

**Bishop's Stortford Neighbourhood Plan  
(Central, South, All Saints, and Thorley wards)  
Charrington's House, Bishop's Stortford  
Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014, 12noon-3.30pm**

**Attendees**

Keith Warnell (KW)	Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, and East Herts District Councillor
Matthew Serginson (MS)	Solum Regeneration Ltd, development partners with Network Rail
Diane Basavaraj (DB)	Neighbourhood Plan – Transport Lead
James Parker (JP)	Chief Executive, Bishop's Stortford Town Council
Rob Francis (RF)	Neighbourhood Plan – Green Infrastructure Lead, representing the Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation
Murray White (MW)	Neighbourhood Plan – Goods Yard lead
Elliot Page (EP)	Transport consultant, Peter Brett Associates
Isabelle Haddow (IH)	Planning Policy Team, East Herts District Council
Martin Paine (MP)	Planning Policy Team, East Herts District Council

**Agreed Meeting Notes**

1. KW thanked all for attending and explained the structure of the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) team, the various workstreams and the team leader roles. Progress with the NP Questionnaire was outlined. It was noted that the NP group was keen to involve developers in discussions, and that MS was a regular attendee of group meetings.

**Transport**

2. EP explained that he had been engaged in the role of a 'critical friend' to the Local Planning Authority in relation to the District Plan work. EP was working on a transport 'think-piece' covering the whole District which would be an essay setting out the main issues and recommendations. It would address town centre congestion issues, including some points specific to Bishop's Stortford. Key messages were likely to include the limitations of the approach to highways engineering-led transport schemes, which could have the effect of attracting more traffic into the town and worsening the existing situation. Instead EP

proposed that a better approach was to seek to alter travel patterns, preferred routes and modes of transport. For example, if northbound traffic on the A1184 found the town centre inconvenient due to pedestrianisation or other public realm schemes, it would re-route onto the bypass. RF suggested that pedestrianisation between Station Road and Apton Road was worth considering further.

3. JP asked whether it would be possible to use the transport models for options testing, and RF queried the source of the data. EP explained that a strategic transport model known as VISUM was due to report in the next few weeks and that this would include coverage of Bishop's Stortford. It would be possible to use this for options testing in future, although the model was operated by Aecom on behalf of Essex County Council and the fees needed for each option test need to be factored in. EP cautioned against over-reliance on transport models, which should be seen as one of several tools. He also explained that the timescales involved in plan-making did not allow for exhaustive model runs.
4. MP added that there was an important role for the professional judgement of experienced transport planners, informed by local knowledge, which was why EP had been asked to engage with the NP group. EP had also attended a meeting with the East Herts Association of Parish and Town Councils and following this session a representative of Thorley Parish Council had indicated his intention to provide information to EP via MP.
5. KW asked about some highways engineering concepts, such as a south-eastern bypass and increasing capacity at Hockerill. EP explained that cost-benefit appraisal of these and other expensive engineering-led ideas was unlikely to stack up. A pragmatic approach would be to consider a range of other traffic management measures, including providing opportunities for alternative modes of travel, and seeking opportunities to redesign the urban environment around people rather than the car.
6. JP explained that one of the key concerns was to ensure the continued prosperity of the town centre by diverting through-traffic to alternative routes but enabling people whose destination was the town centre to get there quickly and easily. EP agreed that this was a key part of the traffic-management approach he would be advocating.
7. DB asked whether a town centre masterplan would be helpful. MP pointed to Buntingford Town Council's approach, which involved employing a specialist in public realm, masterplanning and traffic management to draw up proposals for the High Street. This approach could be something that the NP team might wish to consider further, whether as part of the NP itself or in the longer term. The approach was amenable to public engagement, through design workshops for example.

**ACTION:** NP team to provide succinct list of local transport issues to MP for consideration by EP in the transport 'think piece'. Suggested deadline: **Friday 28 November**.

### **The Goods Yard Site**

7. MW was leading the NP group work on the Goods Yard. There was a strong desire to see the site developed in an appropriate fashion. He proposed a market square/public space in the development. KW suggested that affordable housing and hotel provision should be given careful consideration. Tanners Wharf had successfully managed to attract office uses. At Welwyn Garden City station development had occurred over the railway tracks.
8. MS responded in relation to the commercial viability of some of the suggestions. Tanners Wharf was not comparable with the Goods Yard site and there was a high risk to commercial viability of over-providing office space. There was unlikely to be strong demand for a hotel. A multi-functional public space was being considered, and this could include provision for a market. In the case of bridging over the tracks, the viability would depend on sufficient returns from the shops above to pay for the scheme, as well as sufficient land either side to provide the supporting structure. In this case neither condition was likely to be achievable.
9. MS explained that there had been a meeting with the District Council in relation to the Link Road proposals. A technical note had been submitted which made the case for deleting the Link Road proposals from policy, because of its impact on land-take and pressure on increased densities, and also the compatibility of the road with the operation of the transport interchange. MP had forwarded these ideas to the County Council highways officers and was meeting with them on Monday to discuss further. It was also understood that the County's views in relation to passenger transport access station access would need to be taken into consideration.
10. Another aspect related to access to the development and the station from the south. MS explained that it had been demonstrated that this could be achieved, but the land was tight given the requirements for set-back from the river and the railway line, and Network Rail's operational requirements for land adjoining the southern access point. MP understood from County that existing Section 106 contributions were available to fund the construction of a new foot/cycle bridge alongside the Station Road bridge, to increase safe and convenient connections between the station and the town centre. It was understood that legal matters and discussions with landowners were taking place but County appeared optimistic that a bridge would be provided.
11. MP explained that there were very high local expectations for the site, and it was also considered very important in terms of the strategy for the town and

the need to improve the connections between the station and the town centre. The draft District Plan policy BISH3 tried to capture the aspirations set out in the 2011 Development Brief. A figure of 200 dwellings had been included in the draft policy following earlier discussion with Savills around interpretation of the aspiration in the Brief for a 'limited amount of family housing'. Savills had proposed a range of 200-300 homes as the minimum viable levels of housing for the scheme to be deliverable. Solum had responded to the District Plan consultation earlier in the year requesting more flexibility in the emerging policy, deleting the requirement for the Link Road and removing the proposal for 200 dwellings and replacing this with a suggestion for 'up to 450 dwellings'.

12. MP stated that financial viability was clearly at the heart of preparing a deliverable scheme. Advice had been sought from PBA on both the Link Road and the policy requirements more generally. This would be shared with the NP group. The advice contained some tough messages in terms of the realism of expectations for the site. It also recommended that a priority list should be drawn up, and that the onus be put on Solum to demonstrate why higher levels of development were necessary. MP suggested that the District Council could commission a viability consultant to assess the Solum figures.
13. MS agreed that this approach would be acceptable, and that it would need to take place in January-March 2015, since this was the period when architects and financial viability work would be undertaken, with a view to submitting a planning application in September 2015.
14. KW expressed concern that it might be difficult to prepare a priority list in advance of analysis of all the Questionnaire responses. IH suggested that whilst the responses were important, they were one aspect of the decision-making process and that there was an important role for the NP team to take a leadership role and set out its view. Without a clear view of the local priorities then Solum's task in terms of achieving successful outcomes which also achieved the main community aspirations would be more difficult. It was necessary for Solum's proposals to be both commercially deliverable and to reflect local aspirations as far as possible.
16. MW suggested that there might be a role for the focus group to get an early steer on the priorities, and this could also help to point to a way forward. MP suggested that it would also be important for the District Plan policy and the NP policies for the site to be closely aligned, otherwise there was a risk of confusion which would undermine the ability for delivery of a quality development which goes some way towards meeting local aspirations.

17. MP had discussed the site with the Leader of East Herts Council, who was keen to communicate to the NP group that neither he nor East Herts Council wished to impose any particular approach or mix of uses, and he was very keen to seek input from the NP team.

#### **ACTIONS:**

MP to write a report to the District Plan Executive Panel on 8 December to recommend an approach to the Goods Yard to capture the above issues and recognising the need for a policy approach which incorporates both commercial viability and community aspirations.

MW to work with MS and lead work on drawing up a list of priorities to inform the financial viability appraisal and design exercise.

#### **Secondary Schools**

18. MP stated that the draft District Plan provided a framework for considering possible solutions to uncertainty around secondary schools provision. It would be necessary to achieve greater certainty around this, and in this respect the District Council relied on the stakeholders to agree a way forward. The key stakeholders included the County Council, the schools, and the landowner/developer interests. John Barfoot had been in touch and was apparently talking to Officers at the County Council about this. The key issue was that the schools were seeking a 22ha site south of Whittington Way, whereas Countryside Properties has stated that a maximum of 10ha would be provided. The County Council's position was that land should be safeguarded for future school provision. MP explained that there needed to be greater clarity around the schools' plans within this context. The District Council was reliant on the stakeholders getting together to work out a solution. MP was concerned that this could result in a delay to the District Plan, which would affect the whole District.

**ACTION:** KW to speak to John Barfoot about the possibility of bringing together the various stakeholders in a meeting to attempt to find a satisfactory resolution.

#### **Community Football Provision**

19. MP stated that a number of responses had been received through the District Plan consultation in relation to the need to provide for the aspirations for community football. It was understood that an informal proposal had been received recently for a Clubhouse and associated pitches at land off the B1004 north of Jobber's Wood. In planning terms this land was Green Belt but if a planning application came in it would need to be considered whether the 'very special circumstances' existed to make the proposals acceptable.

20. KW noted that the land lay outside the NP area. There could be concerns about the precedent of allowing development in this location. However it would be necessary to find out more information to see whether it was an issue which the NP could address.

**ACTION:** MP to provide contact details to KW, who will make further enquiries around the details of this proposal.

### **East of Manor Links**

21. KW stated that he was aware that concerns had been raised by local residents about the developers' proposals to put social housing towards the back of the site, adjoining the existing residential properties. There was also concern that plans were being put forward when the Golf Club land had not been sold to the developer.
22. MP explained that in the interests of transparency submissions from developers were being posted on the Council's website. However, it should be understood that proposals were at a very early stage and would no doubt evolve further. It would be appropriate for the NP to engage with more detailed work on the site, if it were felt appropriate, to help allay the concerns of local residents. MP understood that following the Golf Club AGM earlier in the year the Golf Club Directors had given an option to Weston Homes on the practice ground.
23. KW said that there were also concerns about the density of the development proposals, and that bungalows would be more appropriate as there was a strong demand for these from an aging population. MP explained that low-density development such as bungalows would lead to pressure for further greenfield development in order to meet overall housing needs. MS stated that although he had no interest in this particular scheme, in general he considered bungalows to be unviable, because the sales premium on a bungalow would not compensate for the loss of revenue from the reduced quantum of units. In future he considered that bungalows would be something of a luxury product with the sales price of existing bungalows rising considerably.

**ACTION: KW to speak to the lead NP officer on Manor Links as to a suitable approach to this site.**

### **Other matters**

24. KW was trying to obtain information about air quality at London Road from the Environmental Health team at East Herts.

25. KW understood that the Brake Brothers site on Dunmow Road could become available. KW asked whether this site would be suitable for inclusion in the NP. IH advised that for plans provide a framework for development, but the situation on the ground is changing all the time. Generic policies could help to steer planning applications, however if the NP team considered that there was a realistic prospect of the site coming forward then it would certainly be open to the team to address this through their work.
26. MP provided RF with a contact at the District Council in terms of further work on the Green Infrastructure side.