

MINUTES
of the
CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD
held on 16 and 23 July 2020 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor G H J Pooley (Chair)

Councillors H Ayres, N Chambers, W Daden, I Fuller, M Goldman,
S Goldman, N Gulliver, G B R Knight, R Moore, R J Poulter, I Roberts, A Sosin, M Steel,
N Walsh, R T Whitehead and T N Willis

Also present:

Councillors M J Mackrory, S R Robinson, T E Roper and M D Watson

1. Attendance and Apologies for Absence

The attendance of those present was confirmed. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor J Galley, who had appointed Councillor M Steel respectively as his substitute.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 4 June 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest

All Members were reminded to disclose any interests in items of business on the meeting's agenda and that they should do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. They were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days of the meeting, if they had not previously notified her about it.

4. Public Questions

Statements on the Masterplans for West Chelmsford and North of Broomfield and on the Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy had been received from member of the public, details of which are given in minute numbers 5, 6 and 7 below.

5. Chelmsford Strategic Site Allocation 2 – Masterplan for West Chelmsford (Warren Farm)

The Board considered a masterplan prepared by Crest Nicholson for Strategic Growth Site Policy 2 – West Chelmsford. If approved by the Policy Board, the masterplan would be submitted to the Cabinet on 8 September 2020. A Green Sheet of additions and alterations had been distributed before the meeting setting out the Council's response to comments from consultees.

In allocating sites for strategic growth, policy required that Strategic Growth Sites be delivered in accordance with masterplans to be approved by the Council. This ensured the creation of attractive places to live and the successful integration of new communities with existing.

Masterplans were required to demonstrate how the site would satisfy the requirements of the respective site policies. They were a tool to help achieve a vision and key development objectives, considered sites at a broad level and set a framework for the future planning applications. The core content of masterplans were required to cover:

- A vision for the new place
- Site and context analysis e.g. surrounding landscape, heritage, contamination, flood risk, important views, etc
- Movement structure e.g. walking, cycling, public transport, vehicle circulation
- Infrastructure strategy
- Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) strategy
- A framework for landscape, spaces and public realm
- Land use and developable areas
- Building heights
- Layout Principles
- Delivery and phasing

Following the update to the Masterplan Procedure Note in October 2019, the Council also required consideration of (i) supporting Livewell initiatives across the development and (ii) incorporating sustainable construction methods, energy efficiency and other sustainable development initiatives set out in the Council's Making Places Supplementary Planning Document.

The Board heard from representatives of the Chignal Estate Residents' Association and Writtle Parish Council, the organiser of a petition about aspects of the masterplan, and ward councillors for St Andrews and Writtle wards. Their concerns about the masterplan centred on the following issues:

- The proposed bus link from the development site to the urban area via Avon Road. In particular, there were concerns about the width of footways and the safety of pedestrians using them and possible conflict between them and cyclists; the negative effect of the link on the living conditions of nearby residents, in terms of

pollution, noise and light levels; and the detrimental loss of established green space and wildlife habitat and the visual impact of the provision of a heavily engineered bridge as part of the bus link.

- The depth of the green buffer between the development and Roxwell Road, which was in places 30 metres but, in the view of those who had signed a petition, needed to be much wider to reduce the visual impact of the development.
- The need for improvements to Lordship Road at an early stage of the development to accommodate the additional traffic expected and to improve safety; the need for a bus service to serve the new development; and for an entry and exit to the site for buses via both Roxwell Road and Avon Road.
- The need for safe and sustainable access to Hylands school from the development site.
- The location of the access to the site allocated for travelling showpersons.
- The lack of plans to upgrade the play area in Avon Road.
- The failure of the developer to include plans to provide the energy requirements of residential properties from clean and sustainable sources.

In response to those issues, officers informed the Board that:

- Many of the points made by the Residents' Association concerning pollution, light levels and noise were relevant planning concerns that were best addressed at the planning application stage.
- The bus link was considered to be a vital element in making the development sustainable, would provide residents with a choice of modes of travel and there would be incentives provided to encourage them to use it.
- On the question of road safety, the proposed bus link would be used only by buses, pedestrians and cyclists, complied with minimum standards and could accommodate safely the expected level of pedestrian traffic. The swept paths for turning buses were satisfactory but if the proposed arrangements for this changed at the details stage they would need to continue to comply with the standards. Traffic orders could be used to control parking at the junctions of the bus route. Generally, any outstanding issues arising from the road safety audit could be resolved at the planning application stage.
- Owing to its engineering requirements the bridge would have a visual impact but this could be mitigated to some extent by its design.
- As regards children walking between the school and the Park, the footway would be 1.2 metres at its narrowest point, increasing to 2 metres elsewhere, and would not be used by cyclists.
- Regarding the buffer along Roxwell Road, Writtle Parish Council had expressed no concerns about its depth and officers believed it to be sufficient, subject to the detailed design being satisfactory. Part of the reason for a 30 metre buffer was the effect a built frontage would have on helping to reduce traffic speeds on Roxwell Road. Increasing the depth of the buffer may necessitate increasing the housing density elsewhere on the site. As it was, the density had changed since the first masterplan for the site but remained broadly acceptable, subject to the suggestions outlined in the officer report.

- Works to improve Lordship Road could be carried out as part of a Section 106 agreement.
- Negotiations would take place with the developer to provide the bus link at an early stage of the development.
- Loss of parking in Avon Road could be compensated for by providing additional spaces elsewhere.
- The site for travelling showpersons could not be close to the residential area and providing access to it via the roundabout from Roxwell Road would not be possible in view of the size of the vehicles used by them. A separate access was therefore the preferred solution.

The Board was reminded that the submission of masterplans was just one stage in the development of a site, which included the wider principles regarding its allocation set out in the Local Plan and the details of its design and the mitigation of its impact as part of the submission of planning applications and Environmental Impact Assessments.

The discussion of the masterplan by the Board revealed that members had concerns about a number of its aspects. Prominent among these was the bus link in terms of its route, design and effect on the natural environment. Whilst it was desirable to provide a bus service to connect the development to the urban area, the loss of biodiversity and habitat was not acceptable, its safety for pedestrians and cyclists was questionable and the impact it would have on residents along the route was a cause for concern. On these points, the Board was informed that there would be six or eight buses an hour along the proposed route and that whilst a route could be provided via Roxwell Road, bus companies were not happy to access the site from Lordship Road and it would not be able to meet the requirement that no residents be no more than 400 metres from a bus route. Members felt, however, that the safety, viability and benefits of the bus route, and all the sustainable transport elements of the masterplan, needed to be looked at further.

Another major issue raised by members was the failure or reluctance of the developer to recognise the trend towards providing proven sustainable sources of energy as part of new developments and to anticipate likely future government policy on this. It asked that officers continue to urge developers strongly to take this into account in the development and design of this and other strategic sites. Officers said that they would do so via the developers forum and encourage them to take follow the Making Places Supplementary Planning Document.

The comment was made that the depth of the green buffer along Roxwell Road could be the subject of further negotiation with the developer, taking into account the relationship between the presence of built up frontages and the speed limit on that road.

RESOLVED that

1. The Cabinet be recommended to approve the masterplan for Strategic Site Allocation 2, West Chelmsford (Warren Farm).

2. Before consideration by Cabinet, the masterplan is subject to independent quality and design review undertaken by the Essex Quality Review Panel.
3. The Policy Board authorises the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development, to negotiate the further considerations outlined in this report and other subsequent changes to the masterplan ahead of the consideration by Cabinet, and that the Opposition Spokespersons be informed of any changes.
4. The Policy Board acknowledges the significant doubts about the safety, viability and benefits of the bus link proposed in the masterplan. It therefore refers to officers all the sustainable transport elements of this development to officers and agrees, if necessary, to convene a special meeting of the Policy Board to review the masterplan before it is considered by the Cabinet.

(7.10pm to 9.35pm at the meeting on 16 July 2020)

At this point the Board varied the order of business on the agenda to consider the items on the Statement of Community Involvement and Neighbourhood Plans Update before adjourning the meeting.

6. Review of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

The Board were informed that the Council, as a Local Planning Authority, was required by Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to publish and keep up-to-date a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The Statement submitted to the meeting had been reviewed and updated and set out the Council's strategy for effectively involving the community, interested organisations and statutory stakeholders in planning and development matters which affected them. It covered both planning policy and development management functions and complemented Council-wide engagement commitments set out in the Consultation and Engagement Strategy and Our Chelmsford, Our Plan. The Board was requested to approve it for public consultation.

The following changes to the document were suggested:

1. On page 4 of the consultation document, the second bullet point under Committees to read: "The vast majority of planning applications are determined by officers under delegated powers. Determination is made by the Planning Committee of (a) changes to buildings which are owned by the Council; (b) applications for planning consent made by our own councillors or our own employees; (c) applications where ward councillors have requested determination by the Planning Committee for an application in his or her own ward, but the request must be for sound planning reasons; and (d) where the Director of Sustainable Communities feels it is appropriate for the Planning Committee to determine an application – this will only usually be for major planning applications".

2. On page 22, amend the third bullet point under We Will to read: "Publish your comments on our website".
3. On pages 22/23, add at the end of You Should: "covenants, title deeds and Documents".
4. On page 23, How we Make Decisions, make any necessary amendments to conform with point 1 above.

The Board was told that the suggested amendments would be considered, but avoiding unnecessary duplication of the Council's Constitution , with the consultation document would be amended accordingly.

RESOLVED that

1. That the draft Statement of Community Involvement submitted with the report to the meeting by approved for public consultation, subject to the inclusion of the suggested amendments mentioned above where officers consider it is appropriate to do so.
2. Any subsequent changes to the draft SCI and finalising of all consultation material is delegated to the Director of Sustainable Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development.

(9.39pm to 9.51pm at the meeting on 16 July 2020)

7. Neighbourhood Plans Update

An update was submitted on current progress on Neighbourhood Plans in the City Council's administrative area. A Neighbourhood Plan was a statutory planning document which established general policies for development and use of land in a neighbourhood, including the location of new homes and offices, and what they should look like. They were used positively to plan for future development and support growth, reflect and build on the strategic needs set out in the Local Plan, and be in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework.

RESOLVED that the position on the eight Neighbourhood Plans in Chelmsford be noted.

(9.51pm to 10.02pm at the meeting on 16 July 2020)

The meeting was adjourned at 10.02pm on 16 July and reconvened at 7.00pm on 23 July 2020. With the exception of Councillors M Goldman, R Hyland and N Gulliver, who submitted apologies, the members present at the first meeting were in attendance for the reconvened meeting. Councillor M Steel acted as the substitute for Councillor N Gulliver on this occasion.

8. Chelmsford Strategic Site Allocation 8 – Masterplan for Land North of Broomfield

The Board was requested to consider a masterplan prepared by Bloor Homes to guide the development of Strategic Growth site 8, Land North of Broomfield. Although not a member of the Policy Board, Councillor M Mackrory was present as the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development and declared an interest in this item as a company member of Farleigh Hospice, which was located near the development site.

Members received a presentation from officers on the Masterplan which envisaged a 450 home, landscape-led development with a neighbourhood centre, early year and children's facilities, green and open spaces and an emphasis on sustainable movement to, from and around the development site. The key issues associated with the development were its sustainable design and construction, the provision of new community facilities and the construction of a spine road through the development that would provide access to Broomfield Hospital for staff, delivery and emergency vehicles and buses, thereby relieving pressure on the local road network.

The Board heard statements from a member of the public, representatives of Broomfield and Little Waltham Parish Councils and ward councillors for the area. Whilst accepting the principle of development, all emphasised the need to ensure that its impact on the area was mitigated. In particular,

- the effect the closure of Woodhouse Lane would have on residents was a concern, leading to longer journey times for them and fears that the creation of dead ends would attract criminal behaviour. If the stopping up of Woodhouse Lane could be avoided, measures would need to be taken to prevent rat-running;
- the fact that visitors to the Hospital would not be allowed to use the new access road raised doubts about the potential for improving the traffic situation on Blasford Hill/Main Road, Hospital Approach and other roads. The construction of the access road during the early phase of development would be crucial; and
- the adequacy of the proposed screening to reduce the visual impact of the development, especially on its western side, on existing settlements and the landscape was questioned.

Members were told that at a recent meeting with representatives of the Hospital Trust, ward councillors had been told that 70% of the traffic to and from the Hospital was staff-related and that it had plans for additional staff parking with access via the spine road through the development site. Ward councillors asked whether a detailed traffic analysis of current movements had been carried out.

Responding to those and other points, officers told the Board that:

- the proposal to prevent rat-running through Woodhouse Lane was a key component of the arrangements to improve traffic flow in the area, encourage the use of the new access road, place an emphasis on walking and cycling instead of on car use, and would benefit the residents of that road and North Court Road. It was not believed that CCTV would be necessary to monitor activity at the turning heads;
- the layout of the road network within the Hospital site and the location of the visitor car parks were such that, under the present arrangements, allowing the use of the new access road by visitors would lead to traffic backing up in Hospital Approach and have a detrimental effect on traffic flows on other roads;
- based on the work done on traffic movements in the area as part of the Local Plan and by Essex Highways and Bloor Homes, the 70% figure provided by the Hospital was thought to be accurate, with 60% of those vehicle movements coming from the north. A detailed traffic assessment would be required as part of future planning applications in respect of the development site. The developer was committed to providing the access road as early as possible, subject to technical considerations, and the timetable for its provision would be covered by a Section 106 agreement;
- it was expected that the Masterplan for Broomfield Hospital would be produced in due course. If it included revised arrangements that would enable the use of the access road by visitors without any detrimental effect on the surrounding road network, it would be possible to review the use of the access road;
- the Masterplan indicated a landscape belt around the west and north of the site of approximately 40 meters' depth. Details were yet to be agreed but it was anticipated that it would comprise hedges and trees with woodland characteristics. Settlement patterns had been taken into account in the design of the Masterplan and measures were proposed to separate the new site from existing settlements;
- a cross-valley cycle route was envisaged as part of development of the North East Chelmsford allocation sites, for which there was no timetable as yet. It was planned as part of this Masterplan that its cycling network would be able to connect to the cross-valley route.

In response to questions from and points made by members of the Board during their discussion of the Masterplan, officers said that:

- Bloor Homes were committed to signing up to the Livewell Accreditation scheme;
- it typically took about five years for landscape planting to mature sufficiently to provide adequate screening. More description of landscaping would be provided at the outline planning application stage;
- if the eventual Hospital Masterplan was able to overcome concerns about rat-running, the configuration of parking on the site and traffic flows on the wider road network, it may be possible to revisit the use of the access road by visitors to the Hospital;
- A physical control system was required to prevent rat-running. The use of number plate recognition (ANPR) to control access to the Hospital site via the new access road was not at this time considered sufficient, but officers would consider ANPR as part of the future works within the Hospital site;
- it was likely that encouraging cycling and pedestrian access to the Hospital would reduce traffic using the new access road;

- access to the Hospital for the Park and Ride service was likely to be via the Main Road/Hospital Approach roundabout. The new access road provided an opportunity for the shuttle service to enter the Hospital via that route. The Hospital was committed to carrying out works to the roundabout as part of a Section 106 agreement and it was anticipated that they would come forward soon;
- a traffic assessment would be carried out to determine the number of traffic movements to and from the Hospital and who they would be by. The Hospital had made an assessment of the effect of the development and the new access road on movements within its site but had not extended that to the wider road network;
- the cycle and walking paths, whether shared or segregated, would meet the required standards to ensure pedestrian safety.

In approving the Masterplan, the Board expressed the hope that the developer would optimise the use of alternative sources of energy to gas and follow the Making Places Supplementary Planning Document as closely as possible.

RESOLVED that

1. The Cabinet be recommended to approve the masterplan for Strategic Site Allocation 8, Land North of Broomfield.
2. Before consideration by Cabinet, the masterplan is subject to independent quality and design review undertaken by the Essex Quality Review Panel.
3. The Policy Board authorises the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development, to negotiate the further considerations outlined in this report and other subsequent changes to the masterplan ahead of the consideration by Cabinet, and that the Opposition Spokespersons be informed of any changes.

(7.10pm to 8.53pm at the meeting on 23 July 2020)

9. Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS).

Chelmsford City Council was one of twelve partner local authorities working with Natural England to implement the Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS). The Strategy set out a long-term strategic approach to avoid and mitigate recreational disturbance on European designated sites along the Essex Coast, from an increasing residential population arising from new housebuilding throughout the County. The RAMS was adopted by the City Council in March 2019.

The aim of RAMS was to prevent bird and habitat disturbance from recreational activities through a series of management measures which encourage all coastal visitors to enjoy their visits in a responsible manner. It enabled a housebuilder to make a monetary 'developer contribution' towards the delivery of strategic mitigation measures to help

address recreational pressures that would otherwise occur, instead of needing to provide bespoke mitigation themselves.

The RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) provided a county-wide mechanism for securing developer contributions to fund measures identified in the Strategy. It distilled the Strategy document into a practical document for use by local planning authorities, developers and the public and was returning to the Board following public consultation.

A statement was made by a member of the public who questioned whether the Strategy gave sufficient attention to the principle of avoiding harm to habitats in the first place. He believed that the proposed approach favoured the speeding up of the planning application process at the expense of providing adequate protection to the environment. He also referred to the government's intention to consult on changing its approach to environmental assessment and mitigation in the planning system and asked whether it would be prudent to defer making judgement on the Strategy until any new arrangements that resulted from that were in place.

In response to those points, officers said that Natural England had signed off the Essex Coast RAMS, which was one of several such strategies elsewhere in the country. It had also been accepted by a recent Planning Inspector during an Examination of the North Essex Part 1 Local Plan and there was no evidence that RAMS did not work. One of the principal aims of such strategies was to avoid the impact of development on sensitive wildfowl habitats and whilst it could speed up the planning application process, this was alongside ensuring that effective mitigation measures were taken. The government had announced the publication of a new White Paper on changes to the planning system but it was not known what the timetable would be for making any change, and in the meantime the RAMS complied with existing policy. Should that policy change, the RAMS monitoring process would enable it to be adapted.

When discussing the Strategy and SPD, members of the Board referred to the impact the Strategy would have on development in South Woodham Ferrers, which was within a zone where greater measures would be required from developers. Asked whether developers in that area should still have the option to make their own mitigation arrangements, officers said that although the RAMS was voluntary most developers were unlikely to do so as making the required contributions was likely to be a more cost effective and quicker process. The level of contributions was based on the forecast of the number of dwellings expected to be provided in Essex and the cost of the mitigation measures needed to offset that growth and was set at a level that would be viable and affordable to developers. South Woodham Ferrers was closer to the coast and therefore measures beyond the standard financial contributions could need to be taken by developers to mitigate the recreational harm that new housing could cause to the coastal habitats of birds, in line with the Local Plan site allocation policy.

In response to a question as to why the Strategy only dealt with the protection of bird habitats, officers said that the European sites had predominantly been designated to protect the waders and wildfowl wintering in Essex coastal areas. The mitigation measures set out in the strategy and SPD would benefit other wildlife and habitats.

RESOLVED that

1. The Cabinet be recommended to adopt the Essex Coastal Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy Supplementary Planning Document presented in Appendix 2 to the report to the meeting.
2. The Cabinet be recommended to adopt the Essex Coastal Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy Supplementary Planning Document Adoption Statement presented in Appendix 3, and that it be published in accordance with Regulation 14 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
3. The Cabinet be recommended to adopt the 'You Said We Did' Feedback Report, presented in Appendix 1 and that it be published.
4. The Cabinet be recommended to adopt SEA/HRA Screening Report, presented in Appendix 4, that it be published.
5. The Cabinet be recommended to authorise Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development to make minor changes to the Supplementary Planning Document, Adoption Statement, You Said We Did Feedback Report and SEA/HRA Screening Report in Appendices 1 – 4 should it be necessary before adoption/publication, and to undertake all the necessary legal and procedural adoption processes.
6. The role of Chelmsford City Council as the Essex Coastal Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy project 'Accountable Body' for a period of three years, subject to the signing of a 'Partnership Agreement', be noted.

(8.53pm to 9.26pm of the meeting on 23 July 2020)

10. Work Programme of the Policy Board

An updated work programme for the Board over the coming months was submitted for information. The Board was informed that an item on the St Peters site Masterplan would be added to the programme at some stage. The work programme would be kept under review and an updated draft programme will be circulated to members of the Board well ahead of the next scheduled meeting on 1 October 2020.

RESOLVED that the work programme of the Board be noted.

(9.26pm to 9.37pm of the meeting on 23 July 2020)

11. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business for the meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.37pm

Chair