

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 11 SEPTEMBER 2018

REPORT BY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

EAST OF STEVENAGE MASTERPLAN

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To enable Members to consider the Masterplan for the East of Stevenage site.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE: To recommend to Council that:

(A)	the Masterplan for the strategic allocation known as 'Land to the East of Stevenage, 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 masterplanning 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 to the East of Stevenage is a strategic allocation within the emerging District Plan, which is expected to be adopted in September 2018. As such, until the Plan is adopted, the site remains within the Green Belt. The site promoters (Pigeon Land Ltd) worked closely with officers and the Steering Group 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 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 EOS1 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 around 600 new homes of varying mix and tenure, including 40% affordable housing, a care home, housing with care and a number of self-build properties. The Council will require these homes to be accessible and adaptable to meet the changing needs of occupants in accordance with emerging District Plan policy. The site will also deliver a much needed site to accommodate the needs of Travelling Showpeople.

- 2.3 In addition to the above, the site will also deliver a number of key community benefits including a Neighbourhood Hub, which will provide a central park with a play area, local retail and community facilities, the care home and a new two-form entry primary school to provide for the needs arising from the development. The school will also provide a pre-school on-site and will provide additional capacity for existing residents of the surrounding communities.
- 2.4 In order to manage the stewardship of key public amenity space and site infrastructure, there will be a management and maintenance approach agreed during the course of the planning application.
- 2.5 The Masterplan provided in **Essential Reference Paper 'B'** sets out a clear vision for the site supported by 12 key 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. This engagement is further detailed in paragraph 2.15 onwards. These objectives seek to respond to the policy requirements as set out in Policy EOS1.
- 2.6 The Masterplan begins with a series of maps illustrating the geography of the site and how these features are turned into opportunities within the Landscape Framework diagram. The main vision for the site is to create a landscape-led design, which enhances existing features using them to define and frame distinct areas within the site. The retention of mature trees and the enhancement of existing landscape enable the creation of multi-functional green infrastructure features that perform the role of flood attenuation, parkland, fit trails, informal and formal off-road paths, urban shading and wildlife habitats among others.

- 2.7 The Block Structure diagram takes its lead from the Landscape Framework diagram and starts to populate the developable areas with potential building shapes.
- 2.8 The Movement and Connections diagram illustrates key routes through the site, including a spine road which will facilitate the creation of a bus route that will connect to the existing communities within Stevenage. The Masterplan responds to the ambitions within the Stevenage Mobility Strategy which seeks to encourage the use of sustainable modes of transport and to enhance the local cycleway network. This site therefore proposes not only internal cycle routes and connections but also to create an important addition to the cycle network that was previously omitted – a route along Gresley Way between Six Hills Way and Fairlands Way.
- 2.9 There have been a number of discussions with the County Council on the proposed junctions on to Gresley Way – the Highways Officer preference is for these junctions to be signal controlled. Discussion is ongoing with officers as to the priority and timings of these junctions and with regard to the nature of other crossing points, but these will be resolved through the detailed planning application in due course. There has been ongoing discussion about the implications of the site on the local road network. The County Council as the Highway Authority is satisfied that appropriate modelling has been undertaken, and that the site will deliver a good variety of sustainable transport enhancements.
- 2.10 The Character Areas/Density Breakdown diagram seeks to define locations within the site itself that could accommodate different densities and built form. Responding to the topography and key routes the site can create higher density areas around entrances into the site, and lower density forms towards the outer edge of the site. The Land Use diagram sets clear parameters for the different land uses, while the Character Areas illustrations provide some visual examples of what the built form could look like. Details on the palette of

materials will come through the planning applications in due course.

- 2.11 The Illustrative Masterplan fills in the remaining developable areas with indicative layouts indicating where key uses could be located within the landscape framework.
- 2.12 The Neighbourhood Hub diagram shows in more detail what this key central space could deliver. This provides a good point of reference for the future applications. It shows how the community uses are to be located around a central parkland providing a focal point for the new community based around the school and retail/community facilities. The streetscape is proposed to be designed for slower vehicle speeds with well-connected cycle paths and pedestrian routes linking the various uses and surrounding residential areas.
- 2.13 Two diagrams are then presented which show how the scheme could look when taking the illustrative masterplan and the vision for the site into account. The first diagram details an inclusive development that is sustainable and landscape-led. The second diagram details key features within the site and the vision for how these will be used to create a vibrant network of spaces.
- 2.14 The final diagram in the document shows the indicative development parcels and the potential timescale for how these will come forward.

Engagement

- 2.15 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 Masterplan and the emerging application. Officers continue to meet regularly with Pigeon land Ltd and other parties as programmed in the Planning Performance Agreement.

- 2.16 Pigeon Land Ltd has undertaken a recent round of public engagement on the Masterplan and has sought the views of local residents in neighbouring parishes Aston and Walkern and within the adjacent Stevenage wards. This has included two drop-in style events where local residents could view and comment on early iterations of the proposals, could contact Pigeon by phone, email or through an online and paper questionnaire. Flyers advertising two drop-in exhibition events were posted to nearby homes in the vicinity of the site, with special attention given to contacting the properties immediately adjacent to the site.
- 2.17 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, including Stevenage ward councillors and representatives of Aston and Walkern Parish Councils. A key concern of the group is the impact of the development on the local road network, in particular within the surrounding rural roads. Responding to this, both the Illustrative Masterplan and the Movement and Connections diagram identify a bus link, network of cycle ways and pedestrian routes throughout the site encouraging new residents to use sustainable methods of travel. It is the intention that like other Steering Groups, there will be continued engagement as detailed applications come forward.

Conclusions

- 2.18 Pigeon Land Ltd, in association with Hyth Ltd, intends to submit an outline planning application for the whole site at the end of the summer and discussions are ongoing with Officers as to what elements of the proposal will be detailed at this stage, such as the central spine road and access points.
- 2.19 As the site will be sub-divided into three development parcels in order to expedite the delivery of new homes, it is important that the Masterplan provides a good breadth of information for not only decision-makers but for development partners. It

is the view of Officers that this Masterplan provides a strong vision supported by clear objectives and sufficient detail against which future applications can be measured. 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 Pigeon Land Ltd and other stakeholders to ensure that the best design possible is achieved on this site.

2.20 The Masterplan contains a vision and series of objectives that reflect the requirements of Policy EOS1, and with appropriate design tools, these ambitions will be achieved on the site. It is therefore recommended that the Masterplan as detailed at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**, be agreed as a material consideration¹ for Development Management purposes.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

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 (Inspector's Main Modifications) - Chapter 12 – East of Stevenage:

www.eastherts.gov.uk/inspectorsreport

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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.

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