

East Herts Council Report

Executive

Date of Meeting:	8 February 2022
Report by:	Cllr Goodeve, Executive Member for Planning and Growth
Report title:	Land North West of Buntingford Masterplan Document
Ward(s) affected:	Buntingford

Summary

- To enable Executive Members to consider the Masterplan Document for the land North West of Buntingford.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR Executive to recommend to Council:

- (a) The Land North West of Buntingford Masterplan Document, as detailed in Appendix A to this report, be agreed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 In accordance with District Plan Policy DES1, a masterplan document has been produced for the Land North West of Buntingford in collaboration with the Shaping Buntingford Steering Group.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The East Herts Approach to Masterplanning 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 all 'significant' development sites. 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.

- 2.2 In order to embed the Masterplanning process, District Plan Policy DES1: Masterplanning requires all 'significant' development proposals to prepare a Masterplan. The significance of development is measured not only on its scale, but on the potential impact on the community and local character. However, paragraph 17.4.1 of the District Plan supporting text suggests that generally a threshold of fifty dwellings or more will apply.
- 2.3 The masterplan 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.
- 2.4 The Masterplanning document 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 document 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 Document

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.

- 2.5 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 and other significant sites that come forward for development. 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. The land North West of Buntingford is the first site to undertake the masterplanning process in Buntingford. The Shaping Buntingford Steering Group was established in March 2021 and has been used to progress the Masterplan Document.

3.0 Reasons

- 3.1 The Land to the North West of Buntingford is a 'windfall' site, not a site that was allocated in the District Plan. It is located within the town's settlement boundary and as such the principle of residential development on the site is acceptable, in accordance with District Plan Policies *DPS2 The Development Strategy* and *Bunt1 Development in Buntingford*. The supporting text to Policy Bunt 1 sets out that additional homes provided in Buntingford should encourage sustainable transport modes; consist of a mix of dwelling types and sizes including bungalows; and deliver affordable housing to meet local needs. Policy HD1 of the Buntingford Neighbourhood Plan (2017) also confirms that residential development is acceptable in principle within the town's settlement boundary, subject to impact on local character and landscape character. The site is sustainably located, within walking distance of the town's local facilities.

- 3.2 The masterplan document has been developed collaboratively. Over eight months the steering group has worked with Pigeon to ensure that the masterplan will create a high-quality and landscape led scheme that relates well to adjoining development and the wider town. The design framework for the site responds to the policy requirements in both the District Plan and Buntingford Neighbourhood Plan; and has been established as a result of an analysis of constraints and opportunities, through discussions with officers, Shaping Buntingford Steering Group, the local community and other stakeholders.
- 3.3 The Masterplan document, as set out in **Appendix A**, sets out a vision for the site supported by a series of principles to deliver around 55 homes alongside landscaping and amenity space to provide an attractive green approach to the northwest of Buntingford. The development will promote sustainable, low carbon development, incorporate 40% affordable housing and include a range of heights and densities. The masterplan includes new walking and cycling connections and allows access to Hertfordshire County Council's land to the south of the site, in order to facilitate potential future education or open space use.
- 3.4 In terms of on-site matters, the site will include open space (including an amenity area around the retained oak tree and a wildflower meadow to the north of the site), landscaping and Sustainable Urban Drainage (SuDs). It is not required to make other on-site community provision, but will contribute towards other local provision through S.106 agreement in due course through the planning application process.

Engagement

- 3.5 Throughout the masterplan process a number of meetings have taken place with officers and Pigeon. Pigeon have also liaised with relevant stakeholders on a number of issues such as access, drainage and in relation to noise from the A10.

- 3.6 Four meetings with the Shaping Buntingford Steering Group has allowed for the open debate of issues. It comprises district and town council representatives and Hertfordshire County Council officers. Suggestions relating to noise from the A10, visual impact and design of development, affordable housing and pedestrian linkages have influenced design of the Masterplan. These issues, alongside local S106 contributions will be further considered at the planning application stage.
- 3.7 The developers engaged with the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel on 27th September 2021 and the contents of the draft Masterplan were positively received. Suggestions from the Panel to enhance pedestrian and cycle links to adjoining development, increase the provision of open space and set development back from the A10 to address noise concerns have been incorporated into the scheme.
- 3.8 Public consultation has taken place through a consultation website, which was available for three weeks in September and October 2021. The consultation website was advertised via a leaflet that was distributed to around 350 homes within a consultation zone agreed by Ward and Town Councillors and also advertised via the Buntingford Town Council website and Facebook page. In addition to being able to engage with the masterplan via the website, the consultation leaflet also included contact details for anyone who was unable to access the website.
- 3.9 There were 34 responses to the public consultation. The main points raised relate to:
- Concern about traffic congestion and for transport improvements associated with the Redrow scheme (housing development adjoining site) to be delivered;
 - Impact on social infrastructure (healthcare and education);
 - The relationship of the development to the A10;
 - Provision of affordable housing;
 - The need for sustainable construction;
 - Support for the provision of bungalows.

3.10 Many concerns have been addressed in the final Masterplan Document through changes to the layout, to reposition buildings away from the A10; commitment to sustainable construction and the delivery of a mix of tenures and house types. Other issues raised will be addressed at the planning application stage, including design detail and S106 contributions towards community facilities. The transport improvements in relation to the Redrow Scheme are progressing and will be completed in accordance with Hertfordshire Highways' requirements.

Conclusion

3.11 With the adopted District Plan in place, it is important that the Council can continue to demonstrate a delivery of 5 years housing supply. 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 Masterplan Document will be a material consideration in the decision-making process and is key to ensuring that any planning application should meet the Council's aspirations.

3.12 It is the view of Officers that this Masterplan Document provides a good basis upon which to move forward to preparing a detailed application. 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 Pigeon and other stakeholders to ensure that the best possible quality design is achieved on this site.

3.13 It is therefore recommended that the Masterplan Framework, as detailed at **Appendix A**, be agreed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes.

4.0 Options

4.1 The Council could choose not to approve the Masterplan Document. However this would be contrary to District Plan Policy DES1. It would also mean that when determining the application, the Council would not be able to take account of the design framework agreed in collaboration with the steering group and stakeholders. This is likely to have a detrimental impact on design quality and community engagement.

5.0 Risks

5.1 If the scheme progresses to the planning application stage without a Masterplan, it will 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. This is explained above in more detail.

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

The Masterplan Document incorporates design principles that address environmental sustainability.

Financial

No

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

No

Specific Wards

Buntingford Ward

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix A: Land North West of Buntingford Masterplan Document

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