
Meeting: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 25 April 2013
Subject: Framework Plan – Land East of Leighton-Linslade
Report of: Cllr Nigel Young , Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development
Summary: The report recommends that Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend the Framework Plan to Executive for adoption as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.

Advising Officer: Trevor Saunders, Assistant Director Planning and Development
Contact Officer: Sue Frost, Local Planning and Housing Team
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: Eggington, Heath and Reach, Leighton Buzzard wards and Stanbridge wards
Function of: Executive

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

1. The Framework Plan will support the council's priorities of "Enhancing Central Bedfordshire" and delivering "Better Infrastructure".

Financial:

2. The creation of the development brief 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.

Legal:

3. 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:

4. A failure to endorse the Framework Plan would potentially risk the cohesive development of the urban extension. The lack of coherence across infrastructure provision could result in the urban extension not being delivered. An adopted Framework Plan will give more certainty to the development plan process.
5. The failure to endorse the Framework Plan would also potentially fail to deliver the Council's priorities, partnership working and result in environmental and financial risks.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

6. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

7. 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.
8. 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.
9. The Plan also includes a headline aim related to assisting in the regeneration of Leighton Linlade Town Centre. 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 the community relations are maintained.

Public Health

10. 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:

11. 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:

12. 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:

13. Not applicable.

Executive:

14. A verbal update (together with any Overview and Scrutiny recommendation) will be given at Executive Committee (14 May 2013).

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to recommend the Framework Plan to Executive for adoption as technical guidance.

Purpose of the Framework Plan

15. The Council has determined that for all strategic development schemes being promoted either through the emerging Development Strategy or through other arrangements, it will produce a series of Framework Plans to guide the consideration of planning applications as and when these come forward. They are also intended to supplement the evidence base for the Development Strategy and assist in demonstrating the deliverability of these major allocated sites. To that end the Council endorsed a Framework Plan in October 2012 dealing with North Houghton Regis urban extension.
16. The East of Leighton Linlade Framework Plan is a high level document which is intended to guide development in the area, allocated by Policy 62 of the emerging Development Strategy. The document sets out the vision and the aims expected to be delivered for the urban extension at Leighton-Linslade.
17. The Framework Plan is made up of two parts; a Concept Plan diagram and a supplementary written document. The Concept Plan diagram identifies the indicative location of infrastructure and land uses. The written document sets out the vision for the urban extension and Central Bedfordshire Council's expectations for any planning applications to be determined.

Background

18. Leighton-Linslade was identified as a sustainable location for growth through the Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy. Following this plan the site to the east of Leighton-Linslade was identified in the Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire Core Strategy for about 2,500 dwellings, approximately 16 ha of employment land and associated infrastructure.
19. On 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. Following that decision, on 23 August 2011 Central Bedfordshire Council Executive endorsed the joint Core Strategy and its evidence base as guidance for Development Management purposes and on 4 October 2011 set out its plan for a new Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire.
20. Prior to the withdrawal of the Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Core Strategy, the developers had indicated that they would pursue the development of the land through the Development Management process. Three outline planning applications were submitted to the Council in mid-2011. These applications have not been determined, though it is expected that they will be determined at Development Management Committee in summer 2013. If minded to approve, the Council will be required to refer the applications to the Secretary of State as a departure from the adopted Development Plan (South Beds Local Plan Review 2004). The Secretary of State will then decide, normally within 28 days, whether to 'call in' the applications for his consideration.

21. Prior to the submission of the planning applications and as part of the background to the Joint Core Strategy, a Master Plan exercise was undertaken. This exercise was set up by the Council and developers in early 2010. This document was not subject to any public consultation prior to submission of the Joint Core Strategy.
22. In order to remedy this and to comply with the general requirements of the urban extensions identified in the emerging Development Strategy, a Framework Plan has been developed through discussions with Central Bedfordshire Council officers, elected members and with the co-operation of the developers. The Framework Plan sets out a broad vision for the overall site, a detailed assessment of the land uses, the overall design principles and the proposals for associated critical and essential infrastructure.
23. This Framework Plan builds on the work previously undertaken in the Masterplanning exercise and also on the details collected for submission with the submitted planning applications. However, it does not provide the same degree of detail as the planning applications since the intention is primarily to explain the constraints and opportunities operating within this site, the highway and movement issues, the design principles and the ability of the development to integrate with the existing town of Leighton-Linslade.

The Framework Plan

24. The eastern expansion of Leighton-Linslade will be a sustainable urban extension, building upon the existing strong sense of local community, will provide a proportionate expansion of this important market town and will secure a range of public benefits for both the new and existing residents. The development will aim to complement the wider regeneration efforts taking place in Central Bedfordshire, notably that of Leighton Linslade Town Centre and in doing so will encourage inward investment and strengthen the local economy by establishing new jobs.
25. The urban extension will:
 - (a) create a sustainable community with reduced carbon emissions by providing efficient new buildings and reducing the reliance on vehicles
 - (b) create an attractive new community with a range of homes and new employment opportunities and a providing a range of social facilities on site
 - (c) improve local economic opportunities by providing two new employment sites together with a Neighbourhood Centre, community facilities and schools;
 - (d) securing a sense of place by ensuring a design which will fit with the overall character of Leighton-Linslade
 - (e) ensure connectivity by providing good links to destinations within the town, including the provision of better public transport.
26. The Framework Plan identifies a series of headline aims which 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 written document, which has been attached as Appendix A.
27. 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 site to proceed. This includes; the Eastern Link Road and new utility infrastructure.

28. Part of the infrastructure to be provided in the urban extension is the Eastern Link Road. The purpose of this road is to serve the various residential areas to be provided within the new development, but will also provide an outer orbital road which when combined with the provision of a new roundabout at the junction of the A505/Stanbridge Road enables existing residents to travel within the town without using the town centre. In so doing, it has the potential to reduce town centre congestion, the impacts of development on existing local roads, will provide a more sustainable route for journeys, including public transport journeys connecting employment uses and residential areas in this part of town and will provide an alternative route to Vandyke Road and Hockliffe Road.
29. A detailed description of the infrastructure can be found in the Framework Plan.

Public Consultation and Feedback

30. In September 2012, the site promoters presented a draft version of the Framework Plan to the Leighton Buzzard and Rural South Placemaking Group. Central Bedfordshire Members and officers were in attendance at this meeting.
31. In December 2012, an extensive public consultation exercise was commenced. The public consultation period ran for a total of nine weeks between December 2012 and January 2013. A copy of the details of the consultation undertaken are summarised in the draft statement of community involvement – see Appendix B.
32. During the consultation process, a mailout was sent out and the draft Framework Plan was available to view on Central Bedfordshire's website. In addition, three exhibitions were held; two in Leighton-Linslade and one in the adjoining Parish of Eggington within which the majority of the site is located. An advert was placed in the Leighton Linslade newspaper advertising the exhibitions and consultation. A questionnaire was provided for responses.
33. A total of 132 responses were received from the consultation events. The comments have largely been from members of the public residing in a number of different locations within the town and adjoining villages. Responses were also received from the Town Council, adjoining Parish Councils and local community groups. There were 51 responses opposing the development, with the remaining responses providing constructive comments in highlighting the issues residents perceive to have a bearing on the development. A summary of the comments may be found in the Appendix B.
34. A number of comments received have been about the principle of development itself and in the context of Leighton-Linslade being able to absorb further development. Policies in the emerging Development Strategy identify the key locations for growth and establish the principle of development at East Leighton-Linslade and therefore comments which relate to dwelling numbers, mix and tenure, for example, are not pertinent. Any resolution to grant planning permission in advance of adoption of the Development Strategy would need to be referred to the Secretary of State. Comments have also included suggestions about what residents would like to see included within the development. Whilst valuable, they are not salient to informing the Framework Plan given its purpose is to identify key principles for the site, opportunities and constraints. These comments are therefore more relevant to the three planning applications.

35. A summary of the responses can be found in Appendix B. The main objections related to the following issues:
- (a) Amount of housing proposed
 - (b) Increased traffic generation resulting from the development
 - (c) Inadequate provision of social infrastructure
 - (d) Loss of Green Belt
 - (e) Concerns over flooding
 - (f) Coalescence with outlying villages
 - (g) Loss of character of Leighton Linlade

These representations raise a number of planning issues which are set out in this appendix, together with a commentary on how they have been addressed in the Framework Plan.

Changes to the Framework Plan

36. In the Consultation Responses Summary document (Appendix B) the consultation responses have been summarised and addressed.
37. In light of the comments received, the Framework Plan has been amended to include the following changes:
- (a) page 3 - updating the Framework Plan with the progress of the Council's Development Strategy;
 - (b) page 14 - updating the planning and design principles to include landscaping to minimise the effects on outlook from existing properties, principle 9;
 - (c) page 16 – explanation of the Employment Areas;
 - (d) para 4.13 – amendment to refer to the new pitches for a range of sports;
 - (e) para 4.15 – amendment to refer to possibility of combined facilities between the community hub and Upper School;
 - (f) para 6.1 – rewording of paragraph to reflect the consultation that was undertaken in the preparation of the Framework Plan; and
 - (g) Insertion of a Glossary to explain terms used throughout the Framework Plan.

Conclusion

38. The Council has undertaken a comprehensive and inclusive consultation process which has generated significant community interest. Where possible comments have been taken on board in changes to the Framework Plan. Clear reasons have been given when it has not been appropriate to amend the document and these are also set out in appendix B. As a technical document, the Framework Plan is fit for development management purposes.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Framework Plan and proposed changes

Appendix B – Draft Statement of Community Involvement and consultation responses