

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL – 8 DECEMBER 2014
EXECUTIVE – 6 JANUARY 2015

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING
AND TRANSPORT

BISHOP'S STORTFORD GOODS YARD UPDATE REPORT

WARD(S) AFFECTED: BISHOP'S STORTFORD CENTRAL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report provides an update on progress with a planning framework for the Bishop's Stortford Goods Yard, including a suggested way forward towards a planning application, which the site promoters have stated is anticipated in September 2015.
- The report explains that there are likely to be difficult trade-offs between the various aspirations for the site, given the need to ensure deliverability of development, and that these should be addressed through the Neighbourhood Plan group.
- It also recommends that current Local Plan policy be struck through and replaced with a new policy context provided by the emerging District Plan and Neighbourhood Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE
PANEL AND EXECUTIVE: That:

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| (A) | Local Plan 2007 Policy BIS11, The Goods Yard/John Dyde Training College Site, be struck through as out of date and no longer providing a suitable policy framework for consideration of a planning application; |
| (B) | to inform emerging policy for the Goods Yard site, the District Council should work in partnership with the Neighbourhood Plan team to agree a set of priorities for the site, and working in conjunction with the site promoters to agree cost/value inputs to inform development choices based around an agreed priority list; and |
| (C) | the new policy context for the planning application be provided by a revised District Plan Policy on the Goods |

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| | Yard, subject to further public consultation, and closely aligned with any emerging Neighbourhood Plan policy for the site. |
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| (B) | to inform emerging policy for the Goods Yard site, the District Council should work in partnership with the Neighbourhood Plan team to agree a set of priorities for the site, and working in conjunction with the site promoters to agree cost/value inputs to inform development choices based around an agreed priority list; and |
| (C) | the new policy context for the planning application be provided by a revised District Plan Policy on the Goods Yard, subject to further public consultation, and closely aligned with any emerging Neighbourhood Plan policy for the site. |

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Bishop's Stortford Goods Yard is a centrally located brownfield site bounded by the railway station/line, river Stort, and the town centre.
- 1.2 Current planning policy on the site is set out in the Local Plan 2007, Policy BIS11: The Goods Yard/John Dyde Training College Site. This policy includes a requirement for a mixed-use development including 700 dwellings (200 of which have already been built at the former John Dyde Training College Site) and a Link Road running through the site between London Road and the Railway station. The Link Road proposal formed one of a number of recommendations set out in a study by Steer Davies Gleave in 2006 (see Background Papers).
- 1.3 Since the publication of the 2007 Local Plan, local views on an appropriate approach to development of the site have evolved. These views are encapsulated in a Development Brief produced

in 2011 by the Bishop's Stortford 2020 Visioning Board, comprising the Town Council, District Council, Chamber of Commerce, and the Civic Federation.

- 1.4 In addition, since 2007, the development strategy for the town has also changed, in response to the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.5 One of the key aspects of the development strategy involved a town centre boundary linking the existing town centre with the railway station, to focus efforts on providing an attractive pedestrian circuit with increased footfall to shops and businesses.
- 1.6 The importance of the Town Centre Boundary was articulated in a report by the Leader of the Council in July 2012 (see Background Papers). This stated that within the boundary, 'emphasis should be given to sustainable mixed uses and retail led services/activities'. The Town Centre Boundary was adopted by Full Council on 7 August 2012 as a material consideration in respect of any planning matters relating to the area described.
- 1.7 The draft District Plan, January 2014, articulated the aspirations set out in the 2011 Development Brief, and related these to the development strategy for the District Plan. This was subject to public consultation between February and May 2014. The response from the site promoters, dated 21 May 2014, is available on the Council's website (see Background Papers). This states that *"it is important that the deliverability of the site is not frustrated by undue planning policy constraints"*, and seeks to amend the policy from provision of 200 homes to 'up to 450 homes', and deletion of the reference to a Link Road.
- 1.8 Following receipt of this consultation response, a meeting with the site promoters and transport officers from Hertfordshire County Council was held on 1 July 2014, and the agreed notes of this meeting are also available online (see Background Papers). As reflected in the meeting notes, *"given the limited capacity of the town centre road network and the Hockerill junction in particular, the transport authority was likely to have significant concerns about any proposals which would rely on primary access through the northern end of the site. The transport authority viewed southern access for the majority of the development as essential to maintaining town centre traffic flow unless it can be demonstrated that northern access can be made to work."*

- 1.9 In summer 2014 Peter Brett Associates (PBA) were appointed by the Council to undertake work on a Delivery Study to test the deliverability of the draft District Plan. PBA was requested to extend the scope of the study to include the Goods Yard.
- 2.0 Report
- 2.1 Accompanied by the PBA team, Officers met with Network Rail, Solum Regeneration Ltd (the site developer) and Savills (the planning agents for the site developer), on 10 October 2014. At the meeting discussions were held in relation to transport and viability matters. The site promoters outlined their intention to submit a planning application in September 2015.
- 2.2 Following the meeting, the site promoters set out in writing their view of the Link Road, and these are contained in the letter from Savills, the submission by Mayer Brown Transport Consultants, and the indicative layout showing the route of a Link Road, all contained at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**.
- 2.3 The Council commissioned PBA to prepare two short reports on the Goods Yard, one addressing financial viability and policy approaches, and the other addressing the Link Road concept and the approach to transport generally. These are contained at **Essential Reference Paper 'C'**.
- 2.4 A meeting was held with the Neighbourhood Plan team on 13 November 2014. A significant part of this meeting involved discussion of the Goods Yard site. The agreed notes of the meeting are contained at **Essential Reference Paper 'D'**.
- 2.5 A meeting was held with transport officers from Hertfordshire County Council on 17 November 2014. A note from the County Council in respect of their main concerns and aspirations for the site is contained at **Essential Reference Paper 'E'**.
- 2.6 All of these documents have been added to the Goods Yard webpage (see Background Papers).

Main Issues

- 2.7 Based on the above meetings and submissions, and taking account of the history of efforts to plan for the site, the main issues relating to the site are as follows:

- A) There is a tension between the aspirations for the site set out in the 2011 Development Brief and requirements for deliverability. This is likely to require agreement to be reached around difficult trade-offs between different aspirations, including affordable housing, housing quantum, mix and density, transport, and aspirations for other uses;
- B) An approach based primarily on highways engineering will not be appropriate, and instead approaches based on public realm enhancements and other 'softer' measures should be investigated, in order to encourage through-traffic from the south in particular to re-route onto the existing town bypass, and free up capacity for trips with the town centre as the destination;
- C) Related to this, the Link Road proposals should be recast as a sustainable transport corridor, providing for pedestrian, cycle and (subject to further investigation) bus access, rather than as a route for private cars (except insofar as will be needed to access the site);
- D) There appear to be strong grounds for framing the policy approach to the site in terms of its enhanced function as a transport interchange, in particular looking at bus, cycle, and pedestrian linkages, and linking the site more closely with the town centre strategy and the bus network.

The Way Forward

- 2.8 PBA has advised that, given the complexity of the financial viability issues around the site, and the timing of the planning application, masterplanning and design should be led by the site promoter, since small changes to the masterplan can have large implications for viability and deliverability, and this process can be opaque to third parties not directly involved in the commercial aspects of scheme delivery.
- 2.9 However, given the importance of the site, both in terms of local community aspirations and its wider strategic role, it would not be appropriate to provide the degree of flexibility requested by the site promoters in their response to the District Plan consultation.
- 2.10 Close partnership working between the site promoters and County, District, and Town Councils, is recommended, through the existing Neighbourhood Plan group, in order to ensure that closely aligned draft District Plan and Neighbourhood Plan policies can be agreed, to provide a clear, consistent, and deliverable framework to guide the expected planning application.

- 2.11 Recognising the critical role of financial viability in this process, it is proposed that the District Council should appoint viability consultants to review emerging evidence from the site promoters, and advise the Council and the Neighbourhood Plan group on the implications of this for emerging policy. The critical period for this work will be during January to March 2015, when the site promoters have indicated that their viability consultants and architects will be working on the scheme.
- 2.12 In the lead up to this, the partners will need to reach agreement on a priority listing of requirements for the site, so that this can be used as a tool to enable progress in the event that, as anticipated, it is not possible to meet all the aspirations. It is proposed that this process should be co-ordinated by the Neighbourhood Plan team, working in conjunction with the site promoters, and with assistance from the Planning Policy Team at the District Council as necessary.
- 2.13 Finally, in order to clear the way for a planning application, it is also proposed that the existing Local Plan Policy BIS11: the Goods Yard/John Dyde site, be struck through as no longer providing a suitable framework for consideration of a planning application. Instead, the emerging policies for the District Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan should fulfil that role.

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

- All documents relating to the Goods Yard, including submissions from the site promoters and meeting notes, are on the Council's website at: www.eastherts.gov.uk/preferredoptions2014
- Bishop's Stortford Transport Study (Steer Davies Gleave, 2006) www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=15659
- Bishop's Stortford Goods Yard Development Brief (July 2011) www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=12735
- Report to Executive by the Leader of the Council: Bishop's Stortford Town Centre Boundary Proposal (10 July 2012)

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