

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 17 JULY 2018

REPORT BY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

BISHOP'S STORTFORD SOUTH MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To enable Executive Members to consider the Masterplan Framework for the Bishop's Stortford South site.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE: To recommend to Council that:

(A)	The Masterplan Framework for Bishop's Stortford South, as detailed at Essential Reference Paper 'B' to this report, be agreed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes.
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1.0 Background

1.1 The East Herts Approach to Master Planning was first presented to the District Planning Executive Panel in September 2017 (and agreed by Council on the 18th October 2017). The report set out a series of steps that describe the various stages involved and processes expected for each of the District Plan strategic allocations. Whilst not a one-size-fits-all approach, the process is based upon a collaborative approach to identifying and resolving issues, creating a vision for what the site aspires to achieve, testing design options and

consulting upon preferred solutions. The output of this process is a masterplan framework or masterplan which is presented to members for consideration.

- 1.2 In order to embed the Masterplanning process in the District Plan, a new policy has been proposed through the Main Modifications Consultation. Policy DES1: Masterplanning requires all 'significant' development proposals to prepare a masterplan setting out the quantum and distribution of land uses; access; sustainable high quality design and layout principles; necessary infrastructure; the relationship between the site and other adjacent and nearby land uses; landscape and heritage assets and other relevant matters. Furthermore, the masterplan should be collaboratively prepared and informed by public participation. Finally, Policy DES1 states that in order to ensure sites are planned and delivered comprehensively, any application for development on part of the site will be assessed against its contribution to the masterplan as a whole.
- 1.3 The masterplan should therefore provide sufficient information to inform the preparation of detailed aspects of the site at the planning application stage. The level of detail required for the masterplan will depend upon the likely form of delivery of the site. For example, where delivery is expected by one party who has been involved throughout the Plan-making stages, a masterplan framework may be prepared, which provides key parameters and aspirations which form the basis of detailed design determined through a planning application process at a later stage. If it is likely that the site will be delivered by a number of developers who have not been involved in the Plan-making process, more detail will be needed in the masterplan in order to provide certainty on key matters so that future parties are very clear on what the site is expected to achieve.
- 1.4 For each of the strategic sites allocated in the emerging District Plan, a Steering Group has been, or will be established. This

will comprise East Herts councillors, town and parish councillors, representatives of the local community and other interested groups where appropriate. The Steering Group is a sounding board for key issues and depending upon specific circumstances, for discussing detailed design elements whilst preparing the planning application through to when construction is underway.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 The land at Bishop's Stortford South is a strategic allocation within the emerging District Plan, which is expected to be adopted in summer 2018. As such, until the Plan is adopted, the site remains within the Green Belt. The site promoters (Countryside Properties) worked closely with officers on the masterplanning of this site to demonstrate that the policy requirements can be achieved in order to support the Plan-making process. Subsequent to the District Plan Examination in Public, work has advanced on preparing a masterplan framework which will support the planning application process in anticipation of the adoption of the Plan. This is to ensure that the preparation of the masterplan does not delay the submission of a planning application.
- 2.2 Policy BISH5 of the emerging District Plan sets out the proposed land uses and other policy requirements as well as a requirement that a masterplan is produced in a collaborative manner with stakeholders. The site will deliver approximately 750 new homes of varying mix and tenure, including 40% affordable housing, a care home/flexi care and self-build properties. The site will also deliver a new two-form entry primary school to provide for the needs arising from the development, but importantly, will also provide sufficient land for expansion up to three forms of entry for future needs. Similarly, land will be provided for a secondary school of up to eight forms of entry. It is intended that this land will facilitate the relocation of the Bishop's Stortford High School enabling the expansion of the school in the future.

- 2.3 In addition to the above, the site will also deliver a number of key community benefits including a local centre, new sustainable transport services, green infrastructure, open spaces with enhanced Public Rights of Way and an employment area providing much-needed new business floorspace.
- 2.4 The Masterplan Framework provided in **Essential Reference Paper 'B'** sets out a clear vision for the site supported by six objectives. These objectives have been established as a result of an analysis of constraints and opportunities, through discussions with the local community and other stakeholders and have been agreed with Officers. The objectives are followed through to a number of Masterplanning Principles which illustrate a number of key parameters and conceptual designs of the site. Furthermore, the Masterplanning Framework sets out where different land uses will be located within the site at a zonal level and explores the relationship between these uses within a landscape-led design. The detail of these elements, in particular the specific use classes and location of uses within the site is subject to ongoing discussion with Officers and these will be determined through the preparation of the planning applications in due course.
- 2.5 Countryside Properties has expressed a desire to submit a hybrid application this summer. This application will be an Outline Application with the majority of matters reserved apart from the main access points into the site and the first phase of development (to the north of Hertfordshire Way). The first phase (Development Zone A) will comprise 142 homes accessed from Whittington Way as well as the main northern gateway into the site. The Masterplan Framework therefore sets the context for both parts of the application. A draft description of development is included overleaf:

“Hybrid planning application comprising:

- (i) a full application for 142 dwellings (Class C3) including affordable homes, plus associated accesses, landscaping, open space and infrastructure works (Development Zone A), and a north-south primary route; and*
- (ii) an outline application, with all matters reserved except access, for approximately 608 dwellings (Class C3) including affordable homes, a care home (Class C2), up to 4 hectares of employment land (Classes B1, B2, B8 and Sui Generis (possible car showroom)), a local centre (Classes A1, A2, A3, A4 , A5 and D1) including up to 1,000 sq m for retail (Class A1), a primary school (Class D1) up to 3 forms of entry and including early years facility, a secondary school (Class D1) up to 8 forms of entry, open space including equipped areas for play, sustainable drainage systems, landscaping and all associated infrastructure and development.”*

2.6 The main Masterplan Framework diagram brings together the key considerations which are explored further in the five masterplanning principles sections. Some of these key elements are discussed below.

Engagement

2.7 Throughout the Plan-making stage a number of meetings have been held with Officers to discuss a wide variety of matters. These discussions have informed the Masterplanning Framework and the emerging application. Officers continue to meet regularly with Countryside and other parties as programmed in the Planning Performance Agreement. The Council has also engaged ongoing design advice from Allies and Morrison, which has been very helpful in shaping the emerging scheme.

2.8 Countryside has actively engaged the Neighbourhood Plan Group, the Town Council and Thorley Parish Council over the

last few years as well as with other stakeholder groups and interested parties. The main issue raised through this early engagement was a desire to have no vehicles associated with the development accessing Whittington Way.

- 2.9 Embracing the masterplanning process, Countryside prepared a Community Engagement Plan providing a programme of opportunities for public involvement. This has included a series of events where local residents could view and comment on early iterations of the proposals, could contact Countryside by phone, email or through an online and paper questionnaire. Flyers advertising two drop-in exhibition events were posted to 12,854 homes and businesses in the vicinity of the site, with special attention given to contacting the properties immediately adjacent to the site (approximately 30 properties).
- 2.10 A Steering Group has been set up to enable the open debate of issues. This Group comprises a number of Executive Members, local ward councillors and representatives of Thorley Parish Council. In addition, Officers have met with representatives of Thorley Parish Council to seek their opinions in an informal manner. It is intended that the Steering Group will continue to provide views on the emerging detail of the applications. A number of matters have been discussed at these sessions; highway issues including traffic on Whittington Way, access points, and a perceived conflict with the Neighbourhood Plan; openness of views from Hertfordshire Way; the relationship with adjacent properties, including Listed Buildings; and the provision of infrastructure. The majority of these matters are addressed through the proposed Masterplan Framework, while some will be discussed through the planning application stage.

A Green Infrastructure Network

- 2.11 The Framework describes how the proposed development seeks to embrace and enhance existing landscape features such as trees, hedgerows, and watercourses as well as existing

Public Rights of Way such as the Hertfordshire Way which runs across the northern section of the site. Existing hedgerows, trees and copses will be retained and used to inform the location of developable parcels of land.

- 2.12 A number of open spaces will be created across the site to fulfil a variety of functions – flood attenuation, biodiversity assets, pedestrian and cycle networks, a potential orchard and to form visual gateways. In addition, each neighbourhood will contain formal and informal play, spaces. The Masterplan Framework illustrates the general location of the Green Infrastructure network, but the detailed elements will come forward as part of detailed applications in due course. In terms of governance and the longer-term stewardship of the site, Countryside are working with The Land Trust as an organisation who can facilitate community involvement in the ownership and management of public spaces.

Preserving Open Character and Education

- 2.13 The site will accommodate two schools (primary and secondary). It is intended that the Bishop's Stortford High School relocates on to this site with room to expand. The Masterplan Framework, sets out where in the site the school buildings will be located, based upon the consideration of building heights and landform. Whilst the design of the school buildings will be determined at a later stage, the design will need to reflect the Masterplan Framework in terms of location and building heights. These parameters have been agreed by the County Council.
- 2.14 The location of the schools and the overall design of the developable area have been defined by the desire to preserve the open views from the Hertfordshire Way across the site towards the Stort valley.

Attractive Neighbourhoods

- 2.15 There will be six different parts created within the site, each with a role or characteristic depending on the type of land use

proposed. The detail of how these different elements come together will be determined through the planning application process for later phases. However, the Framework describes how a rich environment will be created using a variety of streets and spaces with trees and buildings that reflect local materials and design. The Masterplan Framework illustrates areas where it is proposed to locate higher density development and some building height parameters. The majority of these details however, will be determined through the ongoing masterplanning discussions in preparation of detailed planning applications.

Village Hub

- 2.16 A key principle of the site is the creation of a southern gateway which comprises retail and employment uses, the frontages to the schools and a care home, all centred around a landscaped village green. The Masterplan Framework identifies the location of these uses and provides illustrations to describe the style references being considered. The detail of particular uses will come forward through the planning application process, but the southern access will be included in the initial outline application.

Encouraging Non-Car Travel

- 2.17 A key objective of the design of this site is to make the environment easy and safe for pedestrians and cyclists. Within the site a new 4m footway/cycleway will be created to provide a direct route to the schools, combined with new crossing points on Whittington Way to enable connections between the existing residential areas and the site. Achieving safe, dedicated crossing points are a key objective of Officers who are working closely with the site promoter and the County Council to ensure appropriate designs are brought forward as part of the first phase of development.
- 2.18 A key area of discussion which is ongoing is the nature and location of access and crossing points – whether the northern access should be a roundabout or a traffic-light controlled

junction and where crossings are located. There are pros and cons for each option which have been discussed with County Council Officers and Steering Group members. The Masterplan Framework includes a roundabout with two crossings in the main framework diagram. The objective of achieving good connections and a shift towards sustainable travel will ultimately depend upon the final package of measures combined.

- 2.19 It is the intention that a bus-only section of road will be created towards the northern end of the main spine road. While the detail of this is yet to be determined, the purpose of the bus only section is to significantly reduce the volume of vehicles associated with the development using Whittington Way. Officers are keen to secure an appropriate design solution which maintains the continuation of the Hertfordshire Way, and discussions are ongoing. The Masterplan Framework sets out this objective with a caveat that details will be subject to Highways approval.
- 2.20 The scheme proposes the re-routing of existing inter-urban bus networks through the site which will serve the local centre/employment area and the schools, as well as the new homes. Discussions have already been held with bus companies who have indicated a preference for a north-south route through the site as indicated on the Masterplan Framework diagram. Existing and proposed bus routes are detailed on the proposed bus connections diagram.
- 2.21 In terms of the southern access, consideration was given to creating new access arms from the existing roundabouts. However, this could not be achieved and therefore, a new roundabout is proposed on St James' Way. The location of this access will enable a separate arm for the employment area and create a spine road north-west through the site, which is favourable to bus operators. A roundabout in this location will also have the added benefit of reducing vehicle speeds along

this stretch of St James Way, which was raised as a key concern at the Steering Group discussions.

Building for Life 12

- 2.22 The Masterplan Framework describes briefly how the proposal seeks to meet the provisions of the 12 Building for Life criteria. Building for Life is a renowned design tool which provides an industry standard for the design of new residential developments. Proposals are scored against 12 criteria using a 'red, amber, green' rating. Officers therefore asked Countryside to undertake an initial assessment of the proposal. These principles will then feed through to future planning applications.

Conclusions

- 2.23 It is the view of Officers that the Masterplanning Framework provides a sound basis upon which to move forward to prepare the detailed application stages. It provides a framework for the main issues of significance in relation to the proposal, whilst providing enough flexibility that further detail can be agreed at appropriate stages at a later date. Officers will continue to work with Countryside and other stakeholders to ensure that the best design possible is achieved on this site.
- 2.24 The Masterplan Framework contains a vision and series of objectives that reflect the requirements of Policy BISH5, and with appropriate design tools, these ambitions will be achieved on the site. It is therefore recommended that the Masterplan Framework as detailed at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**, be agreed as a material consideration¹ for Development Management purposes.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

¹ A material consideration is a matter that should be taken into account in deciding a planning application or on an appeal against a planning decision.

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

Emerging East Herts District Plan Main Modifications Consultation
Version 2018 – Chapter 5 - Bishop's Stortford,
<https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/mainmodifications>

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