

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 03 SEPTEMBER 2019

REPORT BY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

NORTH OF SAWBRIDGEWORTH (SAWB4) MASTERPLANNING
FRAMEWORK

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To enable Executive Members to consider the Masterplanning Framework for the SAWB4 site, Land to the North of Sawbridgeworth.

RECOMMENDATION FOR EXECUTIVE: To recommend to Council that:

(A)	The Land to the North of Sawbridgeworth Masterplanning Framework for the strategic allocation known as SAWB4, 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 Masterplanning Framework or Masterplan which is presented to members for consideration.

- 1.2 In order to embed the Masterplanning process, District Plan Policy DES1: Masterplanning requires all 'significant' development proposals to prepare a Masterplan. This should set 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 Masterplanning Framework 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 Masterplanning Framework 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 Masterplanning 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.
- 1.4 Steering groups have been established for each town in the District to help inform the development of strategic sites allocated in the adopted District Plan. These are comprised of 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. Shaping Sawbridgeworth is the Steering Group used to progress the Masterplanning Framework for the SAWB4 allocation.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 The land to the North of Sawbridgeworth is a strategic allocation (SAWB4) within the District Plan, which was adopted on 23rd October 2018. As such, the site has been released from the Green Belt and is immediately available for development, provided that relevant policy criteria are complied with in any future planning application.
- 2.2 SAWB4 is allocated as a residential development to accommodate around 200 homes. The northern and southern parts of the site are under different ownership. Countryside Properties own most of the site and have led (with agent Bidwells) on the development of the masterplan framework. This is supported by the Consortium of landowners for the northern part of the site.
- 2.3 Work on the masterplan initially started in 2018 alongside the two other Sawbridgeworth sites, allocated in the District Plan. The masterplan frameworks for SAWB2 and SAWB3 were finalised and subsequently endorsed by the Council in July 2018, but progress on SAWB4's masterplan stalled. Concerns from officers, the steering group and the design review panel about design issues and potential over development of the site were unresolved. Instead, rather than finalising an agreed masterplan, the developers submitted a hybrid planning application for phases 1 and 2 covering the southern part of the allocated site, which is within the ownership of Countryside Properties.
- 2.4 The Council confirmed that in line with the District Plan, the application would not be determined until the masterplan

process is complete. As such, the planning application is being held in abeyance and in March 2019 the masterplan process reconvened. The site promoters Countryside Properties have since worked collaboratively with the Council and the steering group to address concerns and gain consensus about the design concepts for the site.

- 2.5 To alleviate previous concerns from the steering group, the masterplan framework identifies that the site capacity is based on the District Plan requirement to deliver around 200 homes. Policy SAWB4 of the 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 200 new homes will be of varying mix and tenure, including 40% affordable housing.
- 2.6 In terms of on-site specific matters, the site is not required to make on-site community provision other than open space and landscaping, but it will contribute towards other local provision through S.106 agreement/s in due course through the planning application process. It will also be expected to meet all other relevant SAWB4 policy criteria, inter alia, addressing issues such as transport (both locally and wider strategic); access; Self Build housing and, wider opportunities to link into pedestrian, cycleway and bridleway networks. Sewerage, drainage and flood mitigation are also important matters to be covered.
- 2.7 Alongside the other allocated sites in Sawbridgeworth (SAWB2 and SAWB3) SAWB4 will deliver highway improvements in the town, including improvement works to the existing double roundabout junction of West Road/ Station Road/ London Road/ Cambridge Road.
- 2.8 The Masterplan Framework provided at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'** sets out a vision for the development of the site supported by a series of principles. These seek to respond to the policy requirements as set out in Policy SAWB4 and have

been established as a result of an analysis of constraints and opportunities and through discussions with officers, Shaping Sawbridgeworth Steering Group, the local community and other stakeholders. Reflecting previous concerns, further work has been done in the masterplan framework to strengthen pedestrian and cycling links with Sawbridgeworth to the south, increase open space provision and to explore how the landscape and topography is used to help create a distinctive character that connects into the countryside beyond.

Engagement

- 2.9 Throughout the masterplan process a number of meetings have taken place with officers, Countryside Properties, Bidwells (agent) and Barton Willmore (urban design consultant). The promoters have also liaised with relevant stakeholders on a number of issues such as access, drainage and archaeology.
- 2.10 The Shaping Sawbridgeworth Steering Group was set up to enable the open debate of issues. It comprises district and town council representatives and several community members. Countryside Properties originally engaged with the steering group in 2018 and more recently presented the revised masterplan in June 2019, which was positively received. Suggestions relating to access, sustainability measures, affordable housing and pedestrian linkages were taken into account in the development of the masterplan and will be further considered at the planning application stage.
- 2.10 The Masterplan Framework was taken to the design review panel for a second time on 4th July 2019. The panel would like more information about the detailed design of the built form and streetscape so it is agreed that the site will be taken to the design review panel again at application stage.
- 2.11 Public consultation in July used a dedicated consultation website to enable people to view and comment on the

masterplan. Leaflets to promote the consultation were distributed within a mile radius of the site, to over 650 addresses. The documents and paper forms were also made available at the Town Council offices. The promoters have produced a Statement of Community Involvement, available as **Essential Reference Paper 'C'**, which provides details about the consultation and summarises the responses.

2.12 Feedback was received from 20 respondents and key issues raised are set out in table 1.

Table 1: Summary of consultations responses for SAWB4

Key Issues	Comments
Impact on local roads	Development will exacerbate traffic problems in the town, particularly on Cambridge Road.
Strain on local public services	New development will have a detrimental impact on local services, such as doctor surgeries and schools.
Opposition to the principle of development	Oppose the principle of residential development on the site.
Queries about building quality / design issues	Want to ensure new housing is high quality, sustainable and energy efficient.
Concern about impact on views from specific homes	Individuals adjoining the site concerned about their loss of views.

2.13 Most of the comments are opposed to the development of the site for residential development or concerned about the impact on local roads and services. However, the principle of development of around 200 homes on SAWB4 has been established through the plan-making process. As discussed in paragraph 2.7 Countryside Properties is working with the highways authority to improve the local highway network. Likewise expansion of Mandeville Primary School has been planned to accommodate development of SAWB4.

Contributions for other relevant services will be negotiated via S.106 agreements through the planning application process.

- 2.14 In terms of the design quality issue, the Masterplan framework sets out design principles that aim to deliver high quality, sustainable development. Details of the design, including how proposals should respect the amenity of existing residents will be considered at the planning application stage. Therefore, the consultation feedback does not require changes to the masterplan framework, but the issues raised will be considered through the planning application process.

Conclusions

- 2.15 With the adopted District Plan in place, it is important that the Council can demonstrate the delivery of its strategic sites, and in particular to expedite the delivery of new homes planned within the first five years of the Plan. It is therefore important that, while maintaining flexibility, the Masterplanning Framework should provide sufficient breadth of information to guide both future developers and, importantly, decision-makers. An agreed Masterplanning Framework will be a material consideration¹ in the decision-making process and is key to ensuring that any planning application for different development phases on the Land north of Sawbridgeworth SAWB4 allocation should meet the Council's aspirations.
- 2.16 It is the view of Officers that this Masterplanning Framework is a document that provides a good basis upon which to move forward to preparing detailed applications. It provides a suitable 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 as application proposals are worked up, as necessary. Officers will continue to work with Countryside Properties, its agents, and other

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.

stakeholders to ensure that the best possible quality design is achieved on this site.

2.17 The Masterplan Framework contains a vision and series of land use and design principles that reflect the requirements of Policy SAWB4. With appropriate design tools, these ambitions should be realised on the site. It is therefore recommended that the Masterplan Framework, as detailed at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**, be agreed as a material consideration 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

East Herts District Plan – Chapter 8 – Sawbridgeworth:

<https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/districtplan>

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