

MINUTES
of the
CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD
held on 4 November 2021 at 7:00pm

Present:

Councillor I Fuller (Chair)

Councillors D Clark, W Daden, S Dobson, J Galley, N Gulliver, G B R Knight, G H J Pooley,
R J Poulter, A Sosin, N Walsh and S Young

Also present: Councillor M J Mackrory

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors H Ayres, R T Whitehead and T N Willis. Councillors S Young and S Dobson had been appointed as substitutes for Councillors H Ayres and R T Whitehead.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded that they must disclose any interests they knew they had in items of business on the meeting's agenda and that they must do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. If the interest was a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the meeting. Any declarations are recorded in the relevant minute below.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 5 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. Public Questions

Questions had been received from members of the public on the Land East of Chelmsford Masterplan. Details of the questions and the responses given are recorded under minute number 5 below.

5. Masterplan for Land East of Chelmsford Site 3a – Manor Farm

The Policy Board considered a masterplan prepared by Hopkins Homes for the East Chelmsford Site Allocation 3a, Manor Farm, in the Local Plan.

The site policy for Strategic Growth Site 3a required the following amount and type of development:

- Around 250 new homes of mixed size and type to include affordable housing.
- A new Country Park.

The core content of the masterplan covered:

- Context and site analysis
- Constraints and opportunities
- Landscape, ecology, heritage and drainage strategy
- Access, movement and connectivity, including the cycling network
- Land use and character zones
- Green infrastructure – creating a network of green corridors
- Country Park

The report to the meeting provided an overview of the masterplan's contents and the process through which it had been produced and consulted on. Officers had concluded that the masterplan demonstrated how the requirements of the Local Plan would be delivered on Site 3a - Manor Farm. They were of the view that the masterplan's vision was sufficiently ambitious to achieve a high-quality development which was well related to its context. The masterplan layout and other content provided a sound framework to guide successful placemaking and would support the planning application process.

Questions had been received from three members of the public on the masterplan. They related to:

- The increase in the number of houses proposed for the site compared to the number envisaged in the Local Plan and the ability of local services, particularly health services, schools and roads, to accommodate the larger population
- Responsibility for the management and maintenance of the country park
- The proximity of three-storey blocks of housing to Maldon Road, which would be out of keeping with the surroundings, and the disparity of figures for the density of the development given in various documents

In response to the first question, officers said that the allocation of around 250 homes was based on the Council's initial and precautionary assessment of the constraints and landscape sensitivities of the site ahead of the masterplan process. Paragraph 7.117 of the Local Plan stated that the masterplanning process would determine the final number of new homes, which could be in excess of 250 homes, whilst ensuring that the overall objectives of the site policy were not compromised.

The statement that the masterplanning process would determine the final number of homes was specifically added, specifically for this site, by the Planning Inspector for the Local Plan Examination. Its purpose was to allow some flexibility in the number of homes that could be delivered on site given the site's size, which was approximately 30ha.

Hopkins Homes had produced a comprehensive masterplan for Site 3a, engaging in two stages of consultation and ongoing discussions with the City Council. The masterplan demonstrated a landscape-led approach with consideration to the constraints and opportunities. Based on the work from the masterplan, the Council was satisfied that it is likely the site could accommodate approximately 340 homes.

On health and education, through the Local Plan process, it was identified that financial contributions were likely to be required to aid in the expansion of existing services and facilities. The potential for contributions for healthcare and education was set out in the site policy for this allocation.

On the second question, officers said that the future management and maintenance of the Country Park was a matter for the detailed planning application stage. It was the City Council's aspiration to be the future custodians of the Country Park in accordance with the Council's Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Guidance which set out the Council's preference for all open spaces to be transferred to and adopted by the Council, with a commuted sum for maintenance. If the developer chose to retain the Country Park, it should be maintained by a management company secured by the developer. The maintenance and management requirements, responsibilities, adoption process etc. as well as any financial contributions would be secured via a legal agreement.

With regard to the third question, the site area of the housing development was quite sizable at a total of 30ha. However, Hopkins Homes had acknowledged there were areas within the site which were complete no build zones, for example where the SuDS features were located and the location of the gas main and its easements. They had therefore excluded these areas within in their calculations which reduced the site down to a 'gross area' of approximately 20ha. Based on this site area, 340 homes would result in 17 dph as stated in the masterplan and Hopkin's response document. The 11.18ha stated in the masterplan was the total area of developable parcels alone.

The masterplan identified the densities of the developable parcels and these ranged between 22-38dph which represented a fairly low density scheme particularly in the context that only up to relatively recently Government policy stated that new developments should not be below 30 dph to ensure efficient use of land.

Both the proposed densities and scale took account of the sensitivities of the site, with lower scale and density located in the more sensitive areas such as the transition to the Country Park and around the Bronze Age Monument. Where higher densities and scale were proposed, although contextually, they were not out of keeping, they were where the development was closer to more built-up areas and/or more urban locations such as the settlement of Great Baddow or the A1114 slip road. Also, it should be noted that the development was set in from the boundaries of the site to the north and west due to existing landscaping, which was proposed to be enhanced, and to accommodate the strategic east-west footway/cycle link across the site.

Furthermore, both density and scale were given as a range i.e. 'between' and 'up to'. The masterplan was identifying potential areas for those greater ranges of scale and density but it was through the detailed design that final scale and density would be determined.

The following points arose in the Policy Board's discussion of the report:

- Whilst it was welcomed that the masterplan mentioned sustainable transport and connectivity, especially cycling, it was considered that cycle route 1 remained unsafe, although the proposal for route 5 was welcomed and it was important that it went ahead. The separation of pedestrians and cyclists would be preferred and it was also

important that the proposed signal-controlled crossings for the cycle route were provided. It was asked whether the westernmost crossing on Maldon Road would be a single or multiple crossing point. Officers said that the principle of the crossing was established in the masterplan but the detail would come out at the planning application on whether it would be one or two crossings. Officers added that safety would be a priority in the provision of the cycle routes and their final location and the number of crossings would be decided at the planning application stage in consultation with the Highway Authority. Essex County Council had been asked to ensure that the Army and Navy proposals would include cycling links to the east of the Army and Navy roundabout.

- It was pointed out that additional services would need to be provided to accommodate the increase in the number of houses from 250 envisaged in the Local Plan to 340 referred to in the masterplan. In the wider context, the Local Plan provided for an overall number of new properties to be provided but recent masterplans tended to propose a greater number of houses than the Local Plan envisaged for those sites. It was questioned how, cumulatively, the services required to accommodate that increase could be provided.

Officers said that, for this site, the services required to support the increase in the number of houses would be addressed at the planning application stage. It was already known that there were plans for schools to accommodate the projected increase and it was believed that the highway network could meet the demand arising from an increase in the number of dwellings if there was a modal shift to more sustainable forms of transport. Whether this was the case would be confirmed as part of the detailed transport assessments to be provided by Hopkins and Redrow and these would need to demonstrate that the highway impacts were acceptable. The joint application for the roundabout was expected by early December, whilst the transport assessments would be submitted as part of any planning application.

On the general point about more houses being provided than required by the Local Plan, that Plan gave a minimum figure for the number of new properties to be provided and that figure was flexible. Whilst it was true to say that greater numbers were planned for certain sites, it was possible that other sites would not ultimately be progressed, would be delayed or would be on a smaller scale. It was also confirmed that where more houses than originally envisaged for a site were provided, the number of affordable homes would increase proportionately.

The degree of flexibility for the increase in the number of dwellings on this strategic site which the Local Plan Inspector had said should be included in the Local Plan related only to this specific site.

- The concerns expressed earlier in the meeting by a member of the public about the height of some of the houses was shared by at least one member of the Board. It was asked whether the proposals in the masterplan could be regarded as a material consideration at the planning application stage. Officers replied that three-storey houses were proposed for a part of the site which was more urban in nature. The presence of buildings up to three storey's would add to the diversity of design and characteristics within the development. However, it remained to be seen what would be proposed in the planning application.
- It was questioned whether the car parking provision for the country park was sufficient. Officers said that a detailed assessment of the parking needs would be carried out as part of the planning application but that there was the potential to create more than the 42 planned spaces if necessary.

- It would be desirable to provide allotments as part of the development. The Board was informed that this could be something to be considered at the planning application stage.
- It was suggested that development sites such as this should be bound by current parking standards and that stricter standards to discourage the use of cars might be more appropriate. Whilst that was accepted as a goal that should be aimed for, it was cautioned that a balance needed to be struck between reducing parking provision and avoiding problems caused by on-street and inappropriate parking.

Overall, the Policy Board supported the masterplan but felt that the Cabinet should be made aware of the following comments:

1. The desire that safe and accessible cycle routes would be provided within the development site with good links to the wider strategic network and that it should be made clear to Essex County Council that the Army and Navy proposals should include cycling links to the east of the Army and Navy roundabout.
2. The expectation that more information, including detailed analyses and assessments, on the highways infrastructure would be provided at the planning application stage.
3. The need for a balance to be struck between reducing the provision of facilities for car parking on the site and the need to avoid on-street and inappropriate parking.
4. Generally, a recognition that much of the detailed information on the final form of the development would be provided at the planning application stage, including that on precise numbers of houses, their types, height and where they would be located; the exact routes of cycle paths and facilities; and what services and infrastructure would be required to meet the needs arising from the development.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Policy Board supports the adoption of the Masterplan as presented to the meeting and that the Chief Executive be requested to exercise his delegated authority under paragraph 3.4.2.7 of the Constitution to:

authorise the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development, to negotiate any final changes to the masterplan ahead of the consideration by Cabinet.

(7.04pm to 8.09pm)

6. Chelmsford Policy Board Work Programme

The Board received the latest version of its Work Programme for 2021-22.

RESOLVED that the latest Work Programme of the Board be noted.

(8.09pm to 8.10pm)

7. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.10pm

Chair