



Chelmsford City Council Policy Board

12 January 2023

Strategic Growth Site Policy 7 – Great Leighs masterplan

Report by:

Director of Sustainable Communities

Officer Contact:

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Purpose

This report is seeking the Policy Board to recommend to Cabinet the approval of the masterplan for the Great Leighs Local Plan Site Allocations.

Recommendations

1. The Policy Board recommend to Cabinet that the masterplan attached at Appendix 1 with any changes arising from the recommendations be approved.
 2. That the Policy Board delegate 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 any other subsequent changes to the masterplan ahead of the consideration by Cabinet.
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1. Background

- 1.1. The formal determination of masterplans consists of two stages: approval by Chelmsford Policy Board and then approval by Cabinet.
- 1.2. Strategic Policy S7 sets out the Spatial Strategy (i.e. the scale and distribution) for new development over the period of the Local Plan. In allocating sites for strategic growth, this policy confirms that Strategic Growth Sites will be delivered in accordance with masterplans to be approved by the Council. This is to ensure

we are creating attractive places to live and to ensure the successful integration of new communities with existing.

- 1.3. Masterplans are to demonstrate how the site will satisfy the requirements of the respective site policies. Masterplans are a tool to help achieve a vision and key development objectives. They consider sites at a broad level and set a framework for the future planning applications to follow (usually Outline and Full applications). The Council's Masterplan Procedure Note, updated in October 2019, sets out what masterplans should contain. The core content of masterplans should 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
- 1.4. Following the update to the Masterplan Procedure Note in October 2019, the Council also requires 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.
- 1.5. Each of the masterplans will take a bespoke approach to the site it relates to. The larger of the allocated sites will differ from the smaller sites, the more complex or more constrained sites may differ from less complex and constrained sites, for example. Most masterplans will cover additional content or will look at certain matters in more detail than others, as appropriate, but all will consider similar core content.
- 1.6. The masterplan does not secure detailed site planning.
- 1.7. Developer obligations will be secured by way of a s.106 Agreement as part of the Outline planning application.
- 1.8. The masterplan presented with this report relates to Strategic Growth Site Policies 7 – Great Leighs, which is brought forward by a consortium of developers (see land ownership plan on pg 9 for further reference) – namely John Holmes, Bellway, Redrow and Landvest Development Ltd.

2. The journey to this stage

- 2.1 Through the Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) the developer is given a set of masterplanning parameters (written and in plan form). These relate to the Local Plan policy expectations for the site. In addition, the parameters identify key site constraints and the areas where development should be avoided, where it might be preferable to situate the main site access, other key considerations such as heritage setting, flood zones, for example. These are provided at a very broad level, intended only to provide the starting parameters of site construct, and are to be subject to refinement as part of the masterplan production.
- 2.2 Throughout the period of masterplan production there are recurrent discussions between officers and the developer/s. These generate numerous iterations of the masterplan; each of those refining the masterplan in light of the issues which have been the subject of discussion. Complementing and strengthening that approach the process involves various forms of local engagement which ultimately shape the masterplan into something which is tailored for its locality. The key inputs of that engagement are outlined below.

Public Consultation

- 2.3 Two public consultation drop-in events were held, one in March 2022, then another in July 2022, both at Chelmsford City Racecourse.
- 2.4 The masterplan submission in July 2022 was subject to a public consultation by the local planning authority, similar to a planning application. The revised masterplan submitted in December 2022 was subject to a further round of consultation (two weeks).

Community and Technical Stakeholder Workshops

- 2.5 Prior to producing a draft masterplan, a round of community and technical stakeholder workshops is run. This collates local expectations for the future development and draws key concerns and suggestions to the surface so that the developer can seek to include or resolve those as part of the first draft masterplan.
- 2.6 Two stakeholder workshop events were held in April and May 2022 respectively; one with statutory consultees (the technical workshop); the other (community workshop) with community and residents groups.

Member Presentation

- 2.7 All Members were invited to a presentation on 17 August 2022, setting out the content of the masterplan and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

3. Overview of Masterplan Content

Vision

- 3.1. The vision set out within Strategic Growth Site Policy 7 is one for *‘a high-quality comprehensively-planned new sustainable neighbourhood that maximises opportunities for sustainable travel.’*
- 3.2. The developers vision echoes the site policy and expands upon it. No objection is raised at this stage to their current vision.

Site and context analysis

- 3.3. Within the site policy, the Strategic Site 7 allocations are described as follows:
 - 7a: Great Leighs – Land at Moulsham Hall
 - 7b: Great Leighs – Land East of London Road
 - 7c: Great Leighs – Land North and South of Banters Lane
 - 7d: Great Leighs – Land East of Main Road
- 3.4. The allocation sites are generally located to the west, north and east of Great Leighs village. The largest allocation site is 7a and is located north west of the village. 7b is located north of the existing village envelope. 7c adjoins the south side of 7b and crosses Banters Lane southwards. 7c is split by Banters Lane, with the larger segment being to its south. 7d is effectively an extension of the existing village and is now almost complete following the grant of planning permission in 2016. See Policy Map extract for Great Leighs at Appendix 2.
- 3.5. The masterplan provides a site and context analysis, which supplements analysis work undertaken by the Council in the first stage of the masterplan process. It represents a suitable starting point for a masterplan.
- 3.6. The structure of the report below will deal with each topic for each parcel in turn, with commentary on the whole allocation where appropriate.

Land use and developable areas

Strategic Site 7 – Great Leighs

- 3.7. The masterplan includes a number of issues which require explanation and further consideration, namely (i) the proposed location of the Travelling Showperson Site, (ii) the extension of built form beyond the defined settlement boundary in the northern extremity of 7a, (iii) access to the northern parcel of 7a from Moulsham Hall Lane.

Travelling Showperson Site (TSP)

- 3.8. The site allocation outlines the TSP site to be sited within 7a. The masterplan provides an assessment for alternative locations (7 shown), with the preference identified as 'Land off London Road'. No objection is raised to the site criteria used in the assessment, the analysis of the options is open to further scrutiny.
- 3.9. The starting point for this consideration is that 7a is the policy identified location for the TSP site, given it was the largest area of all 4 sites, so in theory should have offered the greatest flexibility. Given the potential access arrangements (even with new roads installed), the site identified as no 4 'Land off Moulsham Hall Lane' would have represented the only realistic option in highways terms. This location has been tested by officers at Stage 0 of the masterplan (Council scoping stage), however because of the narrowing of the parcel off the roundabout (between the A131 and the boundary of Moulsham Hall), combined with the 1-hectare indicative land take, the TSP site would have either been prominent at the entrance to the site or sited in the preferred location for the Neighbourhood Centre. 7a does indeed pose some difficulties, particularly in relation to the desired proximity to the existing highway network. Officers agree that 7a does not represent an ideal design solution.
- 3.10. Possibilities within 7b or 7c are also not without their difficulties. 7c is considered wholly inappropriate due to the limited access arrangements. 7b offers greater opportunity to be close to the A131, however its allocation for specialist residential units does not sit comfortably with a mixed use site for Travelling Showpeople. It would also likely necessitate a separate access onto London Road, whereby ECC Highways have already sought to limit the access points to 2 (as now seen in the December revision of the Framework Plan).
- 3.11. 'Land off London Road', known colloquially as (part of) the Island Site (owing to its location between London Road and the A131) is currently vacant. It forms part of the Special Policy Area for the Racecourse (Policy SPA2), which enables operational and functional requirements to be acceptable in principle in rural areas that would ordinarily be one of planning policy constraint. A TSP site would not be in accordance with the Site Policy Area policy requirements. However, the Island Site's inclusion within the SPA was intended to preserve the implementation of the governing permission for the Racecourse (03/00084/EIA) for car parking, and also permit any suitably related development associated with the Racecourse. The permitted car parking would have been linked physically to the Racecourse site via an underpass under the A131, which didn't get built at the time of construction of the A131. The Racecourse now operates with an on-site car park north of the track; the requirement for the additional parking on the Island Site no longer exists. The Council are satisfied that development on (part of) the Island Site would not frustrate the operational requirements of the Racecourse.
- 3.12. Whilst located within the rural area, the Island Site benefits from a planning permission that would alter its character, albeit retain natural features. The proposal for the TSP site would include new access points which break through the tree belt along London Road (preserved grouping) and plots which include storage/maintenance blocks within the site. In summary, the TSP site would require some loss of trees (7 category C trees in total) which could be replaced, and result in built form within each of the plots. The acceptance of the principle

of a TSP site will inevitably result in built form as well as storage of large and smaller vehicles. The planning merits can be balanced as part of a planning application (an application was submitted alongside the masterplan in July 2022 – ref 21/02475/FUL). The planning application does not at this point convey a technical solution to the access and layout of the site, however the local planning authority are reasonably satisfied that a technical solution is possible; for a dual access arrangement, following further work undertaken by the developers transport consultants.

- 3.13. Policy Board are requested to accept the principle of relocating a TSP site outside of 7a, with details to be agreed as part of an ongoing live planning application, whilst acknowledging that the number of access points should be limited to two and tree loss should be minimised/compensated.

Extension to northern boundary

- 3.14. The Adopted Policies Map (see appendix 2) outlines the extent of the new Defined Settlement boundary (in red). At its northernmost point within 7a, it cuts diagonally across one of the fields (i.e. doesn't follow a defined field boundary as may normally be expected). This was in response to concerns about the extent of built form creeping northwards beyond a nearby listed building, Triceratops, and the requisite impact upon its setting. The boundary of the strategic allocation does extend north of the red line up to Hornells Corner, but this area is designated for SUDS/recreation. The revised masterplan now shows the northern residential parcel (shown to be self-build) extending beyond the red line (between 25 – 50m), but still within the roughly square field parcel. The parcel wouldn't need to break through any existing vegetation, but it would breach the proposed new defined settlement boundary.
- 3.15. The masterplan does not indicate an increase in number of units beyond the indicative allocation figure of 750 for 7a. However, if there were to be an increase then the applicants have indicated a commitment to the requirements of the Council's Housing Additionality: Planning Advice Note (January 2022).
- 3.16. In balancing the technical breach of the red line, the masterplan shows an improvement to field boundaries close by, thereby improving natural features as well as screening of the development parcel.
- 3.17. Heritage comments do not raise objection provided the setback from Triceratops can achieve 80m (rather than 72m currently shown), in order to increase the breathing space to its rural setting, and scale can be suitably reduced on the western edge. New planting (as shown in Figure 18) should also further mitigate any harm.
- 3.18. On balance the technical breach is considered to be acceptable subject to some refinement to the content of the masterplan (relating to proximity to listed building, scale/density as noted above) as relayed in the recommendation below.

Access to the northern parcel of 7a from Moulsham Hall Lane

- 3.19. This form of access is not identified within the infrastructure requirements for the allocation and did not appear in the July version of the masterplan. It would serve as a direct access to the 'self-build' zone, from Moulsham Hall Lane.
- 3.20. Such an access would facilitate independent build out of this parcel and reduce traffic using the main spine road, both during construction and occupation. However, there are disbenefits to this proposal. Firstly, ECC Highways do not support the access location as a matter of principle due to the rural nature of Moulsham Hall Lane and its restricted width, but also the increase in potential to use routes through Willows Green to reach the A120. Secondly, the access position is sited close to listed buildings to the north - Hump Cottage and Stone Wall Cottage. It would sit within what is currently open space which contributes to the setting and significance of these listed buildings. It is likely to cause a low level of less than substantial harm to their significance through a change in their existing rural setting. This impact could be mitigated by design to include soft landscaping as screening with subtle surface treatment and lighting strategy, however such measures are not before us. Thirdly, the visibility splays required for the access are likely to result in an impact on several trees within a preserved belt along the lane. Their loss is not definitive at this stage, but the access and requirement to keep clear the necessary visibility splays would have an overall urbanising effect on the lane.
- 3.21. Given the multitude of concerns at this masterplan stage, the access cannot be supported by officers. A developer is obviously open to explore in more detail through a planning application, however as a high-level principle at this stage it is not considered that the concerns can be outweighed by its benefits.

Further considerations:

- The northern parcel should be set in at least 80m from Triceratops and scale should be more carefully defined along the western edge as lesser than 2 storeys max (i.e up to 1.5 storeys max)
- Vehicular access onto Moulsham Hall Lane should be deleted from masterplan

Layout Principles

Movement and access

Strategic Site 7 – Great Leighs

- 3.22. The requirement of the site policy is to provide a coherent network of public open space, formal and informal sport, recreation, and community space within the site. Whilst different bodies and groups may share aspirations for alternative layouts, the masterplan should demonstrate a coherent layout underpinned by the site and context analysis.
- 3.23. There is sufficient open space to facilitate local recreation. These spaces are all located in accessible areas of the site for the benefit of new and existing residents.

- 3.24. As a general point it is noted that within the December revision of the masterplan, the description and presentation of walking and cycling links has been amended. The proposals themselves are an improvement, however officers are in agreement that in terms of presentation, the routes could be clarified between Figures 6, 26 and 27.
- 3.25. ECC Highways have made a general (and not unusual) request for existing Public Rights of Way (PROW) to be upgraded to be surfaced and lit, adopted pedestrian and cycle routes. The masterplan document should explicitly state as such in order to confirm such a commitment from developer/s.

7a: Great Leighs – Land at Moulsham Hall

- 3.26. The Local Plan site allocation dictates that the northern segment of the site should be allocated for future recreation use and/or SUDS. The context analysis has informed the location of the SUDS attenuation basins on lower parts of the site towards the brook. Given the proposed location of SUDS features (dispersed through 7a), recreation use is the obvious remaining choice for the northern segment – this is reflected in the masterplan denoting open space, with the inclusion of a bridleway and recreational routes (for cyclists and pedestrians).
- 3.27. The spine road, accommodating buses, has been logically positioned to take an access off the existing roundabout then travel westwards by respecting existing woodland on the Moulsham Hall boundary. It now includes a ‘bus loop’ within the western parcel, following initial concerns from ECC Highways about the routing. Secondary roads (not including buses) will travel northwards and southwards to serve other development parcels.
- 3.28. The philosophy with regard to footways, cycleways and bridleways has been amended following officer feedback on the first masterplan.
- 3.29. The Local transport note (LTN 1/20 Cycle infrastructure design) provides guidance to local authorities on delivering high quality, cycle infrastructure. It is noteworthy that it was published marginally later than adoption of our Local Plan. The Essex Design Guide is proposed to be updated to reflect the guidance in LTN 1/20, which explains the reliance upon it from ECC Highways in their consultee response.
- 3.30. The pedestrian/cycle routes have moved away from formal routes following the spine road and secondary roads to now be more focused on movement north/south and east/west in order to penetrate the site more logically and to utilise existing connections into the site, namely School Lane. Pedestrian/cycle routes are divided between LTN 1/20 compliant routes and recreational routes – this allows a logical hierarchy between routes that have a specific function to get from A to B, and other routes that may not be as direct. Previous comments from Essex Bridleway Association have been addressed – a new bridleway is proposed which will extend from the underpass westwards across to Dumney Lane. This will facilitate a route from east to west across 7a, onto Moulsham Hall Lane and with a potential Pegasus crossing on the A131 and London Road

further extending formal routes for horse riders. Fig 26 should show the connection of the bridleway routes along the byway.

- 3.31. The underpass is a key link between existing village and new development. It is a public bridleway. ECC Highways are recommending investigation into re-routing the bridleway to Moulsham Hall to relieve potential conflict with pedestrians and cyclists in the underpass. The layout allows for such a scenario; however, this would need to be subject to further consultation with Essex Bridleways Association.
- 3.32. The gradients either side of the underpass will require improvements for cyclist safety – the masterplan should acknowledge as such. The masterplan should also acknowledge the need for a controlled crossing in the vicinity of the Dog and Partridge PH Main Road.
- 3.33. ECC Highways' request for Chase Side Bridge, and the route through existing open space, to accommodate cyclists (as well as pedestrians) would effectively necessitate a replacement bridge (owing to its restrictive width) and development on third party land. The site policy position is one that requires 'improvement' to existing links - it is debatable whether the cost of an improved bridge and development on third party is unduly prohibitive, however a counter argument is not presented. ECC Highways are also requesting crossing facilities on Main Road, in the vicinity of footpath 8, to ensure a safe route from Chase Side Bridge. Neither issue is addressed in the masterplan, therefore further investigation is required by the consortium before the local planning authority can be satisfied that ECC Highways are content and that Chelmsford's policy position is not prejudiced.
- 3.34. Figure 25 shows a pedestrian and cycle desire route along School Lane; however, Figure 26 does not show footway/cycleway improvements on School Lane. At present, there is no continuous footway provision from the junction of School Lane with Main Road to the site access. The provision of new footways, upgrades to the existing footway network, and consideration of cycle provision on School Lane is requested by ECC Highways. This view is endorsed by officers as means of maximising sustainable travel options, particularly in light of the queries surrounding Chase Side Bridge.
- 3.35. The development parcels themselves essentially fit within existing field boundaries, which is an appropriate solution. One exception will be the loss of some hedgerow within the south parcel which is parallel to the A131. Its shape, in order to achieve some frontage to the underpass and allow an LTN 1/20 compliant footway/cycleway (in combination with an extended bridleway) will result in some incursion into the field boundary. A number of good quality trees can however be retained and incorporated into the design of the development parcel.
- 3.36. The neighbourhood centre (NC) and school are positioned roughly centrally within the wider parcel – a balance between accessibility from the A131 (for those using vehicles), but more crucially a proximity to the underpass to utilise pedestrian/cycle routes from the existing village. The NC can be accommodated within an obvious field parcel, and also benefit from the bus route as well as

pedestrian/cycle routes to the south. The school location has also been balanced with the need to provide suitable separation from the noise source of the A131 in order to give the Education Authority comfort that noise will not be a constraining factor in development of the school. Part of this solution is to wrap residential development to its southern, and part eastern edges, combined with an acoustic barrier set parallel to the A131 behind the existing tree line. Both elements of this solution have been subject to officer negotiation, to a point that they can be endorsed in principle at the masterplan stage.

7b: Great Leighs – Land East of London Road

- 3.37. The broad layout is dictated by the field parcel known as Banters Field. The parcel has respected Bushy Wood to the north through a set back from its edge. Officers have negotiated greater landscape buffers to the west (in order to set back from the road to preserve a more rural character to London Road beyond the village), and to the east (to preserve the setting of Gubbions Hall). The division between the parcel is somewhat artificial to take account of the application site for the submitted planning application (ref 21/02490/OUT), however it is logical now there exists a recreational route between the two, which will facilitate a more formal landscape belt linking the SUDS zone and landscaping to the east.
- 3.38. Vehicular access points into the parcel have now been reduced to two, with an understanding from the framework plan that the parcels will be linked (by road) roughly centrally. This reduction from the first masterplan is now unobjectionable from ECC Highways. A pedestrian/ cycle route is shown to be positioned 'off-line' to London Road, within the field boundary, owing to difficulties with width of available highway land on the east side of the carriageway. Such a scenario would not be Highways preference, but it does allow a new crossing connection south of the existing roundabout, which will link to a new (likely Pegasus) crossing across the A131/London Road. There are detailed matters such as trees and ecology to be wary of, but in principle the route is acceptable.
- 3.39. A controlled crossing will be necessary at the northern end of 7b to enable a pedestrian/cycle link to the TSP site and facilitate an improved connection northwards (shown but not annotated as such in Framework Plan - Figure 20). Figure 26 should also be expanded to show onward cycling and walking routes beyond the boundary of the site, north and south. Enhancements to off-site cycling and walking facilities will be required; for example, an LTN 1/20 compliant cycle route will be required along Main Road and London Road to link to Great Notley, Horizon 120 and Skyline 120 to the east. Crossings should also be clearly shown on this plan and on Figure 27, and connections to routes to the south to Chelmsford Garden Community. Such items may well ultimately include proportionate contributions secured through planning permissions, but the masterplan should acknowledge and commit to the aspiration.
- 3.40. ECC Highways also note that with the increased usage of the London Road / Main Road junction, the current poor road alignment will require improvements for safety reasons. Whilst this will be a matter dealt with through planning applications, the masterplan should denote a commitment by the developers at this stage.

7c: Great Leighs – Land North and South of BanTERS Lane

- 3.41. The main vehicular access point into 7c will be through 7d. Whilst this has raised some negative public comments, this is the only realistic option to service the parcel. The unit numbers will be around 100 and BanTERS Lane is not appropriate for a formal access to serve this number. A secondary access is proposed off BanTERS Lane, but this would serve a small parcel off BanTERS Lane which is in separate land ownership.
- 3.42. The recreational route which runs along the southern and eastern boundary, before entering onto BanTERS Lane, is a logical way to link through to Main Road to the west and utilise a natural landscape belt to connect people northwards into 7b and beyond. Its entry point onto BanTERS Lane has raised some concerns with Highways about proximity to the bend in the lane and the general desire line – this is acknowledged, and a route positioned closer to the vehicle access (but not conjoining) should be explored. The link should be LTN 1/20 compliant.
- 3.43. Historic England (HE) comment that the harm to Gubbions Hall would be less than substantial, taking into account the natural buffer along the south eastern edge, as also seen within 7b. In order to further reduce the impact, HE recommend the proposed landscape buffers for Sites 7b and 7c should be accompanied by a robust planting plan to reinforce the boundary to the south-east, towards the scheduled monument. The natural buffer can physically accommodate additional planting, so the masterplan should reference this request. Other requests are noted but will be more relevant to planning applications.

Further considerations:

- Amend Figures 6, 26 & 27 to consistently show the hierarchy of routes in the same colour
- The document should include a commitment that existing Public Rights of Way (PROW) are to be upgraded to be surfaced and lit, adopted pedestrian and cycle routes which are LTN 1/20 compliant
- Figure 27 should include reference to highway improvements at the London Road / Main Road junction
- Figure 26 should annotate the Byway to show the joined-up route for equestrians around the south-eastern edge of the site
- Amend masterplan to acknowledge amendments to gradients from underpass and inclusion of controlled crossing near the Dog and Partridge PH
- Include within Figure 26, an annotation to commit to the provision of new footways, upgrades to the existing footway network, and consideration of cycle provision on School Lane
- Further investigation is required to establish the possibility of providing an LTN 1/20 compliant surfaced pedestrian and cycle route up to and across Chase Side Bridge, as well as a crossing along Main Road to provide a suitable connection from the east side of the village
- Amend masterplan Figures and text to represent a controlled crossing to the TSP site, along with a commitment to highways improvements north and south of the village

- The pedestrian/cycle recreational route crossing Banters Lane should be repositioned further west and be LTN 1/20 compliant
- In response to some inconsistencies within the masterplan, reference to a toucan crossing on pg 95 should be substituted to 'Pegasus crossing'; inconsistencies in showing pedestrian and cycle links in Figures 8, 20 & 25 should be addressed.
- Include reference to additional planting along the south/east edges of site 7b and 7c

Infrastructure strategy

Strategic Site 7 – Great Leighs

- 3.44. The site infrastructure requirements are listed within the site policy.
- 3.45. Land is shown to be designated for a co-located primary school and early years and childcare nursery. The stand-alone nursery can be accommodated within the neighbourhood centre. The presence of these also addresses the three key bullets of on-site developments listed in the site policy. They are all located close to existing links via the underpass, which is to be physically improved.
- 3.46. A site is identified for the TSP plots, albeit not within the allocated area. The principle has been debated above, but the willingness by the developer to provide a site can satisfy the provision of this element of infrastructure.
- 3.47. Improvements to the local and strategic road network will be detailed in the planning application and secured through legal agreement or planning conditions. The developer's transport consultants have been engaged with ECC Highways as part of this process. Policy Board can therefore have a degree of confidence that improvements will be secured, as well as securing measures to promote and enhance sustainable modes of transport.
- 3.48. Financial contributions to secondary education can be secured through legal agreement at planning application stage, as required by the Local Education Authority.
- 3.49. Contributions will be secured towards mitigation measures identified in the Essex Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) at planning application stage.
- 3.50. The masterplan demonstrates a commitment to conform with the site infrastructure requirements.

Building heights and density

Strategic Site 7 – Great Leighs

- 3.51. Building heights are denoted within three bands – up to maximum 2 storeys; up to maximum 2.5 storeys or equivalent with up to 25% 3 storeys; up to maximum 3 storeys or equivalent. Broadly, scale is accepted to be a blanket 2-2.5 storeys given the rural location and local context, but there will be reasonable instances

where the use of 3 storeys in the layout will help to provide vistas, legibility, or significance to a specific area. The inclusion of up to '25% 3 storey within the predominant band, is excessive and lacks contextual justification at this time – it would set an unwelcome expectation for forthcoming planning applications. The legend should be amended so that 'up to 2.5 storeys' includes 'some 3 storeys'.

- 3.52. Building heights are shown to be predominantly up to 2.5 storey across all the sites; with 2 storey around the peripheries. Up to 3 storeys is shown within the first two parcels off the main entrance into 7a (which will include the neighbourhood centre), and then opposite the neighbourhood centre on the eastern periphery of the school site. An annotation is also included within 7b to denote key buildings either side of a recreational route which splits the parcel, coincidentally along the extremity of the application site for a live planning application (21/02490/OUT refers).
- 3.53. Given the distance of separation from the nearest properties, the proposed building heights in principle are acceptable. However, greater scrutiny will be required for the northern parcel of 7a due to the proximity to a listed building, in particular the scale of development along its western edge. Scale will also have to be mitigated along the northern edge of the two parcels off the new roundabout due to their proximity to the southern boundary of the Moulsham Hall estate. There is scope for some 3 storey amongst the parcels (to provide a sense of arrival off the new entrance, for example), however there is potential for the northern edge to be harmful to the setting of the listed building.
- 3.54. 3 storey nodes within parcel 7b are unobjectionable at this stage given the proximity to an open area of land for a SUDS feature (to the west) and the division of the parcel with a recreational route providing some setting to accommodate a slightly larger built form.
- 3.55. Densities are denoted as lower (up to 30dph), medium (31-40dph) and higher (+50dph). Low density is shown in the northern parcel of 7a (identified as self-build zone) and the north / west periphery of 7a. The core of the site is shown to be medium density with higher density towards the east on approach to the new main access off the A131 roundabout. 7b and the northern element of 7c are shown to be medium density. 7c is predominantly medium density other than its eastern edge towards Gubbions Hall which is low density.
- 3.56. Overall, densities are generally unobjectionable, albeit the highest density (and scale) appearing with the first two parcels off the entrance to 7a could be questionable due to the proximity to Moulsham Hall. Landscaping is proposed north of the spine road; however, it would be advisable to reduce scale and density along the northern edge to reflect an acknowledgement of the sensitivity to the setting of the listed building.

Further consideration:

- The second item in the legend for Fig 31 should substitute the term 'with up to 25% 3 storeys or equivalent' with 'some 3 storey elements'

- The first residential parcel within 7a be reconsidered to amend its northern edge to be 'up to maximum 2 storeys' on the Building Heights Plan (pg 107) and to 'lower' residential density on the Proposed Residential Density Plan (pg 105).

Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) Strategy

Strategic Site 7 – Great Leighs

3.57. Drainage approach has used existing topography to promote a natural SUDS solution, through the inclusion of several attenuation basins throughout the sites. Given the topography and position of those basins within areas of amenity space, it is considered an appropriate design solution at this stage.

Delivery and phasing

Strategic Site 7 – Great Leighs

3.58. Phasing is shown to be in three parts. 7a is divided across three phases, which is realistic given the size of the allocation. It is questionable whether the major parcel of 7c and roughly half of 7b would fall within the same first phase, however each has different landowners and 7b would also be a different residential product so no specific objection is raised at present. Crucially, phase 1 of 7a includes bus route, the major highways works related to the access and school.

3.59. Following comments made by the Council's Heritage Officer, landscape improvements at the Moulsham Hall estate should come forward simultaneously, within Phase 1.

3.60. Part of the rationale behind relocation of the TSP outside of the allocation boundary is related to deliverability. It is located on a separate land holding to all other parcels so can be developed independently initially, with support from the infrastructure to be included as part of other works on 7b (footway, cycleways, crossing of London Road for example) which are shown to be phase 1 within the masterplan. Officers view is therefore that the TSP site should be developed in phase 1.

3.61. There will be other requirements, such as affordable and specialist housing, self/custom build housing, local healthcare, local highway improvements, etc. which do not have a bearing over masterplanning, but which will form part of the development and will be considered further as part of the outline planning application. These references to potential planning obligations are not to be taken as exhaustive.

3.62. The phasing plan takes into account the timing of key infrastructure, which is the key message to be taken from the masterplan. Amendments are suggested by officers to reflect the Council's wider aspirations for the site.

Further consideration:

- Amendment is required to the phasing of Moulsham Hall landscape setting improvements and the delivery of the TSP so that they can be within the first phase of development.

Livewell

3.63. The Livewell campaign is designed to engage communities, families and individuals with the aim of providing information about all that is on offer in Essex to improve health and wellbeing. The masterplan does not make any reference to Livewell.

Further consideration:

- The masterplan should dedicate a section to discuss measures to reflect the aspirations of Livewell and confirm commitment to the accreditation.

Sustainable development initiatives

3.64. The application will be required to adhere to the Local Plan policies for sustainability. The masterplan does not include details for option for alternative means to power properties, however the absence of such facilities in this masterplan does not rule out the inclusion of community systems or other sustainable living/sustainable power generation measures on this site to meet the Council's objective of reaching a net carbon zero position by 2030.

3.65. Whilst the aspirations for Great Leighs will be somewhat different from the recently presented masterplan for the Chelmsford Garden Community, its masterplan should demonstrate a level of ambition.

Further consideration:

- The masterplan should dedicate a section to discuss sustainable development initiatives, including potential reference to a mobility hub within the neighbourhood centre (as requested by ECC Highways, December 2022)

4. Consultation Responses – Main Issues

4.1 Consultation responses include comments from consultees (some being statutory bodies for planning applications) and members of the public.

4.2 ECC Highways have submitted a substantive response. Comments are integrated into the main body of the report, where appropriate, and have directly fed into numerous Further Considerations.

4.3 Other consultees and public representations have raised the following issues (summarised):

- Principle of development - allocation and details within it
- Infrastructure – lacking within village, healthcare and childcare necessity, secondary school provision, impact with other local authority development

- Traffic – impact on local roads, reliance on car, highway safety, air quality, access to 7c through 7d, rat running of Moulsham Hall Lane, speed limit changes requested
- Residential development– impact on existing neighbours, question type of properties to be built, loss of agricultural land, noise impact from Racecourse
- Travelling showperson site – principle, location, access, noise attenuation, subdivision concern, natural environment impact, alternative use for parking more policy compliant, rationale questionable, conflict with Special Policy Area designation, conflict with development management policies, maintenance
- Landscape buffers – position, extent, additions necessary
- Loss of ecological habitats – trees, wildlife
- Flooding – locally and further afield
- Density and building heights – concerns, key views
- Pedestrian/cycle connections – location, detail, relationship with Racecourse
- Bridleway – concern over loss
- Minerals – further assessments required
- Power lines – should be resited underground
- House values – negatively impact
- Social issues – crime, anti-social behaviour
- Play areas – location questionable, consider disabled access
- Consultation and communication – criticisms of timings and local exposure

5. Additional Considerations

- 5.1. An Independent Design Review has been undertaken by Essex Quality Review Panel (EQRP) in September 2022. The EQRP has no formal status and offers informal views only, essentially providing a second opinion from a panel of experts. The benefit of the EQRP is that it provides opportunity to hear an outside perspective from other professionals. The EQRP is not an in-depth or technical assessment and the Panel do not purport to possess all of the local context or understanding.
- 5.2. Discussion between Officers and the developers have culminated in amendments to the masterplan document.
- 5.3. The EQRP requested a reflection on the baseline assessments, further exploration of heritage assets, consideration of character for each parcel, and relocation of school and NC further away from the A131.

5.4. The masterplan and the framework plan have obviously been amended since the EQRP presentation and matters raised have been addressed in the main. The heritage analysis has been expanded to include non-designated heritage assets. Character has been considered more broadly (to be Essex vernacular) but is by no means specific to the different allocations. The section within the masterplan is a reasonable starting point, but will obviously need to be developed further at outline application stage. The school has been shifted further from the A131 but now also supplemented with likely technical solutions to noise. Other specific comments on transport matters have been captured within the revisions, such as stronger cycle connections, extended bus route and a signalised crossing on the A131.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. The masterplan demonstrates how the requirements of the Local Plan will be delivered on this site. The vision is sufficiently ambitious to achieve a high-quality development which is well related to its context. The masterplan layout and other content provides a sound framework to guide successful placemaking and will support the planning application process in an appropriate way.
- 6.2. The masterplan has presented a number of items which are not in conformity with the site allocation policy. The report recommends that the relocation of the TSP site is accepted, along with the breach of the red line boundary to the north of 7a. The report does not accept the rationale for separate vehicular access into 7a to serve the northern parcel, from Moulsham Hall Lane.
- 6.3. The report highlights that changes are required to the masterplan document in order to align it with the Council's aspirations for this site. A significant proportion of the Further Considerations are highways related matters, with the remainder representing design changes or document amendments. The matters are not viewed as insurmountable from the perspective of the local planning authority.
- 6.4. The masterplan is presented to Chelmsford Policy Board with a recommendation that it be referred to Cabinet for approval subject to the inclusion of any further necessary changes with specific acknowledgement of those Further Considerations as listed in the body of the report.

List of appendices:

1. Masterplan document & expanded Framework Plan – dated December 2022
 2. Chelmsford Local Plan – Adopted Policies Map May 2022 – 18 Great Leighs (with accompanying Legend)
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Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional:

None

Financial:

None

Potential impact on climate change and the environment:

New housing delivery can have a negative impact on climate and environmental change issues. Planning Policies, Building Regulations and Environmental Legislation ensure that new housing meets increasingly higher sustainability and environmental standards which will help mitigate this impact.

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030:

The Local Plan and Making Places SPD provide guidance to assist in reducing carbon emissions through development. This development will follow the published guidance.

Personnel:

None

Risk Management:

None

Equality and Diversity:

None. An Equalities and Diversity Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Local Plan.

Health and Safety:

None

Digital:

None

Other:

None

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

This report takes into account the following policies and strategies of the City Council:

Local Plan 2013-2036

Our Chelmsford, Our Plan, January 2020

Chelmsford Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan
