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**Meeting:** Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 08 May 2014  
**Subject:** Development Brief – Land at Potton Road, Biggleswade  
**Report of:** Cllr Nigel Young, Executive Member Sustainable Communities;  
Strategic Planning and Economic Development

**Summary:** The report outlines the proposals contained within the draft development brief for land at Potton Road, Biggleswade 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 development brief and that Executive adopt it as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.

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**Advising Officer:** Jason Longhurst, Director of Regeneration and Business Support  
**Contact Officer:** Carry Murphy, Principal Planning Officer, Local Planning and Housing Team  
**Public/Exempt:** Public  
**Wards Affected:** Biggleswade  
**Function of:** Council

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

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

### **Legal:**

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

**Risk Management:**

4. Policy HA1 of the adopted Site Allocations DPD allocates this land for development and makes clear the requirement for the production of a development brief for the site. The policy and development brief together set the requirements for the development and a framework within which future planning decisions will be made. A failure to endorse the development brief and determine any subsequent planning applications in accordance with the agreed PPA timelines may result in the Council being forced to pay back a meaning proportion of the monies secured through the PPA.
5. An adopted development brief will give more certainty to the development management process, although there are still risks associated with this separate statutory stage such as securing adequate planning obligations to meet the needs of the development and a failure to meet the public's expectations of the development.

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

6. Not Applicable.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

7. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination. The Equality Impact assessment (EIA) that was undertaken for the Site Allocations DPD 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.
8. The 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. Sections 25-30 of this report highlights the key design principles development brief, many of which will address key equality issues such as affordable housing and Lifetime Homes.

**Public Health**

9. The Council needs 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. The development brief requires new or improved facilities and which will allow people to use sustainable modes of transport as well as on-site provision of additional open space, which will contribute to health and wellbeing.

**Community Safety:**

10. 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 development brief refers to compliance with the Central Bedfordshire Design Guide which includes criteria set down for community safety.

**Sustainability:**

11. Biggleswade is the largest town in Central Bedfordshire (North) area. Within the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (DPD) for Central Bedfordshire (North), Biggleswade has been identified as a major service centre with good 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 thereby reducing the need to travel. The Site Allocations DPD has also been the subject of a Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

**Procurement:**

12. Not applicable.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):****The Committee is asked to:-**

1. **To endorse the development brief and recommend to Executive that it be adopted as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.**

**Purpose of the Development Brief**

13. The draft development brief (Appendix A) provides the background and policy context for this site and its allocation for residential development. It also sets out the aims for the development identifying the particular constraints and opportunities of the site and confirms the range of technical work which any planning application must address.
14. The brief is a high level document whose purpose is to set out general principles; the more concentrated and detailed work is a matter to be addressed at the planning application stages. Nevertheless, it does provide a mechanism through which members of the public and other interested parties can have a greater involvement in the development of proposals for the site and provide some certainty as to the future development of the site. Once approved, the brief will act as Development Management guidance and any future planning applications will be considered against the background of the adopted brief.

**Background**

15. Biggleswade is classified in planning terms as a 'major service centre'. It has grown steadily over a number of years in terms of housing, jobs and services.
16. In November 2009, the Council adopted the Core Strategy and Development Management DPD following an Examination in Public. 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 250-500 homes should be provided in Biggleswade (Policy CS5: Providing Homes).
17. In April 2011, the Council formally adopted the Site Allocations DPD following a public examination. Two sites were allocated for residential development in Biggleswade providing for a total of 373 dwellings. Policy HA1 allocates the land at Potton Road for a minimum of 330 dwellings. This is, therefore, an important site in helping the Council meet its future housing requirements.

18. Policy HA1 states that development on the site will be subject to a number of requirements. A full list of these requirements is set out on page 12 of the development brief and is covered in more detail below. There is also an obligation for a development brief to be prepared to help inform subsequent planning applications and guide the development.
19. Since late 2013 Council officers, from a wide range of service areas, have been working in partnership with the developers for the site, on the preparation of a development brief for this site. Council Officers and the developers have also met with the representatives of the Biggleswade Town Council on two occasions. This work has explored the local and site specific issues to inform the development brief.
20. A planning performance agreement (PPA) has been entered into between the Council and the landowners/promoter. The agreement identifies a shared vision and identifies key milestones and timescales for the delivery of a planning decision by both the Council and the developer. Whilst it offers project management certainty, this does not mean a favourable planning application outcome is guaranteed.

### **The Development Brief**

21. Land west of Potton Road, Biggleswade comprises of an 11 hectare site located on the north-western side of Potton Road (B1040), immediately north east of the town. Location plans and aerial photographs are shown in the draft brief.
22. The site may be described as a trapezium shaped parcel of land which is generally level in topography terms. There are two existing gated vehicular access points from Potton Road. The site comprises a derelict plant nursery adjacent to the short eastern boundary with a group of greenhouses. The remainder of the land is in arable use with further open farmland to the north. There are some mature trees and hedgerows to the northern and to the south-western section of the Potton Road frontage. The western boundary is predominantly open.
23. The site abuts some residential properties which will need careful regard when designing a layout scheme. These are:
  - Along the south west boundary set centrally within the development site's Potton Road frontage, but excluded from it, a small group of three detached bungalows; and
  - To the front of the derelict nursery but excluded from the development sites is a pair of semi-detached houses.
  - Immediately to the south-west of the site is a wider area of suburban housing estates.
24. Opposite the development site is an urban extension under construction for some 2,000 dwellings referred to as 'land east of Biggleswade'. Edward Peake Middle School and Potton Hospital are also located off Potton Road (east side) and in close proximity to the site.

25. The brief sets out a number of design principles under Section 6 'Opportunities' and Section 7 'Proposals and Visions For The Site' to which any development proposals will need to adhere. In particular, the amount and type of development envisaged as well as the mix and type of dwellings (including particular needs such as affordable housing), scale, massing, drainage, landscape and open space requirements will need to be carefully considered.
26. Given the site's location, the brief aims to ensure that quality design is achieved throughout the development, providing a clear sense of place that enhances and integrates successfully with the surrounding development to the south and open countryside to the north, east and west.
27. In response to addressing these issues any layout scheme the development will need to take account of the site's constraints and opportunities associated with the site together with other relevant urban design principles set out in the Council Design Guide, for examples the street hierarchy and parking. An opportunities plan has therefore been prepared and is shown in figure 6.1 of the brief.
28. The brief is explicit in setting out the Council's specific requirements for access and connectivity both within and immediately surrounding the site in accordance with policy HA1. These cover the timing of the development in relation to the completion of the relief road to the east of Biggleswade and roundabout at Potton Road. An assessment will also need to be undertaken into the impact of additional traffic on the B1040 Potton Road and A1/A6001 roundabout and Sun Street, and a satisfactory resolution on the impact of additional traffic on the A1 roundabouts and on the roads within the town. The extent of physical mitigation works or financial contributions to address these impacts will need to be determined and considered as part of any future planning application.
29. There are also opportunities to improve and enhance connections into, out from and around the site. These routes will connect to existing roads and footpaths including the proposed Biggleswade Green Wheel. This will promote more sustainable means of travel to other areas of the town and countryside.
30. The brief sets out the Council's likely requirements for developer contributions in line with the adopted Planning Obligations Strategy. These also cover contributions to improvements of key projects in the town such as the town centre redevelopment proposals and Biggleswade Common.

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

31. A public consultation on the draft development brief was held from 13<sup>th</sup> March to 9<sup>th</sup> April 2014. The consultation exercise was advertised through a variety of media in accordance with established procedures. Letters to statutory consultees were sent as well as over 1,000 letters to residents living in the vicinity of the site. Copies of the document were made available to view on the Council's website and at the Council's offices, Biggleswade Library and Biggleswade Town Council offices. A questionnaire was available to complete and submit via post or on-line. Added to this, a public exhibition was held on 13<sup>th</sup> March at the Town Council's buildings. This was attended by representatives of the developers as well as Council officers. Approximately 85 people attended the exhibition.
32. A total of 35 survey responses were received along with a further 12 written responses. Formal comments have been submitted by the Town Council, Highways Agency, English Heritage, Environment Agency, Anglian Water,

Health and Safety Executive and Natural England. The feedback in these responses has been analysed and a detailed response has been provided in the consultation statement Appendix B.

33. A number of comments received have been about the principle of development itself and in the context of Biggleswade being able to absorb further development. Other responses include comments on the issues residents perceive to have a bearing on the development and their personal aspirations for the site. Adopted planning policies will prevail and therefore comments which relate to dwelling numbers, mix and tenure, are not pertinent. They are also not salient to informing the development brief given its purpose is to identify key principles for the site, opportunities and constraints and are therefore more relevant to any subsequent planning application.
34. A summary of other comments received of relevance to the development itself are as follows:
- a) Access arrangements to and from the site.
  - b) Concerns about safety and additional traffic around the school.
  - c) Impact of additional traffic on Potton Road and wider network.
  - d) Amenity impact for existing neighbouring properties.
  - e) Issues about open space and connectivity.
  - f) Need for adequate parking and road design.
  - g) Potential impacts and loss of Rights of Way and Bridleways on the site's boundaries.
  - h) Impacts on the natural environment – loss of trees/hedgerows, wildlife affected.
  - i) Integration with the existing neighbourhood and rest of town.
  - j) Impact on local facilities/services and need for improvements to address this.
35. A table is included in Appendix B which summarises the main comments received during the consultation, each with a response explaining how each issue will be addressed, and a column showing changes to the brief where necessary. The main issues identified above were responded to as follows:
- a) The safest method of access to the site will be considered in consultation with the CBC Highways Officers through the Transport Assessment. This was already stated in the Brief so no change was proposed.
  - b) Discussions are to be arranged with Edward Peake School to ensure that they are satisfied with the proposed arrangements for access to the development site. In addition to this text was added to section 2.3.1 of the brief to confirm that Edward Peake School would retain their crossing point.
  - c) A full Transport Assessment to CBC's satisfaction will be accompanying the planning application. The Transport Assessment is being prepared within a scope agreed with CBC, including consideration of contentious junctions within the town and assessment of impact on the Eastern Relief Road. Section 7.8 was added to the brief to confirm that this development would not come forward without completion of the Eastern Relief Road.
  - d) Text was added to Section 2.3.1 to reference the need to regard

relationships with existing properties.

- e) Some comments were made about the location of open spaces, suggesting that a more holistic approach with linked open spaces would be preferable as it would form a green corridor for residents and wildlife. This has been noted for consideration in the planning application stage.
  - f) Many comments concerned the quality of design, in particular road design and provision of adequate parking. The reference to the CBC Design Guide in the brief was updated to reflect that the Design Guide has now been adopted.
  - g) Text was added to section 6.7 to confirm that the existing footpath and bridleway to the west and north respectively would be retained and improved. It was also confirmed that the view from the bridleway and footpath would be considered.
  - h) Text was added to section 7.4 to confirm that existing hedgerows would be retained and enhanced. The brief already stated that full Ecological surveys would be undertaken and submitted at Planning Application stage, so no change was proposed.
  - i) Comments were made in relation to the integration of the site in to the surrounding rural area and the need for high-quality design. The brief already stated that a full Landscape Visual Impact Assessment would be undertaken and that the development would take account of the Design Guide so no change to the brief was proposed.
  - j) The brief already had a section on potential Section 106 contributions, so no change was proposed in response to the comments about pressure on facilities.
36. Some comments of a technical nature have also been received and are largely concerned with clarification being made to the brief on the requirements of the development.
37. The proposed changes to the draft development brief have been highlighted in Appendix A.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

38. Full consideration has been afforded to the consultation exercise and, where appropriate, amendments have been made to the draft brief. As a technical document, the development brief has followed due process and is fit for development management purposes.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Draft development brief incorporating proposed changes

Appendix B – Draft Statement of Community Involvement and consultation results

### **Background papers and their location:**

Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD

Site Allocations Development Plan Document

**Location of papers:** Priory House, Chicksands