
Meeting: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 18 October 2012
Subject: Site Allocations Policy MA2 – Masterplan for Land at Steppingley Road and Froghall Road, Flitwick
Report of: Cllr Nigel Young, Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Economic Development
Summary: The report recommends that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the Masterplan and that Executive adopt it as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.
Given the long lead-in times for this Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a verbal update will be given at this meeting of any additional comments received as part of the public consultation following the preparation of the Draft Consultation Statement which is appended to this report (Appendix D).

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities
Contact Officer: Connie Frost-Bryant, Senior Planning Officer
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: Flitwick
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities

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| 1. The Masterplan will support the Council priority of managing growth effectively |
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Financial:

- | |
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| 2. The creation of the Masterplan does not represent a financial burden on the Council. The costs for creating the Masterplan have been borne in their entirety by the site 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 Masterplan and subsequent determination of future outline planning applications. |
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Legal:

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| 3. None |
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Risk Management:

4. Policy MA2 of the Site Allocations DPD makes clear the requirement for the production of a Masterplan for the site. A failure to endorse the Masterplan and determine any subsequent planning applications in accordance with the agreed Planning Performance Agreement timelines may result in the Council being forced to pay back a meaningful proportion of the monies secured through the Planning Performance Agreement.
5. An adopted Masterplan will give more certainty to the development management process.
6. Other risks, such as failure to deliver the Council's priorities, reputational risks, failure to discharge statutory responsibilities, failure of partnership working, and environmental and financial risks could also be incurred. The masterplan serves to minimise these risks by setting an agreed framework for development in advance of the planning applications and then onwards through to implementation.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

7. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

8. 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
9. The Site Allocations DPD Equality Impact assessment (EIA) highlighted the need for:
 - The delivery of housing and employment in towns and villages throughout the north of Central Bedfordshire
 - The selection of housing sites on the basis that that future residents live in locations close to services and public transport routes.
 - Provision of land for community facilities.
 - New employment units allocated close to centres of population in order to increase job opportunities locally and help to address unemployment and out-commuting.
10. The DPD EIA concluded that the emphasis placed on ensuring that developments are allocated within sustainable locations and ensuring that residents are able to access employment opportunities, facilities and services to meet their everyday needs should help to ensure a positive impact for all sections of the community.
11. Section 36 of the report highlights the key objectives of the Masterplan, many of which will address key equality issues.

Public Health

12. The new development has the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of those living within Flitwick and surrounding areas as the new cycling and pedestrian routes that are proposed will allow people to use sustainable modes of transport. The level of public open space that is to be provided on the site which is in excess of the requirements, will also contribute to health and wellbeing.

Community Safety:

13. 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 SPD.

Sustainability:

14. Within the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (DPD) for Central Bedfordshire (North), Flitwick has been identified as a major service centre capable of accommodating additional housing and employment provision. The proposed development would contribute toward the vitality and viability of local facilities thereby reducing the need to travel. The Site Allocations DPD has also been the subject of a Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Procurement:

15. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Committee is asked to endorse the Masterplan and recommend to the Executive that it be adopted as technical guidance

Purpose of the Masterplan

16. The production of a masterplan was a requirement of Policy MA2 of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (2011). The Masterplan provides the background and policy context for the site and its allocation. It sets out the aims for the development to deliver and identifies the constraints and opportunities which the subsequent outline planning application must address.
17. It is a high level document, whose purpose is to set out general principles; the more concentrated and detailed work will be a matter to be addressed at the planning application stages of the process.
18. Once adopted, the Masterplan will then support the submission of an Outline Planning Application and assist Development Management in determining that application.

Background

19. The Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan (2005) identified the Valley Farm site on Steppingley Road as safeguarded or "white land" to be excluded from the Green Belt.

20. In November 2009, the Council adopted the Core Strategy and Development Management DPD following an Examination in Public in June/July of the same year. The Core Strategy required the delivery of at least 17,950 new homes between 2001 and 2026 with 5,000 new homes required in addition to those already committed (such as those allocated in the Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan 2005).
21. Of these 5,000, the Core Strategy stated that 500-700 should be provided in Flitwick (Policy CS5) with the Safeguarded Land identified as being brought forward to accommodate these new homes. The Plan also noted that these should be brought forward early in the plan period which ran up to 2026, as new housing would support the town centre redevelopment and also benefitted from its location close to the mainline railway station.
22. In April 2011, the Council formally adopted the Site Allocations DPD (for the former Mid Bedfordshire Area) following an examination in October 2010. Policy MA2 of the Central Bedfordshire Site Allocations DPD (April 2011) allocates Land at Steppingley Road and Froghall Road, Flitwick (also known as Valley Farm) for the development of a minimum of 450 dwellings and at least 1.1 hectare of B1 and B2 employment land.
23. It is now considered after completing a detailed design based appraisal of the site that it is only capable of delivering up to 400 homes. The reduction in housing numbers is deemed necessary in order to deliver a mix of family sized accommodation at a lower density than the standard 35 dwellings per hectare density that has previously been adopted to estimate site capacities. This approach has been welcomed at the various consultation events that are outlined in paragraphs 25 to 35 below.
24. A Planning Performance Agreement has been entered into between Central Bedfordshire Council and the site promoters, Old Road Securities Plc. The Agreement identifies a shared vision and sets out key milestones and timescales for the delivery of a planning decision. Whilst it offers certainty in terms of project management, it does not offer any guarantee that planning permission will be granted.

Consultation

25. Various stakeholder meetings have been convened to inform the preparation of the Masterplan.
26. A presentation meeting was held for local Ward Members, Flitwick Town Council and Council officers in December 2011 with the purpose of initiating the development of the masterplan and informing those involved of the opportunities and constraints that the site presented. These are further outlined in paragraphs 37 and 38 below.
27. Using the comments and feedback gained from this session a second whole day seminar involving stakeholders was held in February 2012. This also included a presentation but used a focus group format on specific topic based areas to explore the issues in further detail. The groups were well attended and involved members and officers of the Council. The topics comprised of the following themes:
 - Urban Design/ Masterplanning
 - Open Space and Green Infrastructure
 - Transport & Connectivity

- Employment

28. A number of other regular meetings with Council highways, sustainable transport, open space and planning officers have also been held throughout the spring and summer to ensure that an agreed technical approach to the development of the site could be established.
29. A draft masterplan was then put before the West Placemaking Group for their informal consideration on 25th July 2012. This was well-received by the group and the questions which followed that related principally to access issues were addressed satisfactorily by the transport and planning team that work on behalf of the site promoter.
30. A dedicated website was launched in advance of the public consultation (www.valleyfarmflitwick.co.uk); with the purpose of providing general information, plans and also a platform for the subsequent public consultation and exhibition material.
31. Formal public consultation commenced on 7th September 2012 and ran for a period of four weeks until 6th October 2012.
32. As part of this, a two day public exhibition was held during the afternoon and evening of Friday 7th September and during the day on Saturday 8th September to inform local residents and the wider public about the proposals and allow them to comment on the masterplan. The timing of the exhibition outside working hours was designed to give everyone who was interested in the proposals the best opportunity of attending the exhibition.
33. The exhibition was also attended by those tenants whose properties adjoin the site, ward members, town councillors and the Chair of the adjoining parish council, Steppingley Parish Council.
34. Following this, a static unmanned exhibition together with comments forms was maintained for the first fortnight of the consultation period at the Rufus Centre in Flitwick and then from 24th September onwards at the public library in the centre of the town. This gave the exhibition material increased coverage in the town and ensured that paper copies were viewable at all times during the consultation period.
35. The consultation and publicity of the masterplan proposals was carried out in compliance with the Central Bedfordshire Draft Statement of Community Involvement (June 2012).

The Masterplan

36. As a high level visual and spatial plan which sets out general principles, the Masterplan (Appendix A) is succinct in its nature and is comprised of three themed plans showing movement; landscape, open space and play areas; and built form and character. The masterplan seeks to achieve the following key objectives:

- (a) **Housing:** - A target of up to 400 new dwellings to be delivered across the site. As discussed in paragraph 23, this is a lower figure than that which was stipulated in Policy MA2 of the Site Allocations Plan, but reflects the current approach of ensuring that reasonably sized family accommodation, and adequate car parking and landscaping can be delivered on new housing sites. This will include the provision of a range of housing types and sizes based on an assessment of the need in this area in accordance with Policy DM10 of the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD and Policy 30 of the emerging Development Strategy. Densities will vary across the site to allow the creation of different character areas in order to give the development a sense of place.
- (b) **Affordable Housing:-** In accordance with Policy CS7 of the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD and Policy 32 of the emerging Development Strategy, the objective is to deliver 35% of the total number of houses as affordable. A mix of tenures will be required which could include social rent, affordable rent, and intermediate tenures having regard to housing needs and best available evidence.
- (c) **Employment –** The site is allocated for 1.1ha of B1 (offices and light industry), B2 (general industry) or bulky goods retail. In accordance with Policy 7 (Employment Sites and Uses) of the emerging Development Strategy, and in order to ensure that the site delivers new jobs; some flexibility will be afforded to non-B employment-generating uses, which could include C2 (residential institutions) or D1 (non-residential institutions).
- (d) **Planning Obligations:** - The site promoters are to enter into a planning obligation in order to make contributions towards necessary facilities and services in accordance with Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD. This will include the provision of additional school places as required. These contributions will be provided through entering into a S106 Agreement with the Council in accordance with the Planning Obligations Supplementary planning Document (SPD) or any future Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule. As well as new school places, the planning obligation will, where appropriate, also include contributions towards sustainable transport measures, healthcare, sport and recreation facilities, local community facilities and any other requirements as agreed by the Council. Draft Heads of Terms are to be agreed and submitted with the Outline Planning Application.
- (e) **Connectivity across the site:** - The scheme allows for convenient movement for residents, while ensuring through the use of surfacing, road layout and low speed limits that routes through the site will not be used as a 'rat-run'. A central spine road will allow a bus to travel through the site to connect the new housing with the town centre. The minor streets and lanes which flow off this will where appropriate be shared surfaces to make for an attractive, legible and safe development for all. The existing public footpath linking Windmill Road to Froghall Road will be retained and enhanced to create an attractive green corridor and the opportunity to link to the pedestrian network either in the direction of Flitwick town centre to the south or Ampthill to the north.

- (f) **A Safe Route to Redborne Upper School** – The masterplan shows the creation of a pedestrian footpath along the boundary of the site which fronts Froghall Road. This picks up the proposed footpath network throughout the site and links with the existing public footpath route. It then continues underneath the railway bridge onwards towards the school in Amphill. The need to create a footpath of a safe width under the bridge has meant that a one way shuttle system controlled by traffic lights must be employed for vehicular access. The speed limit on Froghall Road would also be lowered from 60mph to 30mph for the safety of cyclists and pedestrians and to reflect the new residential character of this area. This solution has been developed with the agreement of Central Bedfordshire Development Management Transport Planners and will be further tested through the Transport Assessment which must be submitted alongside the outline planning application. Further detail about the design of this route can be found in the plan at Appendix C.
- (g) **Integration with the existing neighbourhood:** - The site is not adjacent to other residential development other than the three cottages that front the site, but instead adjoins the community uses of the Rufus Centre and Flitwick Leisure Centre. The successful integration of new housing with the existing community, both physically and socially will be aided by this accessibility to key services and also by the pedestrian links that are outlined in point (d) above.
- (h) **Public open space and play areas** – A total of 3.16ha of open space will be delivered across the site. This provision slightly exceeds the level required by the Council's adopted standards. Two new children's play areas will also be created and will help to address the existing deficiency in play space to the north of the town. Currently there is no provision within 15 minutes walk of an area stretching from Beaumont Road to The Paddocks in the north of Flitwick. This is plotted spatially on plans titled 'Children's Play Provision' on p13-14 in Appendix B. One of the play areas will be a Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP) which caters older children and includes at least eight pieces of play equipment. The other will be a Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) which is suitable for children aged from 3-8 years and includes at least five types of equipment. The masterplan also shows a Multi Use Games area on the site which accommodates a range of team sports activities. Following a consultation response from the Central Bedfordshire Council Leisure Services Team, it has been agreed that this will now be delivered off-site on the adjacent Flitwick Leisure Centre land to increase accessibility and usage. A commuted sum will be paid by the developer to deliver this facility.
- (i) **Drainage** - The developer will be required to deliver a comprehensive and appropriate Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) scheme for the site that complies with best management practice for SuDS in order to limit surface water run-off. A surface water attenuation area and pond will be delivered on the eastern corner of the site as part of this wider drainage management strategy.

37. The technical work (Appendix B) which informed the creation of the Masterplan identifies the constraints which any future planning application will have to consider. These consist of:

- Existing landscape and aboricultural features
 - The railway line and resulting noise contours
 - Water mains and easements
 - Electricity cables
 - Surface water and drainage
 - Highway capacity issues
38. The draft Masterplan itself (Appendix A) also identifies the opportunities which any future planning application will have to consider. These consist of:
- New homes for Flitwick
 - Well-designed homes and spaces
 - Informal green space
 - Two new children's' play areas and a Multi-Use Games Area on the adjacent Leisure Centre site
 - Reduced vehicle speeds and safe access along Froghall Road
 - Better environment and connections for pedestrians and cyclists
 - New commercial units/ other employment generating uses
 - A new bus route
 - Improved access to the countryside
 - Improvements to existing drainage

Analyses from the Consultation Exercise

39. The summary of results of the public consultation exercise at the time of publication of this report can be found at Appendix D within the Draft Statement of Community Involvement. Any comments received after this time, will be reported to the Committee verbally as indicated at the top of this report. A final and fully complete version of the Statement of Community Involvement will be submitted together with the report that will go to Executive on 4th December 2012.
40. In brief, over 100 visitors attended the exhibitions and 23 responses were submitted either at the exhibition on the feedback forms provided, or by letter or e-mail in the weeks that followed. A number of copies of a response on behalf of the residents group Flitwick at the Crossroads (FATCRAG) were received. This raised concerns in relation to the provision of community infrastructure and increased traffic; and sought additional detail on matters like house types which would not be included within a Masterplan. A letter was also received from Nadine Dorries MP noting the exhibition and her intention to view the exhibition boards during the consultation period.
41. The high level of attendance and interaction by those who attended the exhibition showed that there is a good level of interest in the scheme proposals and the Masterplan.
42. Despite this overall interest, the consultation on the Masterplan itself received very little direct feedback with the overwhelming majority of comments being about the principle of development, or what residents would like to see included within the application or addressed by the S106 legal agreement. This again suggests that the content of the Masterplan itself is not contentious.

43. In addition, 5 out of the 23 respondents gave positive feedback, and a further 2 gave neutral responses to the masterplan proposals. This lack of contention, may in part be due to the fact that principle of development in this location is well established in the town, as the site has been promoted as an area for the expansion of Flitwick for the last two decades.
44. The majority of comments received, related to concerns about suitable infrastructure provision particularly in relation to local schools and doctors surgeries; and increased traffic congestion around the site caused by additional vehicles and the proposed shuttle arrangement under the Froghall Road railway bridge.
45. While these comments are valuable, they are not pertinent to informing the Masterplan given its purpose as a high level document which identifies key principles for development. The first set of concerns will be addressed by the S106 legal agreement which will ensure that suitable infrastructure is provided through planning contributions and the latter by the Transport Assessment which must be submitted alongside the Outline planning application.
46. Other comments related to parking provision, surface water drainage and build standards. Parking will be in accordance with the current parking standards for Central Bedfordshire, drainage will be addressed by a comprehensive SuDS scheme as discussed in section 36 (i) and build standards will be determined by the current Building Regulations in conjunction with the relevant Development Plan policies.

Proposed Changes

47. The only proposed change to the Masterplan (Appendix A) is to remove the Multi Use Games area from the plan following the consultation response received from Central Bedfordshire Council Leisure Services Team as detailed in section 36 (h). It is proposed that this facility is now delivered on the adjacent Flitwick Leisure Centre land by payment of a commuted sum. Furthermore this approach has the full support of Flitwick Town Council.

Conclusions

48. Whilst the level of direct feedback on the Masterplan was relatively low, it is testimony to the endeavours of the stakeholder working groups who have listened to and reflected local opinion in the emerging document. Great consideration has been afforded to the feedback from consultation at all stages in informing and creating the masterplan so it is therefore concluded that as a technical document, the Masterplan is fit for development management purposes and should be endorsed as such by this Committee.

Appendices:

- Appendix A – Draft Masterplan
- Appendix B – Background Technical Data
- Appendix C – Froghall Road Plan
- Appendix D – Draft Statement of Community Involvement

Note: The appendices listed in Appendix D are not currently available but can be provided on request prior to the OSC meeting.