

Report Number: SWT 83/20

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Executive – 20 May 2020

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

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Mike Rigby

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1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Council are committed to preparing Plans and Design Guidance for key development sites in the Garden Town to ensure that new development is of a high design quality and is comprehensively delivered, in line with adopted Planning Policies and more recent Garden Town principles.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 To date around 1350 of the houses have been built, 900 of which were in the first phase of the Monkton Heathfield urban extension (MH1). The majority of the remaining houses from the SS1 policy are will be delivered by means of another large planning application at Monkton Heathfield - MH2.
- 1.4 The Report recommends publishing a Framework Plans for the SS1 area as a whole and a Concept Plan for the MH2 area for public consultation in order to provide developers, local residents and businesses the opportunity to comment on the draft proposals. The Framework Plan and Concept Plan closely follows Policy SS1 of the Core Strategy, showing indicatively, the disposition of the main land uses – land for new homes, new roads, employment areas, the bus and ride, a new through school, District Centre, open space and green infrastructure etc.
- 1.5 Together with the Plan, a draft Design Guidance document has also been prepared for the MH2 site, and is again recommended for publication for public consultation. The Design Guidance is based on the Core Strategy Policy for MH2 and the Councils Garden Town Vision, Design Charter and the recently published District Wide Design Guide. The Design Guidance embodies the Councils commitment to addressing Climate Change and the need to deliver sustainable new development in the new Monkton Heathfield Garden Community.
- 1.6 Early versions of the Plans were included in a January Report to the Executive. Following feedback and discussions with the local community and local businesses, changes have been made. The Plans remain drafts for further consultation.

- 1.7 Following public consultation the Plans and Design Guidance are proposed to be adopted for Development Management purposes to allow them to be used in considering planning applications in the SS1 Monkton Heathfield Policy area and specifically the MH2 site.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that:

- (a) The draft SS1 Policy area Framework Plan, the draft MH2 Concept Plan and the draft MH2 Design Guidance be published for public consultation; and
- (b) 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 seeking approval to adopt the Plans and Guidance for Development Management decision making purposes.

3 Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

- 3.1 No specific risk but failure to bring forward housing could put at risk housing and affordable housing delivery in Taunton.

4 Background and Full details of the Report

Introduction

- 4.1 The Council are committed to preparing Design Guides and Plans for key development sites in the Garden Town to ensure that new development is of a high design quality and is comprehensively delivered.
- 4.2 Members will recall that at the Executive in January a Report was presented seeking approval to publish for consultation a Masterplan and Development Guide for land South of Manor Farm, Langaller.
- 4.3 That land is part of the SS1 Monkton Heathfield Policy area allocated in the adopted Taunton Deane Core Strategy.
- 4.4 That Report also included, for context, emerging draft Framework and Concept Plans for the wider SS1 Policy area and the second phase of the Monkton Heathfield Garden Community (MH2). It was identified that these plans would be progressed, together with further Design work, in order to allow for the Plans and Guidance to be published for consultation.

The Need for Plans and Design work

- 4.5 The adopted Core Strategy, Policy SS1, sets out that the Council would prepare Development Guides for the Monkton Heathfield sites. A Development Guide was approved as part of the planning process for phase 1 of the Monkton Heathfield scheme. The Core Strategy was adopted in 2012.
- 4.6 It is expected that a planning application for the next phase of the Monkton scheme – MH2 - will be submitted in the next few months. There is pressing need to set out the Councils vision for the development and to set down key design principles to ensure the highest quality proposals are delivered.

- 4.7 There is considerable common ground with the developers of the MH2 site – Persimmon Homes and Redrow Homes and the local community and it is expected that the application, when submitted, will closely align with much of the Councils design aspirations for the area. Where there are differences it is important that the Council have in place a clear vision for the site to allow Officers to negotiate with the developers.

Concept Plan

- 4.8 The Framework Plan for the SS1 Policy area and the Concept Plan for the main MH2 site, are shown as Appendices 1 and 2 to this Report.
- 4.9 Both are clearly labelled DRAFT. These are not fixed plans, the recommendation is to publish them both for consultation with the Developers, the Parish Councils, local businesses consultees and other stakeholders and to continue engagement with these groups.
- 4.10 Both Plans follow the principles set out in the adopted Core Strategy and identify the location of key land uses and infrastructure, including green infrastructure that will be delivered in the next phase of the Monkton Heathfield scheme together with other housing sites in the SS1 policy area including those at West of Greenway, Prockters Farm and land at Dosters Lane. The site South of Manor Farm Langaller is the subject of a separate detailed Masterplan and Design Guidance.
- 4.11 The Plans show the indicative alignment of the Eastern Relief Road, housing areas, the location of a District Centre, a new through school, a site for bus and ride, reserve employment land and major new green infrastructure in the so-called ‘green necklace’ which surrounds the whole SS1 policy area.
- 4.12 These are all matters which are required to be delivered, as set out in the adopted Core Strategy, 2012.

Design guidance

- 4.13 Attached as Appendix 3 is the first (text) draft of a Design Guidance document for the SS1 Policy area as a whole, but focused in more detail on the main Monkton Heathfield 2 site.
- 4.14 The draft Design Guidance has been prepared by Thrive Architects, an urban design consultancy who have been working with the Council on the Monkton proposals for a number of years.
- 4.15 The draft design guidance follows the SS1 Policy of the Core Strategy but also embodies the Councils commitment to addressing Climate Change, and the need to deliver a high quality Garden Community following Taunton’s designation as a Garden Town in 2017. It is closely based on the adopted Garden Town Vision, whilst also referencing the Government’s National Design Guide and the Councils adopted Garden Town Design Charter/Checklist and District Wide Design Guide.
- 4.16 Again, the Design Guidance is a DRAFT for consultation.
- 4.17 Many of the principles set out are good design practice required by national guidance. Others are specific to the Garden Town and the Monkton 2 proposals as set out in the 2012 Core Strategy.

- 4.18 They identify clear design objectives and requirements for the new development in order to deliver the highest quality in design and to deliver the step change in design which is key to delivery of the Councils Corporate Strategy and the Vision for the Garden Town.
- 4.19 Key sections address climate change and sustainability.
- 4.20 Additional detail and graphics to illustrate key areas will be added to the document before public consultation commences. The form and layout of the document, in draft, is shown as Appendix 4.

Community comments

- 4.21 At the Executive in January a number of local residents and local businesses from the West Monkton and Creech St Michael areas spoke to Members and requested the opportunity to explain their concerns in more detail about the MH2 proposals.
- 4.22 In response to this the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation met with representatives from West Monkton and Creech St Michael Parishes, following a tour of the area in March shortly before the Government's lockdown measures were announced.
- 4.23 It was stressed to the community that the Framework and Concept Plans need to be published for consultation to put in place a more comprehensive framework for the consideration of future planning applications, and in order to avoid some of the outcomes from the first phase of the Monkton scheme.
- 4.24 It was also noted that the plans were DRAFTS, they are not fixed; and no options were being omitted at this stage nor, were any intended to be given any weight in terms of preference.
- 4.25 The communities were assured that all comments received on the draft Plans and draft Design Guidance will be carefully reviewed and discussions with the local community and the developers will continue before they are adopted for decision making purposes. This is confirmed in the recommendations to this Report.

Local road network

- 4.26 One of the key issues raised on the January Plans was the impact of the traffic arising from the SS1 / Monkton Heathfield proposals on existing local residents and businesses.
- 4.27 The Plans at Appendix 1 and 2 have been amended as a result of this feedback, to identify that all local roads will need to be included in consideration of the Monkton planning applications and that the traffic arising from the developments, and any measures to mitigate traffic impact, must seek to continue to allow access to local residents and business whilst also preventing rat-running on local roads.
- 4.28 Similarly the MH2 Concept Plan, Appendix 2 now identifies that the area between the built MH1 site and the proposed MH2 site must be subject to detailed design and technical work to ensure that the two communities can be properly integrated.
- 4.29 Again, the draft Concept Plan is not proposing or seeking to prefer any specific option for this area: feedback from public consultation will be carefully considered before the

Plan is adopted, and dialogue with the local community, businesses and the developers will continue.

- 4.30 Much of the assessment and potential solutions to roads and traffic issues, location of any bus gates etc, arising from the SS1/MH2 developments, can only be considered in detail once planning applications are received. In the meantime, rather than be prescriptive about the future, the plans have removed specific road proposals and potential bus gate locations in favour of more general notations and identification of areas needing to be addressed.
- 4.31 The only exception is the bus gate location shown in the Prockters Farm area which is to be put in place by the County Council following the completion of the Western Relief Road next year, in order to prevent through traffic using the A3259. This is required by legal agreements dating from the first phase of the Monkton scheme.
- 4.32 The same approach is followed in the draft Design Guidance, Appendix 3 and 4. The issue of integrating existing and new communities is highlighted as a key design challenge which must be addressed in any planning applications but is not prescriptive about how this be achieved.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 The draft Plans and Design Guidance seek to deliver development which meets a number of objectives of the Corporate Strategy.
- 5.2 The Guidance addresses Climate Change and sustainability and the need to achieve high quality design. It provides a vision and design guidance for a key site in the Taunton Garden Town, the Monkton Heathfield Garden Community. The development of the SS1 Policy area and MH2 in particular will ensure the provision of adequate and affordable employment land, new shops and community facilities and a continuing supply of homes including affordable homes.
- 5.3 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.

6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 The budget for the preparation of the Plans and Guidance for the next phase of the Monkton Heathfield development are in place. The project is overseen by the Garden Town Coordinator and the Head of Strategy.

7 Legal Implications (if any)

- 7.1 None.

8 Climate and Sustainability Implications (if any)

- 8.1 The climate emergency, and our response to it, is a strong theme running throughout the draft Design Guidance. The proposed development aims to mitigate the climate emergency and adapt to its effects. It covers issues including reducing carbon emissions through walking, cycling and public transport, the creation of new open spaces and recreation areas, opportunities for tree planting and new allotments, the

energy efficiency of buildings, opportunities for renewable energy and ensuring provision of electric charging points, biodiversity enhancements, tree planting and flood risk/sustainable drainage.

8.2 Detailed guidance is provided on the sustainability of proposed new homes through good design and best practice construction methods.

8.3 More generally, the SS1/MH2 sites lie within the Garden Town, in a sustainable location with access to existing and proposed public transport routes including a new bus and ride facility. It proposes 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 None.

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.

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

17.1 None

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency: **Once only**

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix 1	DRAFT SS1 Policy Area Framework Plan, May 2020
Appendix 2	DRAFT MH2 Concept plan, May 2020
Appendix 3	DRAFT MH2 Design Guidance, May 2020, text version
Appendix 4	DRAFT MH2 Design Guidance, May 2020

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