

Meeting: Executive
Date: 18 March 2014
Subject: Arlesey Cross Masterplan
Report of: Cllr Nigel Young, Executive Member for 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 recommends that Executive adopt the Masterplan as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.

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: Executive
Key Decision Yes

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

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:

1. 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:

2. The Council owns a greater part of the site on the east of the High Street. 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:

3. Policy MA8 of the adopted Site Allocations DPD allocates this land for development and makes clear the requirement to produce 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.
4. 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.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Not applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. 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.
7. 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:

8. 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:

9. 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:

10. 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:

11. Not applicable.

Overview and Scrutiny:

12. The Committee resolved to endorse the draft Masterplan subject to a small number of changes. The main ones being:
- Making an additional crossing over/under the A507 a requirement, not a potential one;
 - Traffic calming measures on the High Street/Hitchin Road to be identified as critical infrastructure alongside the delivery of the relief road;
 - Clarify at paragraph 5.11 that carriageway widths will be narrowed and on street parking will be designed in through the construction of designated bays, in relation to the secondary access.

The detailed outcomes of the meeting will be reported verbally at Executive. The above changes have been incorporated into the draft Masterplan (Appendix A).

RECOMMENDATION:

The Executive is asked to endorse the Masterplan and adopt it as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.

<i>Reason for Recommendation:</i>	<i>A masterplan is required by policy MA8 of the Site Allocations DPD for the North of Central Bedfordshire before applications are submitted to help guide the Development Management process.</i>
-----------------------------------	---

Executive Summary

13. The report outlines the contents of the Masterplan for a large mixed use site in Arlesey (MA8) which was allocated in the Site Allocations Development Plan Document for the North of Central Bedfordshire. It is currently one of two significant housing sites in the north, the other being the Wixams. It will deliver approximately 1000 dwelling and 10ha of employment land. The quantum of housing on this site accounts for 10% of the new allocations that were made in the North in 2011 and it therefore has an important role in meeting the Council's housing targets. The consultation process started in 2012 when the first two day public exhibition was held over a Friday and Saturday in June. A questionnaire was issued and residents given four weeks to provide their feedback. This was followed by a two further design workshops which provided the basis for the preferred options and the indicative layout of the proposals now included within the draft Masterplan. The draft Masterplan was then subject to a further 2 day exhibition and five week period of public consultation in November and December 2013. This report outlines the responses and changes from the most recent public consultation and the recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Full details of the consultation process that this document has undergone have been provided in the Statement of Community consultation Appendix C.

Purpose of the Masterplan

14. Master planning is key part of delivering better quality urban design, a fundamental part of the planning system. As a Council we strongly support high quality urban design and are seeking to improve the quality of developments we deliver. However, it is important to recognise that a Masterplan is a high level document, whose purpose is to set out general principles and help identify the potential of a site and what can be delivered. It should not be seen as a rigid blueprint for development. It sets the context within which proposals can come forward. The document is not an end in itself as there is much more concentrated and detailed work to do on design quality and delivery. This is generally a matter to be addressed when planning applications are submitted in due course.
15. 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.

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 however, have not brought about significant improvements to facilities' in the town. For this reason, the Town Council promoted larger scale growth in its 2004 Town Plan. In conjunction with the legacy Mid Beds District Council, a site was subsequently 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. 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. The site allocated in Arlesey is covered by Policy MA8. The policy highlights that the site should provide a mixed use development with a minimum of 1000 dwellings and 10ha of employment land. As with all the allocated sites of significant size there is a requirement for the production of a Masterplan 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. 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 site and Central Bedfordshire Council's expectations against which any planning applications to be determined. The Masterplan is attached as Appendix A to this report.
20. The key requirements of Policy MA8 are the provision of a relief road, a new neighbourhood area of retail and other community uses, better health facilities, a new lower school, more open space, key routes for pedestrians and cyclists, the development of new employment opportunities and the delivery of a 1,000 new homes.
21. In summary, the key requirements are as follows:
 - (a) Residential – around 1,000 dwellings, including a mix of house 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 parcel of the development area, as the existing school does not have capacity to serve the development. A new school identity was agreed by Executive on the 10 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 wishes to do so.
 - (d) Local Centre – 1.67ha is identified to provide a neighbourhood centre for the town. The uses to be provided include community, health and retail but this can be flexible and will be 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 new open space provision is proposed by the Masterplan, including a new town park with play area adjacent to the neighbourhood centre. Other open space and play facilities are to be provided within accessible walking distance of all parts of the development. The new playing pitch provision is proposed to be located adjacent to the school site (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 will include a significant north-south car free route linking the development to education and community facilities.
22. To inform 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, demonstrates that the proposed site accesses would operate well within their capacities (subject to some modification) and will therefore be the appropriate means of access for the new development.
24. The extent of physical mitigation works required to these junctions to bring about a nil impact will ultimately be determined by a detailed Transport Assessment which will be submitted with any future planning application. The costs of highways works required will be quantified and an appropriate financial contribution made by the developer through a S106 Agreement associated with any subsequent planning permission.

Consultation and Changes in response to feedback

25. The consultation on the Masterplan started early in its preparation with a public exhibition in 2012 to obtain information on key issues and opportunities. This feedback was used to produce three concept plans which were presented at two design workshops led by specialist planning and design consultants. From the feedback at the workshops and further technical work a preferred concept plan was produced which has formed the basis of the current draft Masterplan. A public consultation on the draft Masterplan was held from 9th November 2013 to 16th 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. 52 responses opposed the scale of development, with the remaining responses commenting on the issues residents considered to have a bearing on the development. The following issues were those most commonly raised:

- 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 attached at Appendix C.

26. The principal amendments made to the draft Masterplan in response to the consultation are as follows:
- Extend proposed greenways (cycle/ pedestrian links) including potential options for 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 requirement for this to form part of the infrastructure necessary to deliver sustainable development of the site. Following comments from OSC this has now been changed to be a requirement rather than a potential requirement.
 - 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, including Arlesey Town Council before any measures are finalised as part of planning applications.
 - In response to concerns that the proposed Local Centre will have a negative impact on the existing community buildings, library and doctors surgery, wording has been added in Section 9 to the effect that S106 money towards community facilities and services could be spent 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 to existing facilities.
 - Additional wording has been added to strengthen and confirm the importance of infrastructure to be provided as part of the development, the Masterplan now identifies the relief road and educational provision as critical infrastructure. 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 also been added to Section 9 in response to concerns over pressure on existing infrastructure as the development progresses. Following comments from OSC the requirement for traffic calming on the High Street has been upgraded to critical infrastructure.
27. The other two main concerns raised during consultation related to the scale of development and increased traffic/HGV's on the High Street and south of the five ways junction.
28. The scale of development identified in policy is a minimum of 1000 homes and this cannot be changed by the Masterplan as it is required in the adopted Core Strategy to meet CBC's housing targets. However, the exact scale of development will be determined at application stage, taking into account viability considerations in relation to the infrastructure to be provided and detailed design/layout considerations reflecting the requirements of the Central Bedfordshire Design Guide and appropriate densities.

29. With regard to traffic, the new 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. At its southernmost point, the relief road joins the High Street at the five ways junction and many of those responding raised concerns about traffic congestion and highways safety at this junction. However, clear guidance in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges identifies that given the nature and width of the relief road, there will be sufficient capacity within the highway network to accommodate increased vehicle movements. Although an interim traffic assessment had been prepared to inform the draft Masterplan, following consultation, a further site survey of peak morning traffic was undertaken on the 22 January 2014 to respond to residents concerns. However, highway engineers did not observe any significant problems and concluded that additional measures south of the five ways junction would not be required in order ensure highway safety and the free flow of traffic when development is completed. A full transport assessment will of course be required to accompany an outline application stage in due course.

Conclusion and Next Steps

30. The Masterplan has been prepared in line with the Council's requirements for local engagement and consultation and has included in this case, additional stakeholder meetings and staffed exhibitions for two consecutive Saturdays. Full consideration has been afforded to the responses received during the consultation exercise and where appropriate amendments have been made to the Masterplan. As a planning technical document, the Masterplan has followed due process in terms of consultation and it is considered fit for development management purposes. Executive is asked to consider the content of the Masterplan and adopt it as technical planning guidance for the purposes of development management.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Masterplan incorporating proposed changes
Appendix B - Interim Transport Assessment non technical summary
Appendix C – Statement of Consultation and consultation results

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

None