

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 31 OCTOBER 2017

REPORT BY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

BISHOP'S STORTFORD GOODS YARD SITE MASTERPLAN

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All Bishop's Stortford wards

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To enable Executive Members to consider the Master Plan for the site

RECOMMENDATION FOR EXECUTIVE: To recommend to Council that:

(A)	the Master Plan for the Bishop's Stortford Goods Yard site be endorsed and that it forms a material consideration for development management purposes.
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1.0 Background

1.1 The land at the Goods Yard, Bishop's Stortford, has been a long term allocation for development in the Council's Local Plans. It features in both the current 2007 Local Plan and is identified again as an allocation in the emerging District Plan. The 2007 Plan allocation included the land which comprised the former John Dyde training college. That site was redeveloped for housing over 10 years ago, and does not now form part of the emerging District Plan allocation

1.2 In early 2016 a planning application was submitted setting out proposals for the development of the site. It proposed up to 680 residential units, retail floorspace, a hotel and two multi storey car parks. The application was submitted to a meeting of the Development Management Committee on 17 May 2017. The decision of the Committee was to refuse planning permission.

- 1.3 Also during 2016, the Council commissioned consultants to prepare a Planning Framework for Bishop's Stortford Town Centre (the Planning Framework). The Planning Framework sets out a context for future planning and other decision making in the town centre, seeking to support the town's continued economic health and vitality. The goods yard site is considered in some detail in the Framework, the document identifying it as presenting a major opportunity to improve the arrival experience in the town and to enhance a large portion of the riverside.
- 1.4 The Bishop's Stortford Town Centre Planning Framework was approved for development management purposes by the Council at its meeting of 18 July 2017.
- 1.5 Subsequent to the decision of the DM committee to refuse planning permission for the 2016 planning application, the landowners have entered into a process of collaborative working with the Council to produce the master plan which is the subject of this report. The purpose of the process of work that has led to the production of the master plan has been to identify and resolve, where possible, areas of previous disagreement between the parties which led to the refusal of the planning submission.
- 1.6 The working arrangements have involved the establishment of a Steering Group of Members, chaired by the Leader and comprising other members of the Executive. A Member working group has also been established. This comprises a number of local ward members, wider Bishop's Stortford members and a non-Bishop's Stortford member of the DM Committee.
- 1.7 Following a number of meetings of these groups, discussion of the issues with the landowners representatives and formulation of master plan proposals based on these discussions, a final master plan has now been presented. This is included as **Essential Reference paper B** to this report.
- 1.8 The landowners' representatives have also undertaken a number of meetings and consultation exercises with a range of stakeholder groups with both local and wider interest in the last few months. A summary of these is included as **Essential Reference Paper C**. Also attached, by way of further background at **Essential Reference Paper D**, is a summary of comments that the Council made at the draft stage of formulation of the master plan, along with the response from the landowner.

1.9 Whilst the primary purpose of the Steering Group has concluded with the formulation of the master plan, it has been pleased with the constructive working arrangements that have been formulated with the landowners' representatives and has decided to continue with Steering Group meetings subsequent to this consideration of the master plan. This will enable a forum, where issues which remain outstanding in relation to the master plan or where further detailed work is required, can be considered. The establishment of these working relationships give greater confidence such that it is recommended that the master plan be endorsed at this stage, whilst some matters do still require further attention. Further detail on these is set out below.

2.0 Master Plan

2.1 The main issues raised by the development of the site, and which have been the subject of the discussions at the Steering and working groups, can be summarised as follows:

- The status, configuration and operation of the highway and other links to and within the site;
- The provision, amount and future management of non-residential and residential car parking provided on the site;
- The scale and height of the buildings proposed, their design, appearance and use;
- The layout and treatment of the non-built/ green spaces/ riverside;
- The relationship between the site and the development proposed and other strategic and policy objectives for the town

2.2 A commentary on how each of these matters is dealt with in the master plan is set out below:

Highway and other links

2.3 The master plan shows the creation of a new all-purpose two way road through the site between London Road at the south and Dane Street/ Station Road at the north. This aspiration was set out in the Planning Framework and was articulated by members of the DM Committee when the previous planning application was considered.

2.4 The degree to which the creation of this new road will mitigate other current traffic issues in the town is unknown at this stage.

There is a concern that the provision of a new access to the railway station and town centre will simply draw further traffic into the town and offset any improvements that are achieved elsewhere. The Council, through the Shaping Stortford Steering Group, has commissioned future transport strategy work for the town, which will inform outcomes in relation to this.

- 2.5 In the interim, whilst being provided as an all-purpose route, engineering and other measures will be applied to the road such that traffic speeds are low. This will also ensure that the need to create a quality new space as a forecourt to the railway station will take precedence over the function of the road as a new link between the south of the town and the town centre. At present the master plan sets out that the road will be engineered to achieve a target vehicle speed of 20mph (and max of 24mph). An even lower speed would probably provide a better compromise solution to allowing both through traffic, but also creating an environment that feels safe for all users.
- 2.6 The provision of the road also supports the delivery of other aspirations set out in the Planning Framework, such as the future potential to remove the one way traffic system in the town.
- 2.7 Other links to be retained and enhanced are the foot and cycle link from the River Stort bridge adjacent to the maltings buildings through to the station. The riverside footway to the south of this is to be enhanced as a combined foot and cycle link. Enhanced cycle parking provision is to be created at the railway station in new buildings proposed to either side (north and south).

Parking

- 2.8 Two multi storey car parks are proposed for non-residential commuter parking. The finalised number of spaces will be defined in planning application submissions. The Council has requested that the spaces be managed in a way that enables an element of the provision to be available for short stay usage during the week – and not solely provided for commuter use. The landowner has indicated that this remains under discussion with the train operating company.
- 2.9 Residential parking is proposed to be provided at a ratio of 0.61 spaces per unit overall (with 0.47 per unit in the first phase and 0.75 per unit in the second phase – two phases overall). This is in recognition of the sustainable location of the site. Parking

provision in the second phase, which will comprise an outline application when the planning application is submitted, remains open to further assessment.

- 2.10 Given the location of the site, the Council has requested that details of further steps to be taken to support sustainable transport, such as car club provision, are set out in the master plan. These are not included at this stage, but further details are to be forthcoming as part of the planning application submissions.
- 2.11 Residential parking provision is likely to be low in relation to the emerging policy standards. A definitive judgement cannot be made at this stage in the absence of full details of the number of units (up to 600) and the size of them. The emerging policy does allow for a reduction in provision down to 25% of the full amount, based on the transport sustainability of a site. As indicated, this location performs well in transport sustainability terms and such a reduction would appear well placed.

The built form and uses

- 2.12 Buildings which are up to six storeys in height are proposed. The design approach is such that where there is a sixth storey, this will appear, from the public domain, as contained within a pitched roof space. A number of the blocks will contain podium levels at ground floor, hidden behind frontage buildings, where parking will be provided.
- 2.13 The design approach draws on the industrial heritage of the area, utilising maltings buildings as a starting point. Generally the architecture is to be simple in style, without undue decoration. Two more individualistic buildings are proposed to 'bookend' the current railway station building – to the north and south. These will be non-residential.
- 2.14 With regard to non-residential uses, the proposals include a hotel and floorspace that will be provided for retail and business uses.
- 2.15 The Council's retained urban design advisor considers that the master plan represents an appropriate design solution for development at the site. The building heights proposed exceed some expectations in relation to the site and previous assessments that have been undertaken in relation to the scale of buildings to be accommodated here. The viability of the scale of development will be tested further in the formal planning

application process. At this stage, it is considered that the scale proposed represents an acceptable compromise between achieving sufficient development to enable a viable scheme to come forward and the impact it will have on the character and context of the site and area.

Green spaces and riverside

- 2.16 As indicated above, the master plan includes proposals to enhance the riverside environment, providing enhanced foot and cycle way links. These will require the use of land outside the developer's control and in agreement with the Canal and Rivers Trust. The developer cannot assure provision at this stage therefore.
- 2.17 A landscaped space is to be provided adjacent to the riverside. This will be up to 60m in depth and 100m in length. This is a meaningful space in landscape design terms. The widest part of the space will be located adjacent to the foot/ cycle bridge over the river. The foot/ cycle link between the bridge and the station will run through this space.
- 2.18 In some areas it is considered that some conflict remains between contrary aspirations to utilise land for hard surface uses, eg car parking and its availability for soft landscaping. This is particularly so in part of the second phase adjacent to the rail line. Here, residential parking provision currently appears dominant. As set out above, this second phase of development will comprise an outline part of an application with formal proposals are submitted.

Relationship with the town

- 2.19 The master plan sets out a range of precedent buildings which have informed its content with regard to scale and height. These have been used to inform the height of the buildings proposed for the site. The scale of development reduces from the north end of the site, adjacent to the existing John Dyde and flour mill developments, down to 2/3 storey at the south end of the site to provide a similar scale to existing buildings in that area.
- 2.20 References have been set out above in relation to the linkages proposed to be created by the development. These include the new through site road, the riverside foot and cycle improvements, the link between the River Stort foot/ cycle bridge and the station and new footway link to Anchor Street. The latter one forms a

basis for future links beyond the site, set out as an aspiration in the Planning Framework.

2.21 Overall, the master plan does not preclude the achievement of the wider town centre objectives set out in the Planning Framework and works toward achieving some of them.

3.0 Conclusion

3.1 The master plan document addresses the main issues of significance in relation to the development of the site. It sets out a detailed framework within which a new planning application submission can be made. It gives certainty in relation to a number of matters relevant to the development of the site, such as the range of uses, building scales and heights, quality and architectural expectations and new linkages. The master plan also gives clarity with regard to some issues where some aspirations relating to the development of the site are likely to be more difficult to achieve.

3.2 Whilst the document addresses the significant issues, some matters remain to be dealt with in more detail. The ideal position would be that these are also resolved at this stage. However, the context for this document is the background of the previous planning submission – and the new detailed proposals coming forward. These are likely to be submitted shortly after consideration of this document and will provide a process through which the more detailed assessment work can continue.

3.3 The working arrangements established between the landowner/ developer and the Council, through the Steering and Member working groups, also give a forum through which further matters of detail can continue to be discussed at Member as well as Officer level.

3.4 It is considered that the certainty identified through the document so far and the commitment to a process of ongoing engagement gives sufficient confidence overall such that the master plan document presented now can be endorsed by the Council.

4.0 Implications/ Consultation

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

Background Papers

None

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