

East Herts Council Report

Council/Executive/Committee (delete as applicable)

Date of Meeting: 21 January 2020

Report by: Cllr Haysey, Leader of the Council

**Report title: Bishop's Stortford High School Site Masterplan
Concept Document**

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- To enable Executive Members to consider the Masterplan Concept Document for the Bishop's Stortford High School Site.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR Executive to recommend to Council:

- (a) The Masterplan Concept Document for the Bishop's Stortford High School Site, as detailed at Appendix A to this report, be agreed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 The Masterplan Concept Document sets a vision and series of objectives for the future development of the Bishop's Stortford High School Site on London Road, Bishop's Stortford. The Document reflects the policy requirements of Policy BISH6 of the East Herts District Plan, 2018 and it is therefore recommended that the Masterplan Concept Document be agreed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 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 masterplan framework or masterplan which is presented to members for consideration.
- 2.2 In order to embed the Masterplanning process in the District Plan, 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.
- 2.3 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.

3.0 Considerations

- 3.1 The land at The Bishop's Stortford High School Site is a strategic allocation within the adopted District Plan under Policy BISH6.
- 3.2 Policy BISH6 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 allocation is for around 150 homes, which takes into account the need to set aside part of the site for the provision of open space on the western part of the site as well as the expansion of the Thorley Hill Primary School which is on land adjacent to the site.
- 3.3 The development of the site will follow the relocation of the Bishop's Stortford High School campus to land south of Whittington Way, as part of the wider development of the Bishop's Stortford South site (granted permission in March 2019). The school relocation has been granted permission by the County Council and Reserved Matters details are currently being considered by County Council officers.
- 3.4 The Masterplan Concept Document (provided in **Appendix A**) describes the steps taken to consider the physical context of the site, including an analysis of the surrounding design, urban form and density of properties in the vicinity of the site. It then looks at the particular characteristics of the site and explores the opportunities arising from these characteristics such as connections with existing residential areas and embracing existing trees and landscape to shape the developable area of the site.
- 3.5 The Document sets out a vision for the delivery of 223 homes. This vision has been developed through undertaking a detailed analysis of the constraints and opportunities of the site, through discussions with the local community and key stakeholders including local ward members, the Town Council and Civic Federation at a public exhibition and through the Steering Group process.

- 3.6 Section 2 of the Masterplan Concept Document describes the steps taken to consider the physical context of the site, including an analysis of the surrounding design, urban form and density of properties in the vicinity of the site. It then looks at the particular characteristics of the site and explores the opportunities arising from these characteristics such as connections with existing residential areas and embracing existing trees and landscape to shape the developable area of the site.
- 3.7 Section 3 of the Masterplan Concept Document includes a summary of the community engagement that has taken place and how the comments received have been taken into account. 1,300 newsletters were delivered to neighbouring residents, with 38 responses received through this process. 147 residents attended an exhibition in July, 67 of which completed feedback forms (62 at the event and 5 using a freepost address). The key concerns raised by residents included traffic impacts and the need for investment in community infrastructure such as doctors' surgeries. This section illustrates how the illustrative masterplan has evolved through the engagement process.
- 3.8 The Masterplan Concept Document then looks at the design concepts and principles that have been applied to the overall scheme proposal in Section 4. These principles respond to the identified opportunities and constraints, and key concerns raised during the public engagement. These principles include accessibility, safety and security, a relationship with surrounding residential areas, density, parking and servicing and height and scale, links and connections.
- 3.9 The Masterplan Concept Document also includes an illustrative landscape design, which has evolved through discussions with the Council's Landscape Officer and Urban Design Officer. Furthermore, the Masterplan Concept Document includes illustrative elevational designs, looking at materials and features which take reference from surrounding residential areas.
- 3.10 An illustrative dwelling mix and tenure is provided, which has been the subject of pre-application discussions with the

Council's Housing Officers. The document sets out that all homes will meet accessibility standards and the layout will facilitate legibility for those with visual and aural impairment through soft and hard landscaping, lighting and materials. The document further sets out how the site will be managed and maintained in the future through a landscape management plan, and how safety and security will be achieved through design and access measures.

- 3.11 The Masterplan Concept Document sets out how the application will address sustainability in terms of energy and emissions; how sustainable drainage features will be integrated into the design to manage surface water drainage requirements, which take account of uplifts for climate change resilience; how water consumption and waste will be managed; and how each home will benefit from fibre to the premises broadband connections and how electric vehicle charging will be provided in a configuration to be determined at the detailed planning stage.
- 3.12 The matter of most debate at each of the Steering Group Meetings has been the impact of the development on the local highway network, in particular because the proposal is for an increased number of new homes above those which are allocated in the District Plan policy. The Concept Document therefore includes a sub-section on transport and access principles, which looks at the policy requirements of maximising sustainable transport options and walking and cycling routes into and through the development site. Detailed work is ongoing on highways matters and will form a part of the application.
- 3.13 Section 5 of the document concludes with an illustrative masterplan layout which brings together all the above elements.
- 3.14 An application is anticipated this winter. The application will be an Outline Application with the majority of matters reserved apart from the main access point into the site.

Engagement

- 3.15 There have been a number of Steering Group and Officer Meetings throughout 2019. The Steering Group initially comprised local ward members who met in February and July. More recently, the Steering Group also included representatives from the Bishop's Stortford Town Council and Civic Federation who made valuable contributions to the discussion at a meeting in October. Furthermore, a public exhibition was held in July, hosted at the school. Approximately 1,300 homes and businesses from the surrounding area, were sent a newsletter and invitation to the exhibition. The leaflet distribution area was agreed with officers in consultation with members.
- 3.16 In addition to the Steering Group Meetings, several pre-application meetings have taken place with officers of the Council and County Council focusing on issues such as highways, education, landscape and design.

Conclusions

- 3.17 It is the view of Officers that the Masterplan Concept Document provides a sound basis upon which to move forward to prepare the detailed application stages. 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 the applicant and other stakeholders to ensure that the best design possible is achieved on this site.
- 3.18 The Masterplan Concept Document contains a vision and series of objectives that reflect the requirements of Policy BISH6, and with appropriate design tools, these ambitions will be achieved on the site. It is therefore recommended that the Masterplan Concept Document as detailed at Appendix A, be agreed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes¹.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 The District Plan requires strategic sites to undertake a masterplanning process.

5.0 Risks

5.1 If a scheme comes forward without going through the masterplanning process, it would be contrary to the District Plan.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 The masterplanning process includes public engagement and steering group meetings with members and local representatives.

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

No

Financial

No

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

No

Specific Wards

Bishop's Stortford: All Saints, Central, Meads, Silverleys and South

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

- 7.1 East Herts District Plan October 2018 – Chapter 5 - Bishop's Stortford, <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/districtplan>
- 7.2 Appendix A: The Bishop's Stortford High School Site Masterplan Concept Document

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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.