

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Full Council – 5 October 2021

### Monkton Heathfield: SS1 Policy Area and MH2 Concept Plan and Design Principles

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 Members on the Monkton Heathfield draft Policy SS1 area Framework Plan, draft Phase 2 Concept Plan and draft Design Principles document.
- 1.2 At the Executive Meeting of 20 May 2020 Members recommended that:
  - 1) The draft SS1 Policy area Framework Plan, the draft MH2 Concept Plan and the draft MH2 Design Guidance be published for public consultation; and
  - 2) That the outcome of the public consultation, including any appropriate suggested amendments, be reported back to the Executive as soon as possible with a view to seek approval to adopt the Plans and Guidance for Development Management decision making purposes.
- 1.3 This report sets out what has happened since May 2020 and appraises the merits of progressing the adoption of the trio of documents.
- 1.4 Several considerations now challenge the merit of proceeding with adoption, these considerations include:
  - (a) the ongoing prospect of an outline application overtaking events;
  - (b) the length of time which has passed since May 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; and
  - (c) the plethora of new national and local policy/guidance in place which would need to be reflected in the guidance.
- 1.5 The planning application will raise the same issues made during the consultation period and more, and so it is considered a more suitable use of resources to concentrate on that submission now due late September 2021. Allied to this, current SWT officers are mindful that now moving to adopt 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 taken into account the comments received to the consultation and in the light of national guidance, that the Council do not proceed to adopt the SS1 Policy area Framework Plan, the draft MH2 Concept Plan and the draft MH2 Design

Guidance as a material planning consideration in the determination of planning proposals.

### **3 Risk Assessment (if appropriate)**

- 3.1 No specific risk but possibly delaying the negotiation upon and determination of an imminent planning application by Officers concentrating on parallel design guidance could result in a failure to bring 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 Monkton Heathfield draft Policy SS1 area Framework Plan, draft Phase 2 Concept Plan and draft Design Principles document.
- 4.2 At the Executive Meeting of 20 May 2020 Members recommended that:
- 1) The draft SS1 Policy area Framework Plan, the draft MH2 Concept Plan and the draft MH2 Design Guidance be published for public consultation; and
  - 2) That the outcome of the public consultation, including any appropriate suggested amendments, be reported back to the Executive as soon as possible with a view to seek approval to adopt the Plans and Guidance for Development Management decision making purposes.
- 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 Monkton Heathfield, allocated under Policy SS1 of the Core Strategy. 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 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, including Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller (known as the Redrow/Persimmon Consortium), 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. The majority of the remaining houses from the Policy SS1 area will be delivered by means of another large planning application at Monkton Heathfield – Phase 2 or commonly referred to as MH2, expected to deliver circa 1750 homes.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 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.

- 4.8 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. This area is subject to its own draft Masterplan and Development Guide which was considered by the Executive in January 2020 and recommended for public consultation. The progress on this document is subject to a separate update report on this agenda.
- 4.9 Referring back to the draft SS1 Policy area Framework Plan, the draft MH2 Concept Plan and the draft MH2 Design Guidance this report seeks to update Members on what has happened since the recommendation to undertake public consultation.
- 4.10 The documents were published for public consultation on 15 June 2020 until 10 July 2020. The consultation prompted responses from Persimmon Homes, Creech St Michael PC, West Monkton PC, Alder King, Greenslade Taylor Hunt, Monkton Elm Garden Centre, The Canal and River Trust, Railfuture and 20 Individuals. These comments are appended (Appendix 6).
- 4.11 It has been gleaned through that meeting and written notes that officers at the time felt the Redrow/Persimmon Consortium Masterplan was largely agreeable in terms of the general disposition of land uses and the alignment of the Eastern Relief Road Phase 2 (ERR2). He noted however that further work was required on the green necklace, the interface with Phase 1 and the treatment of what will be the old A38 once the ERR2 is built.
- 4.12 The original timescale for the submission of the Monkton Heathfield Phase 2 application has been delayed, it had been expected in February 2021, then August 2021 and now is due late September 2021. As a result of the initial delay officers have now reassessed the position and met with the Persimmon/Redrow Consortium in June 2021 to seek an update and to offer availability for further discussions. It was stated at that meeting that the Consortium were not seeking to engage further in terms of design and masterplanning work having spent many years working with officers and others to bring forward an application including referral to Design Review Panel several times.
- 4.13 Officers are therefore conscious that the Monkton Heathfield draft Policy SS1 area Framework Plan, draft Phase 2 Concept Plan and draft Design Principles document remain unresolved and therefore set out a further recommendation to Members.
- 4.14 There is clearly the option of assessing the consultations responses and updating the documents accordingly with a view to adopting as per the original recommendation. However that consultation now took place over 12 months ago and Members may wish to consider a new tact.
- 4.15 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 public consultation. It is the view of current officers that the documents would require a significant overhaul to reflect the current policy aspirations and declarations of SWT.
- 4.16 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

4.17 In so many words current officers are of the opinion that adopting the draft Phase 2 Concept Plan and draft Design Principles document 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.

4.18 The third document of the trio, the draft Policy SS1 area Framework Plan provides an helpful overview of the Policy SS1 area and the interrelation of the component sites, however in isolation would not provide any significant steer the Council may still wish to be bound by.

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 Monkton Heathfield draft Policy SS1 area Framework Plan, draft Phase 2 Concept Plan and draft Design Principles document, 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 Phase 2 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 process and section 106 negotiations.

## **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

- 5.1 The draft Plans and Design Guidance sought to deliver development which meets several objectives of the Corporate Strategy.
- 5.2 If Members agree to indefinitely curtail adoption 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 adoption 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/MH2 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 local community have been engaged in the preparation of the draft Plans, together with key stakeholders like County Council Highways and the developers.

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 – May 2020
Appendix 2	DRAFT SS1 Policy Area Framework Plan, May 2020
Appendix 3	DRAFT MH2 Concept plan, May 2020
Appendix 4	DRAFT MH2 Design Guidance, May 2020, text version
Appendix 5	DRAFT MH2 Design Guidance, May 2020
Appendix 6	Summary of Consultation Responses

**Contact Officers**

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**APPENDIX 1-5** can be viewed via this link - [Decision - Monkton Heathfield: SS1 Policy Area and MH2 Concept Plan and Design Principles - Modern Council \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](#)

**APPENDIX 6** – The consultation comments have been dropped into a table or in the case of the reps from the PCs and Persimmon are attached in full.