

Central Bedfordshire Council

Executive - 31 March 2015

Wixam Park Masterplan

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This report relates to a Key Decision.

Purpose of this report

1. Outline the proposals contained within the Wixam Park Masterplan.
2. Outline the key changes made in response to the public consultation.
3. Seek endorsement of the Masterplan and its adoption as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to:

1. **to endorse the Masterplan and adopt it as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

4. The Draft Framework Plan was considered by Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 February 2015 who resolved to endorse the draft Masterplan with the following recommendations:
 - That the Masterplan be endorsed and that it be adopted by the Executive as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.

Background

5. The Masterplan covers an area known collectively as Wixam Park; a new allocation separate from and located south of 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.

6. The Masterplan is a high level document that sets 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.
7. 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. The Development Strategy Policy 63 sets out a series of triggers related to the Wixams main settlement, notably Village Four at Wixams. 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; and
 - by 2020 - the delivery of the Wixams Railway Station.
8. The Masterplan is being endorsed to allow development to come forward in the event that any of the following triggers have not been met. If any of the above have not been delivered, the development of the Policy 63 area can commence before 2021.

Masterplan proposals

9. 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. A key requirement is to create an integrated extension to the Wixams main settlement.
10. 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.
- (c) Community Facilities – These are to include a primary school, early years centre, community centre(s), small scale local centre facilities and sports pitches.
- (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. Three connections, as well as pedestrian access, to Wixams are proposed.
- (e) Recreation and Open Space – Significant overall provision including a new countryside park. 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 local centre.
- (f) ‘Greenways’ have been incorporated as a structural element of the green infrastructure network to facilitate pedestrian and cycle connections and 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

11. There has been extensive consultation on the draft Masterplan. This 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 and a presentation to the Houghton Conquest Parish Council and elected members.
12. A six-week public consultation on the draft Masterplan was held from 27 September 2013 to 8 November 2013 and a public exhibition was held on 27 September 2013 at Houghton Conquest Village Hall. Approximately 146 people attended the exhibition and a total of 63 completed questionnaires were received.
13. Key findings from the consultation:
 - Concerns over the proximity of the development to Houghton Conquest.
 - Concerns about traffic near Bedford Road.
 - Support for the open space network and provision of children’s play areas close to residential development.
 - Support for the countryside park proposals and a preference for the park to provide more woodland areas and walking routes.
 - No majority support for either access option on the southern most roundabout off the B530.

- Concern over the impact in terms of build out rates and completions that Wixam Park would have on the development at the mains Wixams settlement.
 - Concern over the proposed connections between Wixams and Wixam Park.
14. The feedback in these responses has been analysed and a detailed response has been provided in the Consultation Statement.
15. The principal amendments made in response to the consultation are as follows:
- a) The Indicative Framework Plan has been revised in relation 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 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.
 - f) Surface water drainage catchments have been added into the existing Topographical Plan to demonstrate how surface water drainage has been considered and informed the location of SuDS.
 - g) A 'Greenways' Plan has been incorporated 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 2.3ha of children's play space.
 - i) A Sustainability section (Section 4) has been included to identify what key principles should be applied to the development.

16. 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.

Council Priorities

17. 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.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

18. 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.

Financial Implications

19. 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.

Equalities Implications

20. The Site Allocations DPD Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and emerging Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire 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 the future residents lives in locations close to services and public transport routes.
 - Provision of land for community facilities.
 - New employment units allocated close to the centres of population in order to increase job opportunities locally and help to address unemployment and out-commuting.

21. 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.

Risk Management

22. 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.
23. 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.
24. An adopted Masterplan will provide evidence in support of the Development Strategy to demonstrate that the site is available and deliverable.

Public Health

25. 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

26. 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

27. 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.
28. Wixam Park also proposes a Countryside Park along the southern boundary, significant open space and greenways through the site and into the adjoining countryside and to the main Wixams settlement. The Masterplan also identifies the sustainability measures and key principles that can be incorporated into the site.

Implications for Work Programming

29. Future detailed masterplans and planning applications will be subject to further public consultation and all planning applications will be considered by Development Management Committee.

Conclusions and Next Steps

30. The Masterplan has been prepared in line with the Council's requirements for local engagement and 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. Executive is asked to consider the content of the Masterplan and adopt it as technical guidance for the purposes of development management.

Appendices

Appendix A: Draft Masterplan incorporating proposed changes
Appendix B: Draft Indicative Framework Plan
Appendix C: Statement of Consultation and consultation results.

Background Papers

None