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**Meeting:** Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 27 February 2014

**Subject:** Arlesey Masterplan

**Report of:** Cllr Nigel Young, Executive Member Sustainable Communities;  
Strategic Planning and Economic Development

**Summary:** The report outlines the proposals contained within the Draft Masterplan for Arlesey Cross and outlines where changes have been made in response to public consultation. It further recommends that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the Masterplan and that Executive adopt it as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.

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**Advising Officer:** Trevor Saunders, Assistant Director Planning

**Contact Officer:** Sue Frost, Local Planning and Housing Manager

**Public/Exempt:** Public

**Wards Affected:** Arlesey, Stotfold and Langford, Shefford

**Function of:** Council

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

1. The Arlesey Masterplan will deliver against two of the Council's key priorities:
  - Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.
  - Better infrastructure – improved roads, broadband reach and transport.

### **Financial:**

2. There are financial implications as the Council is the majority landowner of the site, but this report relates only to the planning process. There has been a cost to the Council in the preparation of the Masterplan but this has been met from existing budgets. There are no financial implications arising directly from the report, as it deals with planning matters. The Council is the majority landowner of the site and therefore when developed, the Council will be expecting a capital receipt from the sale of land to developers.

### **Legal:**

3. The Council owns a greater part of the site on the east of the High Street. In order to avoid any conflict of interest between the Council as Planning Authority and the Council as landowner, the Council's Assets Team has employed consultants Woods Hardwick and Hankinson Duckett Associates to prepare the Masterplan on its behalf. In line with common practice, it has also entered into a Planning Performance Agreement with the Planning Division for the administration and supervision of the Masterplan and subsequent

determination of future outline planning applications.

**Risk Management:**

4. Policy MA8 of the adopted Site Allocations DPD allocates this land for development and makes clear the requirement for the production of a Masterplan for the site. The policy and Masterplan together set the requirements for the development and a framework within which future planning decisions will be made. A failure to endorse the Masterplan gives the Council as Local Planning Authority reduced control if piecemeal applications are submitted for the site and may result in major infrastructure requirements not being delivered in a timely and sustainable way.
5. 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 arise. 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.
6. An adopted Masterplan will give more certainty to the development plan process.

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

7. Not Applicable.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

8. 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.
9. 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. The report highlights the key objectives of the Masterplan, many of which will address key equality issues

**Public Health**

10. The Masterplan requires new or improved health facilities and new cycling and pedestrian routes which 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:**

11. The Council needs to ensure that it complies with its statutory duties under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act and as such the Masterplan refers to compliance with the Central Bedfordshire Design Guide which includes criteria set down for community safety.

**Sustainability:**

12. Within the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (DPD) for Central Bedfordshire (North), Arlesey has been identified as a minor service centre with excellent road and rail connections capable of accommodating additional housing and employment provision. The proposed development would also contribute toward the vitality and viability of local facilities and provide a large area of employment land thereby reducing the need to travel. The Site Allocations DPD has also been the subject of a Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

**Procurement:**

13. Not applicable.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**The Committee is asked to endorse the Masterplan and recommend to the Executive that it be adopted as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.**

**Purpose of the Masterplan**

14. The production of a masterplan was a requirement of Policy MA8 of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (2011). The Masterplan refers to 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.
15. 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 when planning applications are submitted in due course.

**Background**

16. Arlesey is classified in planning terms as a 'minor service centre'. It has grown steadily over a number of years through piecemeal development. Such developments have not brought about additions or improvements to facilities' in the town. For this reason the Town Council promoted larger scale growth through its 2004 Town Plan. In conjunction with the legacy Mid Beds District Council, a site was identified for large scale mixed use development to meet district wide housing and employment needs and to deliver significant improvements to local services and improve traffic conditions along the High Street.
17. 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. Of these 5,000, the Core Strategy stated that 1000 homes

and 10-15 ha of employment land should be provided in Arlesey (Policy CS5). This is therefore an important site in helping the Council meet its future housing requirements.

18. In April 2011, the Council formally adopted the Site Allocations DPD following a public examination. Policy MA8 of the Central Bedfordshire Site Allocations DPD (April 2011) made clear that a mixed use development of a minimum of 1000 dwellings and 10ha of employment land should be developed and a Masterplan prepared to guide the development..

### **Masterplan Proposals**

19. The Masterplan covers all of the land included in the Policy MA8 allocation. The document sets out the vision, land use mix and development principles expected to be delivered for the allocation at Arlesey. The Masterplan 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 allocated site and Central Bedfordshire Council's expectations for any planning applications to be determined. The draft Masterplan has been attached as Appendix A to this report.
20. The key requirements of policy MA8 are the provision of a relief road, a new focal area of retail and other community uses, better health facilities, a new lower school, more open space and routes for pedestrians and cyclists and employment opportunities together with a minimum of 1000 new homes.
21. Those indicated in the Masterplan are as follows
  - (a) Residential – Around a 1000 dwellings, including a mix of types including affordable housing in line with the Council's requirement at the time of application. Extra care and assisted living is indicated on land to the east of the High Street totalling about 1.09ha
  - (b) Employment – 10ha of employment land the majority of which is located on the eastern edge which will allow direct access to be taken from the new spine road close to the proposed junction on the A507
  - (c) Education – A site for a new two form entry First School is identified in the south of the eastern land as the existing school does not have capacity to serve the development. A new school identity was agreed by Executive on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013; the likelihood is that the school will be open by 2016. The existing Gothic Meade Academy will be able to bid to run the school if it so wishes.
  - (d) Local Centre – 1.67ha is identified to provide a focal point Arlesey currently lacking because of the linear nature of the town. The uses to be provided include community, health and retail but this can be flexible and subject to further agreement and discussion with the Town Council
  - (e) A new relief road providing an alternative route relieving the High Street, House Lane and Stotfold Road

- (f) Recreation and Open Space – significant overall provision has been made including a new town park with play area adjacent to the local centre. Other open space and play facilities are provided within accessible walking distances to all parts of the development. The new pitch provision is located adjacent to the school site and outside of the allocation boundary on CBC owned land to provide an enhanced landscape edge to the town.
- (g) New green routes for walking, cycling and landscaping permeate through the indicative layout and a significant north south car free route is proposed linking the development to the existing school and community facilities.
22. In addition to the masterplan an Interim Transport Assessment (ITA) was undertaken and a non technical summary document was published as part of the consultation. See appendix B.
23. A number of junctions have been modelled on the basis of clear and robust assumptions about the growth that will result from this and other developments in the surrounding area to 2025 (The ITA explains in greater detail the assumptions used). The modelling, which has been agreed with the Highway Agency and CBC, demonstrates that the proposed site accesses would operate well within their capacities (subject to some modification) and are therefore considered to be the appropriate means of access to the site for future planning applications
24. The extent of physical mitigation works required to these junctions to bring about a nil detriment impact will ultimately be determined by a detailed Transport Assessment which will be submitted with any future planning application. The costs of such works will be quantified and an appropriate financial contribution then made by the developer through what is referred to as a S106 Agreement.

### **Consultation and Changes in response to feedback**

25. A public consultation on the draft masterplan was held from 9<sup>th</sup> November 2013 to 16<sup>th</sup> December 2013. Approximately 460 people attended an exhibition over two consecutive Saturdays. A total of 124 survey responses were received from the consultation events along with a further 24 written responses. There were 52 responses opposing the scale of development. With the remaining responses commenting on the issues residents perceive to have a bearing on the development, the following were the most common.
- Concerns about traffic south of the five ways junction 55
  - Comments/concerns relating to existing amenity area/impact upon the southern part of the town 36
  - Concerns about increased traffic and HGV's 25
  - Community/social concerns and comments 24
  - Local people should benefit from homes/employment 22
  - Disagree with traffic calming proposals 20
  - Local shops/café and services should be provided 20
  - Concerns that the size of the employment area exceeds local demand 16
  - Existing fields around the town should be retained 15

- Public transport facilities and services should be considered 15
- Comments suggesting the relief road should be to the east of the village 12

The feedback in these responses has been analysed and a detailed response has been provided in the consultation statement appendix C

26 The principal amendments made in response to the consultation are as follows:

- Extend proposed greenways (cycle/ pedestrian links) including potential options for a crossing over/under the A507 to provide a safer route for school children to Etonbury school and provide access to Etonbury Woods; the Concept Plan within the Draft Masterplan has been amended to indicate an approximate location for this so that developers are aware of the desire for this to form part of the infrastructure required with the site.
- As a result of concerns expressed about formalising parking on High Street and introducing further traffic calming, the indicative measures have been scaled back on the revised plans at Figures 5.3 and 5.4. Promoters of sites will be expected to have further discussions with officers and local representatives, such as Arlesey Town Council before any measures are finalised as part of planning applications.
- In responses to concerns that the proposed Local Centre will have a negative impact on the existing Civic Amenity Area, wording has been added in Section 9 to the effect that S106 money towards community facilities and services could be spend on rejuvenating this existing area to help maintain its vitality. Wording has also been added to clarify that the uses in the Local Centre are intended to be complementary.
- Additional wording has been added identifying the critical and essential infrastructure to be provided, critical being the relief road and educational provision. Additional wording on the phasing of infrastructure provision, including the requirement for an infrastructure phasing programme to be submitted and agreed at the planning application stage has been added to section 9 in response to concerns over pressure on existing infrastructure.

27. The other two main were the scale of development and increased traffic and HGV's on the High Street and south of the five ways junction.

28 The scale of development cannot be changed as it is already required in the adopted Core Strategy to meet CBC's housing targets.

29. With regard to traffic, the relief road is intended to take traffic off the High Street and traffic calming will deter traffic from using the High Street as the main through route. In the south the relief road enters the High Street again at the fiveways junction and this is where the main problems are perceived to be. Standard guidance in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges identifies that with this type of road and width there is still sufficient capacity within the highway network to accommodate the increased vehicle movements. Although an interim traffic assessment had accompanied the Masterplan, following consultation a further site survey of peak morning traffic was undertaken on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2014 to understand residents concerns. However, highway engineers did not observe any significant problems and concluded that additional measures south of the five ways junction would not provide any solutions. Notwithstanding this a full transport assessment will be required at the outline application stage.

## **Conclusion and Next Steps**

30. The Masterplan has followed the Council's due process in terms of consultation and additional consultation has also been undertaken including stakeholder meetings and staffed exhibitions for two consecutive Saturdays. Full consideration has been afforded to the consultation exercise and where possible amendments have been made to the Masterplan. As a planning technical document, the Masterplan has followed due process and is fit for development management purposes. Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the Masterplan which has been prepared following public consultation and to recommend the Executive adopt the Masterplan as formal planning guidance.

## **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Draft Masterplan incorporating proposed changes

(Due to its size the appendix has been circulated in hard copy to Members of the Committee only and is available on the Council's website)

Appendix B - Interim Transport Assessment non technical summary

Appendix C – Statement of Consultation and consultation results