordshire average, and higher rates of residents are claiming out of work benefits. Levels of higher qualifications are lower than in Central Bedfordshire and people's health is worse than the area average. A lower proportion of children achieved good GCSEs than in Central Bedfordshire.

The Framework Plan highlights a vision for new developments where people can experience a good quality of life and where neighbourhoods will have an attractive mix of housing, a wide range of local employment opportunities, shops, schools, faith spaces, health facilities community and cultural facilities, access to local jobs and access to a range of quality open spaces as well as the countryside.

The Plan also includes a headline aim related to creating opportunities for promoting and realising the regeneration of adjacent communities, including the regeneration of the physical environment within Houghton Regis and for supporting the Town Centre of Houghton Regis and the Town Centre of Dunstable.

If these objectives are achieved the proposal could have a positive impact in terms of advancing equality of opportunity across a range of indicators. Careful consideration will need to be given to the need to ensure that the development of employment opportunities and service provision matches the needs of the growing population in order to ensure that good community relations are maintained.

Public Health:

7. The provision of health facilities for the area will be determined through a Health Impact Assessment. The Council will need to ensure that it complies with its duties to promote access to green space, encourage sustainable transport and ensure that the built environment maximises opportunities for physical activity. This in turn will help the Council to improve outcomes for health and wellbeing.

Community Safety:

8. 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 the Adopted Central Bedfordshire Design Guide.

Sustainability:

9. The environmental and sustainability implications of this development will be identified through the Environmental Impact Assessment. Mitigation measures would be agreed and put in place through the planning process. The Framework Plan seeks to promote sustainable development through the accessible location of broad infrastructure and land uses.

Procurement:

10. Not applicable.

Overview and Scrutiny:

11. The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be considering the Plan on 26 September 2012 and their comments/recommendations will be provided at the Executive.

RECOMMENDATION(S):**The Executive is asked to:**

1. **adopt the Framework Plan as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.**

Reason for Recommendation: To provide planning guidance to the development of the Houghton Regis Strategic Allocation, proposed to be allocated in the Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire.

Executive Summary

12. The report recommends that the Executive adopt the Framework Plan as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.
13. Given the short lead-in times between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive, a verbal update (together with any Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommendation(s)) will be provided at the Executive.

Purpose of the Framework Plan

14. The Framework Plan is a high level document which is intended to guide development in the area. The document sets out the vision and the aims expected to be delivered for the urban extension.
15. The Framework Plan is made up of two parts; a Framework Plan diagram and a supplementary written document. The Framework Plan diagram identifies the indicative location of infrastructure and land uses. The supplementary written document sets out the vision for the urban extension and Central Bedfordshire Council's expectations for any planning applications that may be submitted.

Background

16. The land north of Houghton Regis was identified as a sustainable location for growth through the Sustainable Communities Plan (ODPM, 2003) and the MKSM Sub-Regional Strategy. Following this plan the land was identified in the Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire Core Strategy for 7,000 dwellings, 40 ha of employment land and associated infrastructure.
17. On the 29 July 2011 the Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Committee resolved to seek the withdrawal of the Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire Joint Core Strategy. Immediately following that decision, Central Bedfordshire Council Executive announced their intention to pursue the content of that Strategy via its own Development Strategy. This is currently in production.
18. Also following the withdrawal of the Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Core Strategy, several consortia and individual land owners indicated that they would pursue the development of the land through the Development Management process. The site is to be advanced through two large consortia and a number of smaller non-consortium groups. The consortia will submit outline planning applications, along with illustrative Masterplans to support their application, before producing smaller, more detailed, applications and Area Masterplans in the future. The first outline application, to be submitted by the main consortium (Land Improvement Holdings/Axa), is expected in October 2012.
19. CBC have encouraged the use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) to project manage any planning application process. Central Bedfordshire Council and LIH/Axa have entered into the first of these PPAs to cover the planning process over the years it will take to complete the relevant planning consents. Other PPAs are expected to be signed by the developers in the coming months. The first PPA identifies key milestones and timescales for the delivery of planning decisions by both Central Bedfordshire Council and the applicant. Whilst it offers the advantage of clear project management this does not imply or guarantee a favourable planning application outcome.

20. One of the first actions was the production of a Houghton Regis North Framework Plan which covers the whole of the proposed urban extension. The Framework Plan has been developed through discussions with Central Bedfordshire Council officers, elected Members and with the co-operation of the various consortium and non-consortium groups. CBC has assembled a Project Team, made up of specialist Central Bedfordshire Council officers and led by a dedicated Project Manager who meet on a monthly basis to deliver the Framework Plan as well as the objectives of the PPA. The Project Manager also organises a Member Advisory Group, with invitations to ward Members from Houghton Regis and Dunstable and relevant Executive Members for the Sustainable Communities brief. This group meets every two to three months and has discussed and advised upon the content of the Framework Plan.

Consultation

21. Public consultation began on 20 June and concluded on 8 August 2012. To provide a greater level of visibility, the consultation ran parallel to the public consultation for the Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire.

The Framework Plan

22. The northern expansion of Houghton Regis will be a sustainable urban extension, building upon the existing strong sense of local community, and will help form a distinctive place, whilst ensuring that it appropriately integrates and connects with the existing urban form of Houghton Regis. It will complement the wider regeneration efforts taking place in Central Bedfordshire and will help to encourage inward investment and strengthen the local economy. The urban extension will:
- (a) Connect with its surroundings
 - (b) Help form new communities
 - (c) Contribute to a sustainable future
 - (d) Have an emphasis on design
 - (e) Providing for new businesses and employment opportunities
 - (f) Protect and enhance the water environment.

23. The Framework Plan identifies a series of headline aims that planning applications must take account of and demonstrate how they are to be achieved. A detailed description of these aims can be found in the Framework Plan supplementary written document, which has been attached as Appendix B.
- a) To positively contribute to the delivery of new housing stock
 - b) To mitigate the impact on the area
 - c) To contribute to providing a wide range of new employment opportunities
 - d) To contribute to a greater level of public access
 - e) To create opportunities for promoting and realising the regeneration of adjacent communities
 - f) To contribute to the provision of new supporting community infrastructure
 - g) To contribute in managing and improving the GI network, flood risk measures, water quality and water conservation
 - h) To contribute to transport, walking and cycling links
 - i) To provide and maintain sustainable and healthy environments
 - j) To ensure development will deliver buildings which are highly resource efficient
 - k) To follow best practice in design and layout of the built environment.
24. The Framework Plan identifies the essential and critical infrastructure required for the development to be delivered. The critical Infrastructure is that which must be provided to enable the strategic sites to commence. This includes; the A5 – M1 link road, the Woodside Connection and the diversion and replacement of strategic services associated with those roads. The essential infrastructure is that which must be provided for growth to be achieved in a timely and sustainable manner and to ensure existing and new communities are provided with the facilities considered necessary to allow development to progress. A detailed description of the infrastructure can be found in the Framework Plan.

Analysis from the Consultation Exercise

25. The full results of the public consultation exercise can be found in the Framework Plan Questionnaire Responses document (Appendix C) and the Consultation Responses Summary document (Appendix D). In brief, 53 people responded to the online questionnaire and 29 people commented by email.
26. The consultation on the Framework Plan received little direct feedback with the overwhelming majority of comments being about the principle of development itself, or concerned about expected infrastructure. This suggests that the content of the Framework Plan itself is not contentious.

Comments of relevance to the Framework Plan include:-

- a) Transport infrastructure
- b) Conformity with the Development Strategy
- c) Alternative locations for development/infrastructure
- d) Preserving heritage assets
- e) Managing flood risk.

Changes to the Framework Plan

27. In the Consultation Responses Summary document (Appendix D) the consultation responses have been summarised and addressed.
28. The majority of comments received were about the principle of development and of a detailed nature directed at the subsequent planning application stages. Whilst valuable, they are not salient to informing the Framework Plan given its purpose as a high level document which identifies key principles and key infrastructure. The Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire, when adopted, will establish that the principle of development is acceptable for this urban extension.
29. In light of the comments received, the Framework Plan diagram has been amended to identify the Thorn Spring Scheduled Ancient Monument. The Framework Plan supplementary written document has been modified to now make greater reference to health and well-being, the historic environment, heritage assets and the protection of water environments. The specific changes to the Framework Plan supplementary written document are visible in Appendix B.

Conclusion and Next Steps

30. Consideration has been afforded to the consultation exercise and where necessary, changes made to the Framework Plan. As a technical document, the Framework Plan is fit for development management purposes.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Framework Plan - Diagram

Appendix B – Framework Plan – Supplementary written document

Appendix C – Framework Plan Questionnaire Responses

Appendix D – Consultation Responses Summary