

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Full Council – 5 October 2021

Monkton Heathfield: Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller – Masterplan and Development Guide

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Mike Rigby

Report Author: Simon Fox, Major Projects Officer (Planning)

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update and seek direction from Members on the Masterplan and Development Guide draft for the area known as Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller.
- 1.2 At the Executive Meeting of 20 January 2020 Members recommended that:
 - 1) The draft Masterplan and Development Guide be published for stakeholder and statutory consultation; and
 - 2) That, subject to there being no issues raised requiring substantive changes during the consultation, the Head of Strategy and the Portfolio Holder for Planning be authorised to approve the document for Development Management decision making and to inform the guide pre-application discussions with prospective developers and landowners.
- 1.3 This report sets out what has happened since January 2020 and appraises the merits of progressing the adoption of the documents.
- 1.4 Several considerations now challenge the merit of proceeding with approval, these considerations include:
 - (a) the status of the documents can only be Guidance not Supplementary Planning Guidance;
 - (b) the length of time which has passed since January 2020 (the Exec decision) with no progression and the work now needed to assess, discuss and decide a way forward on the comments received during the consultation is significant;
 - (c) the consultation was only conducted informally with limited stakeholders and so may not have wider public buy-in;
 - (d) the site is in multiple ownerships which presents further difficulties and there is no prospect of an application until Monkton Heathfield Phase 2 is substantially progressed (application expected late September 2021); and
 - (e) the plethora of new national and local policy/guidance in place which would need to be reflected in the guidance.
- 1.5 Allied to this, current SWT officers are mindful that now moving to approve documents that may not reflect current policy/guidance may prejudice negotiations through the Development Management decision making process.

2 Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that:

- (a) Having reassessed the situation and taken into account the comments received to the consultation and in the light of national guidance, that the Council do not proceed to formally approve the Masterplan and Development Guide to inform pre-application discussions.

3 Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

3.1 No specific risk but utilising staff resource on the progression of a Masterplan to help inform future development on this parcel of land may result in less resource being available to progress the Monkton Heathfield Phase 2 application which would in itself prejudice the bringing forward housing, affordable housing and the school in the required timescales.

4 Background and Full details of the Report

4.1 This report seeks to update Members on the Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller Masterplan and Development Guide, the site forming part of the wider Monkton Heathfield allocation under Policy SS1 of the Core Strategy.

4.2 At the Executive Meeting of 20 January 2020 Members recommended that:

- 1) The draft Masterplan and Development Guide be published for stakeholder and statutory consultation; and
- 2) That, subject to there being no issues raised requiring substantive changes during the consultation, the Head of Strategy and the Portfolio Holder for Planning be authorised to approve the document for Development Management decision making and to inform the guide pre-application discussions with prospective developers and landowners.

4.3 The original report (and appendices) is appended (Appendices 1-5). This report set out the rationale for progressing specific documents to guide development at the Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller part of the wider Monkton Heathfield allocation. Policy SS1 allocates land in the Monkton Heathfield area for the development of 4500 new homes, employment areas, schools, community facilities open space and green infrastructure, a bus and ride facility, District Centre, together with new roads, cycleways and bus routes.

4.4 The majority of the area covered by this Masterplan was part of the original outline application approved for Phase 1, although there are other parcels included without any consent and under the control of third parties. Indeed Members will be aware that the Monkton Heathfield Policy SS1 allocation extends over a number of sites such as the principal Phase 1 and Phase 2 areas, plus Aginhills, West of Greenway, Hartnells, Prockters Farm, and the land promoted by Alder King at land north of the A38 and east of Doster's Lane.

4.5 These sites are at various stages in the planning process, from no application submitted to date, through to full occupation. Policy SS1 will however not deliver the 4500 homes envisaged for the whole Monkton Heathfield Policy SS1 area. This is largely as a result of lower density development than was anticipated when the policy was adopted, at a time when national minimum density standards were in place.

4.6 The former TDBC Scrutiny Committee considered the implications of this and other changes to SS1 brought about by changes in National policy and the development of the first phases of the MH development area in January 2019. The Councils previously

published Employment Land Study (November 2018) identified that overall there was a surplus of identified employment land, but also highlighted that there is an ongoing demand for smaller scale employment sites aimed at the local market. The Council is about to publish an updated Employment Needs Assessment and so the implications of this also need be reflected.

- 4.7 In order to address this likely shortfall in housing delivery at Monkton Heathfield, and delivery issues around employment land, TDBC resolved to release some of the Employment land, South of Manor Farm, Langaller for residential use including affordable housing and the delivery of significant areas for green infrastructure.
- 4.8 It was this decision that prompted the production of the Masterplan and Development Guide subject to the January 2020 Executive Report.
- 4.9 This report therefore seeks to update Members on what has happened since the recommendation to undertake stakeholder and statutory consultation.
- 4.10 The documents were published for stakeholder and statutory consultation circa 11 May 2020 until 5 June 2020. The consultation was hosted on the website of the appointed Architectural Practice, Thrive Architects, whom had worked with SWT to produce the documents. Whilst not a particular problem, it was also the case that a password was required to access the material. This means it was not accessible to the general public. The resolution did not state public consultation was expressly to be undertaken, merely stating stakeholder and statutory consultation but this is questioned as to why you would wish to purposely inhabit public consultation at that stage?
- 4.11 The website also advised interested parties could email the Case Officer direct. As that Officer has now left the authority one cannot be certain that all comments are currently available for review and assessment.
- 4.12 A number of representations were received from those forwarded the password and these comments have been recently sourced from Thrive Architects. There were also some crossover comments made with regard this site as part of the consultation held later in June and into July on the Phase 2 Masterplan and Design Guidance, this was subject to its own Executive report and consultation process through Citizen Space. These comments are appended (Appendix 6).
- 4.13 It is understood progress with the Development Guide and Masterplan was delayed as the development Consortium of Persimmon and Redrow suggested they would not be bringing forward this parcel until their Monkton Heathfield Phase 2 application had been submitted and substantially progressed to determination. This was to avoid complications regarding the cumulative impacts of traffic, a resolution over the quantum and distribution of employment land and the fact no survey work had commenced to initiate the submission of an application. At that time, the latter end of 2020, officers were being informed that the Monkton Heathfield Phase 2 application was just a few months away and likely to be submitted in February 2021.
- 4.14 Officers are conscious that the approved document cannot be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document and therefore its status and the weight attributable to it would always be questionable, however the process that has been undertaken is still valuable to officers. Indeed the master planning work and consultation has identified a number of key issues that would help officers advise any prospective applicant through a future pre-application process.

- 4.15 There is clearly still the option of assessing the consultations responses and updating the documents accordingly with a view to approving as per the original recommendation but increasingly that looks to be less attractive as an option.
- 4.16 It is worth acknowledging that simply assessing the consultation responses and updating the documents only provides a narrow opportunity for generally updating the documents and neglects an opportunity or onus to reflect the plethora of policy and real world changes that have occurred since late 2019 when the documents were being produced to progress to stakeholder and statutory consultation. It is the view of officers that the documents would require a significant overhaul to reflect the current policy aspirations and declarations of SWT.
- 4.17 In this regard it is noted:
- a. SWT declared a climate emergency in February 2019 and adopted the Somerset Climate Change Emergency Strategy and approved its own Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan in October 2020
 - b. SWT adopted an Interim Guidance Statement on Planning for the Climate Emergency 'Climate Positive Planning' in February 2021
 - c. SWT published the Taunton Design Charter and Checklist
 - d. SWT is currently undertaking its final public consultation on its Districtwide Design Guide and its Public Realm Guide for Taunton, the former including a requirement for referral to a Quality Review Panel
 - e. SWT set out its aspirations for Taunton Garden Town 2040
 - f. The impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic on transport planning and placemaking
 - g. Publication by Government of the 'Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's report 'Living with Beauty' report, January 2020
 - h. The introduction, by Government, of the National Model Design Code, June 2021
 - i. Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework to reflect design aspirations
 - j. SCC progressing a Bus Service Improvement Plan, due October 2021
 - k. 'Decarbonising transport: A better greener Britain' plan publish by Government July 2021
 - l. SCC progressing an update to their Estates Road guidance aka The Red Book
- 4.18 In so many words officers are of the opinion that approving the Development Guide and Masterplan now may actually hinder the development management planning application process and may prejudice the quality and outcomes the scheme may otherwise be held to deliver. Many of the newer pieces of policy/guidance above have usurped the SWT/Thrive Masterplan in terms of setting out a higher standard.
- 4.19 Officers would wish to reassure Members that curtailing the progression of these documents does not leave a policy desert or undermine SWT's negotiation position as and when applications in the Monkton Heathfield area are submitted. Indeed the

starting point in determining all future application within the Monkton Heathfield area is the Development Plan unless material considerations dictate otherwise. The policy initiatives and directives listed a-l above, inclusive of the work done so far with the Development Guide and Masterplan, plus the outline consent for Phase 1 are material considerations to which the decision-maker may apply weight. Officers may choose to give weight to more recent policy/guidance in light of the fact the Core Strategy Policy SS1 was examined some 10 years ago and the policy reflects placemaking and transport theory of that time. The amount of weight to be given to any such initiative or directive is for the decision-maker to assess and justify. It is against this backdrop that officers have considered their recommendation to Members.

- 4.20 Members should also be aware one of the substantive issues at Phase 1 has been related to the adoption of Public Open Space, Play Areas and the provision of Playing Pitches. Moving forward as a Garden Community one of the challenges with this parcel, inclusive of residential and employment and recreational uses will be to ensure Stewardship arrangements are clear, robust and deliver the type of environment desirable within the Garden Town. To this end, as the issue is wider than just Monkton Heathfield, work is being undertaken to draw up Stewardship arrangements and a delivery plan for the Garden Communities. This work will feed into the Development Management and section 106 negotiations.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 The draft Masterplan and Development Guide sought to deliver development which meets several objectives of the Corporate Strategy.
- 5.2 If Members agree to not proceed with approval, then one can be mindful of the new and existing districtwide policy and guidance that addresses Climate Change and sustainability and the recent national and local drive to achieve high quality design and green travel.

6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 Any budget envisaged for the updating and progression these Plans and Guidance documents will now no longer be required.

7 Legal Implications (if any)

- 7.1 None.

8 Climate and Sustainability Implications (if any)

- 8.1 The climate emergency, and SWT's response to it, will not be hampered by not progressing the approval process. The Monkton Heathfield allocation could not have been held to a higher standard than is now laid out for the whole of Taunton via the policy/guidance already discussed.
- 8.2 More generally, the SS1/MH1/Land South of Manor Farm sites lie within the Garden Town, in a generally sustainable location with access to existing and proposed public transport routes including a proposed new bus and ride facility. It will include new footpath/cycleway networks and new facilities like shops and schools and community buildings, all of which help to minimise the need to travel by private car. The location of land for new businesses, next to new homes offers the opportunity for people to live and work close by.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications (if any)

9.1 None.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications (if any)

10.1 The Core Strategy is underpinned by an Equalities Impact Assessment.

11 Social Value Implications (if any)

11.1 None

12 Partnership Implications (if any)

12.1 None.

13 Health and Wellbeing Implications (if any)

13.1 The site will deliver green open spaces and parks, enhanced public spaces, as well as additional opportunities to safely walk or cycle in order to encourage active and healthy lifestyles.

14 Asset Management Implications (if any)

14.1 The only implications may arise out of the Stewardship work in terms of the Council's approach to adoption.

15 Data Protection Implications (if any)

15.1 None.

16 Consultation Implications (if any)

16.1 The Parish Councils and other stakeholders and statutory consultees have been engaged in the preparation of the draft Plans.

16.2 The two Parish Councils, Creech St Michael and West Monkton have formed a Joint Working Panel to review the plans and documents for the SS1 and MH2 areas.

16.3 Officers will undertake to meet with the Joint Working Panel throughout the planning application process to update and inform.

17 Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s) (if any)

17.1 None

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees –**
- **Cabinet/Executive –**
- **Full Council –**

Reporting Frequency: **Once only**

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix 1	Executive Report – January 2020
Appendix 2	Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller - Site Location Plan
Appendix 3	Draft Masterplan and Development Guide – Part 2
Appendix 4	Draft SS1 Policy Area Masterplan
Appendix 5	Draft MH2 Concept Plan
Appendix 6	Summary of Consultation Responses

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APPENDIX 1-5 can be viewed via this link - [Decision - Monkton Heathfield: Land south of Manor Farm, Langaller, Masterplan Framework and emerging SS1 Concept Masterplan - Modern Council \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](#)

APPENDIX 6 – The consultation comments have been dropped into a table or in the case of the reps from WMPC and Greenslade Taylor Hunt are attached in full.