
Meeting: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 19 February 2015

Subject: Wixam Park Masterplan

Report of: Cllr Nigel Young, Executive Member for Regeneration

Summary: The report outlines the proposals contained within the Draft Masterplan for Wixam Park 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.

Advising Officer: Richard Fox, Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy

Contact Officer: Sue Frost, Local Planning and Housing Manager

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: Houghton Conquest and Haynes

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

1. The Wixam Park 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 has been a cost to the Council in the preparation of the Masterplan in terms of staff resources but this has been met from existing budgets and has been recouped partly through a Planning Performance Agreement. There are no financial implications arising directly from the report, as it deals with planning matters.

Legal:

3. In line with common practice, the Developer has entered into a Planning Performance Agreement with the Planning Division for the administration and supervision of the Masterplan.

Risk Management:

4. Policy MA3 of the adopted Site Allocations DPD and Policy 63 of the emerging Development Strategy allocates this land for development and makes clear the requirement for the production of a Masterplan for the site(s). The policies and Masterplan together set the requirements for the development and a framework within which future planning decisions will be made. If the adoption of the Development Strategy were to be delayed an adopted Masterplan would guide any planning applications coming forward outside the plan making process. A failure to endorse and subsequently adopt the Masterplan gives the Council as Local Planning Authority reduced control if piecemeal applications are submitted for the site(s) 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 provide evidence in support of the Development Strategy to demonstrate that the site is available and deliverable.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

7. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

8. The Site Allocations DPD Equality Impact assessment (EIA) and emerging Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire Equality Impact Assessment 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 and Development Strategy 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 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 will also contribute to health and wellbeing. A countryside park is also planned for which will benefit both residents living on site and those living further away.

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) and the emerging Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire, Wixams has been identified as a major service centre due to the number of homes and levels of facilities planned at Wixams. The proposed development would also contribute toward the vitality and viability of local facilities and provide an area of employment land thereby reducing the need to travel. The Site Allocations DPD and the emerging Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire have also been the subject of a Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Procurement:

13. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Committee is asked to:-

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

Purpose of the Masterplan

14. The Masterplan covers an area known collectively known as Wixam Park; a new allocation separate from the Wixams main settlement. Wixam Park is located to the south of the Wixams main settlement. The Masterplan responds to two separate policy requirements; Policy MA3 of the adopted Site Allocations Development Plan Document (2011) for the North of Central Bedfordshire and Policy 63 of the emerging Development Strategy. Although Policy 63 is not yet adopted policy, Policy MA3 recognises the importance of, and allows for the production of a combined masterplan. As a result of considering the two policy areas comprehensively it provides a more cohesive southern extension can be planned and is beneficial in terms background evidence to support the Development Strategy.
15. The Masterplan is a high level document whose purpose is to set out general principles and aims for the development to deliver and identifies the constraints and opportunities which the subsequent outline planning

application(s) must address. The more concentrated and detailed work will be a matter to be addressed when planning applications are submitted in due course.

16. The development is intended as a sustainable and integrated extension to the main settlement and therefore Policy MA3 and Policy 63 of the emerging Development Strategy, both allow for the main Wixam settlement to come forward first by restricting commencement beyond 2021.
17. The Development Strategy Policy 63 sets out a series of triggers related to the Wixams main settlement, notably Village Four at Wixams. The Masterplan is being endorsed to allow development to come forward in the event that any of the following triggers have not been met. The triggers are as follows:
 - by the end of 2015 – the material commencement of the fourth Village at Wixams main settlement;
 - by the end of 2017 – the completion of the consented Station Access Road, providing a link from the B530 to Wixams Railway Station; or
 - by 2020 - the delivery of the Wixams Railway Station.
18. If any of the above have not been delivered, the development of the Policy 63 area can commence before 2021. As the Development Strategy has not yet been formally adopted, any changes made to the emerging Policy 63 through the Examination process will automatically apply to the endorsed Masterplan.

Background

19. 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 1,000 homes and 5ha of employment land should be provided in Wixams (Policy CS5). This is therefore an important site in helping the Council meet its future housing requirements.
20. In April 2011, the Council formally adopted the Site Allocations DPD following an Examination in Public. Policy MA3 of the Central Bedfordshire Site Allocations DPD (April 2011) made clear that a mixed use development of a minimum of 1,000 dwellings and 5ha of employment land should be developed and a Masterplan prepared to guide the development.
21. The Site Allocations DPD discussed the potential to provide additional development beyond the land south of MA3 to deliver further mixed use development post 2026. It was also considered that there was a need to safeguard and maintain adequate separation from Houghton Conquest and as such the Site Allocations DPD identified the creation of a country

park of strategic importance.

22. Work on a Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire commenced in 2012. The emerging Development Strategy has allocated land to the south of MA3 for 500 dwellings and a countryside park under Policy 63: Wixams Southern Extension. The countryside park is on the southern boundary of the extension to safeguard and maintain separation from Houghton Conquest. In addition a Masterplan is also required to ensure the comprehensive development of adopted MA3 site and the emerging Policy 63 allocation and to ensure it is integrated with the Wixams main settlement.
23. The land allocated under Policy MA3 (from the adopted Site Allocations DPD 2011) and land under Policy 63 (from the emerging Development Strategy 2014) collectively make up Wixam Park.
24. Wixams is classified in planning terms as a 'major service centre'. It is a planned new settlement being built on the former Elstow Storage Depot, which straddles the boundary of Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough. Planning permission exists for around 4,500 homes in total. As well as housing, the new settlement includes a local centre with a range of shopping and other community facilities. The delivery of the homes and facilities will take time to be built out. Policy MA3 of the adopted Site Allocations DPD imposes restrictions to prevent this site coming forward (unless indicated otherwise by CBC's annual monitoring process) to ensure a sustainable phased approach of delivery at the Wixams main settlement. However, as the main settlement has taken longer to built out, triggers have been put into the Development Strategy policy to allow early delivery of Policy MA3 and Policy 63 land, only if these triggers are not be met.
25. Work on the Wixam Park Masterplan commenced in early 2013 with the public consultation held between September and November 2013. There has been a delay in completing the Masterplan due in main to amendments to the Development Strategy and the policy context amongst other changes, requiring the Development Strategy to undergo further consultation.

Masterplan Proposals

26. The Masterplan covers all of the land included in the Policy MA3 and Policy 63 allocations. The document sets out the vision, land use mix and development principles expected to be delivered for the allocation(s) at Wixam Park. The Masterplan is made up of an Indicative Framework Plan and written document. The Framework Plan identifies the indicative location of infrastructure and land uses. The written document sets out the vision for the allocated site(s) and Central Bedfordshire Council's expectations for any planning applications to be determined. The draft text for the Masterplan together with the Indicative Framework Plan have been attached as Appendix A to this report.
27. The key requirements of Policy MA3 are the provision of 1,000 new dwellings, 5ha of employment land together with strategic landscaping

and open space. The key requirements of Policy 63 are the provision of 500 new dwellings, a countryside park on the southern boundary and other associated infrastructure. Advance planting on the southern boundary within the Policy 63 land is required to maintain and safeguard the separation with Houghton Conquest. A key requirement is to create an integrated extension to the Wixams main settlement.

28. The key elements of the Masterplan and the Indicative Framework Plan include:
- (a) Residential – Approximately 1,500 dwellings, including a mix of types including affordable housing in line with the Council's requirement at the time of application.
 - (b) Employment – 5ha of employment land accessible both from the development and the highway network and located in a prominent position that is visible from the B530 and from the primary road leading through the site.
 - (c) Community Facilities – These are to include a primary school, early years centre, community centre(s), small scale local centre facilities and sports pitches located centrally, along the primary road, to maximise accessibility for all residents.
 - (d) Highway Network – The access into Wixam Park will be off the B530. There will be two access points both with new roundabouts off the B530. To facilitate integration with the main Wixams settlement, three connections to Wixams are proposed. Provision is also made for pedestrian access between Wixam Park and Wixams, demonstrated through the incorporation of 'greenways' through the site(s).
 - (e) Recreation and Open Space – Significant provision has been made including a new countryside park. 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 within the countryside park. An allotment or community orchard is also provided for near the sports pitches adjacent to the employment land.
 - (f) 'Greenways' have been incorporated as a structural element of the green infrastructure network. These will facilitate pedestrian and cycle connections. They demonstrate how a connected green infrastructure network will be achieved between the Wixams main settlement, through Wixam Park and with the countryside to the south. These Greenways also connect the local centre and community facilities and open space to promote more car-free journeys between the key destinations.

Consultation and Changes in response to feedback

29. There has been extensive consultation on the draft Masterplan. Early consultation included a stakeholder workshop with technical officers from Central Bedfordshire Council as well as key stakeholders from the Parish

Councils and Forest of Marston Vale. This workshop was held on 16 January 2013 at the Forest Centre, Marston Moretaine. This workshop helped identify key issues at an early stage in the process and facilitated a discussion on site issues what the Masterplan could take account of.

30. A presentation to the Houghton Conquest Parish Council and elected members was also undertaken in order to provide an update on the Masterplan as well as explain the relationship of the site with Houghton Conquest. A site visit was also included with the presentation.
31. A six-week public consultation on the draft Masterplan was held from 27 September 2013 to 8 November 2013. To commence the period of public consultation a public exhibition was held on 27 September 2013 at Houghton Conquest Village Hall. The public consultation was widely publicised through press releases, site notices, information on Council's website, email notifications to stakeholders and letters to statutory consultees, residents of Houghton Conquest and Wixams and people of the CBC consultation database.
32. Approximately 146 people attended the exhibition and a total of 63 completed questionnaires were received. The majority (48) were received through the online questionnaire portal. In addition to the questionnaires, a number of written responses were also received from stakeholders and CBC technical officers. The results of the questionnaire and responses to the queries can be found in Appendix B.
33. Key findings from the consultation:
 - a) Concerns over the proximity of the development to Houghton Conquest. Response: The provision of the countryside park will act as a buffer and provide a permanent parkland edge to the whole Wixams development. Substantial woodland planting will be included to further protect the visual amenity of residents in Houghton Conquest. The topography of the site also limits the visual impact of the development on Houghton Conquest.
 - b) Concerns about traffic near Bedford Road. Response: Initial transport assessment work has been undertaken to review the proposed access arrangements. Preliminary advice from highways engineers confirms that the proposed access arrangements are acceptable in highway safety terms.
 - c) 44% did not support the provision of employment land. Response: Policy requires there to be a provision of employment land to ensure that there is a range of land uses and provide jobs alongside the residential development.
 - d) Support for the open space network (62%) and provision of children's play areas close to residential development (59%).
 - e) Support for countryside park proposal (57%) and a preference for the countryside park to provide woodland areas (71%) and walking routes (65%). Response: Text in the draft Masterplan has been

amended to reflect the strong preference for woodland areas.

- f) There was no majority support for either access option on the southern most roundabout off the B530. Response: It was considered that the creation of a roundabout with partial realignment of Bedford Road and the closure of the existing T-junction will be included in the draft Masterplan as concerns had been raised about the existing junction.
- g) Concern was raised over the impact, in terms of build out rates and completions, that Wixam Park would have on the development at the mains Wixams settlement. Response: Policy MA3 of the Site Allocations DPD stipulates that development on MA3 cannot commence before 2021 unless the Council's Annual Monitoring process indicates otherwise and Policy 63 of the emerging Development Strategy sets out a series of triggers to restrict development at Wixam Park. .
- h) It was considered that the proposed connections between Wixams and Wixam Park are not satisfactory. Response: The draft Masterplan proposes that the development seeks to agree at least one direct highway link and at least three walking/cycling links up to the boundary with the Wixams.
- i) Concern was raised over having three separate employment parcels. Response: The separate employment parcels allow for flexibility in the types of employment generating uses and the different features of the parcels will attract different occupiers. The draft Masterplan has been amended to provide two consolidated employment parcels.

34. The feedback in these responses has been analysed and a detailed response has been provided in the Consultation Statement Appendix B.

35. The amendments made to the draft Masterplan in response to the consultation can be found in Appendix A. The principal amendments made in response to the consultation are as follows:

- a) The Indicative Framework Plan has been revised in relation to changes made in the document. These mainly relate to the realignment of the primary street to facilitate the redistribution of the employment parcels, revision to the children's play space provision and the addition of an informal footpath.
- b) The text within the draft Masterplan has been amended to reflect the strong preference for woodland by removing the reference to 'small groups of tree planting' to 'belts of tree planting'.
- c) It was decided that the creation of a roundabout with the partial realignment of Bedford Road and closure of the existing T-junction will be included as the access proposal for the southern vehicular access, off the B530, within the draft Masterplan.

- d) It was considered that the terminology of a Country Park was not appropriate in respect of this open space to expect the full standards of a Country Park to apply in respect of the newly adopted CBC Leisure Strategy Standards. As such it will now be referred to as 'Wixams Countryside Park'.
- e) There are now two main employment areas as opposed to the three separate employment areas originally shown. This has been amended as it was considered that this will allow for flexibility in the types of employment generating uses on these sites.
- f) Surface water drainage catchments have been added into the existing Topographical Plan within the document to demonstrate how surface water drainage has been considered as an integral part of the Framework Plan and informed the location of SuDS, as are shown on the Framework Plan itself.
- g) A 'Greenways' Plan has now been incorporated into the Masterplan Document to demonstrate how an integrated green infrastructure network has been designed to facilitate the key pedestrian and cycle connections.
- h) There has been an increase in the provision of children's play space in accordance with the Council's requirements. There is now 9.2ha of formal open space, of which 2.3ha of children's play space, and 47.5ha of informal open space.
- i) A Sustainability section (Section 4) has been included so as to identify what key principles should be applied to the development to ensure that it is a more sustainable development.
- j) There is a reference to the CBC Design Guide ensuring that the design standards adopted by CBC are adhered to in the development.

36. The scale of development on the MA3 allocation is committed through the adopted Site Allocations DPD to meet CBC's housing targets.

37. With regard to traffic, an initial transport assessment has been undertaken to review the proposed access arrangements. Further detailed work will be undertaken to support subsequent planning applications. Preliminary advice from highways engineers confirms that the proposed access is acceptable in highway safety terms. Should any on-site/off-site highway improvements be required to mitigate the impact of the proposed development in the wider highway network, these will be secured through subsequent planning permissions. A full transport assessment will be required at the outline application stage.

Conclusion and Next Steps

38. The Masterplan has followed the Council's due process in terms of consultation. 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

Appendix B – Statement of Consultation and consultation results