

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet

8 October 2019

TITLE:	Wharf Road Strategic Development Site
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Ralphs - Leader
CONTACT OFFICER:	Sarah Porru- Head of Regeneration
WARDS INVOLVED:	Biddulph West

**Appendices Attached – Appendix 1 Executive Summary
Appendix 2 Landownership plan**

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To inform Councillors of the Wharf Road masterplan, which has been prepared to assist with the delivery of the emerging Local Plan.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Cabinet note the findings of the masterplan, but at this time do not commission further work.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 As part of the Accelerated Housing Delivery Programme, Sanderson Weatherall were commissioned in September 2018 to complete a masterplan for the Wharf Road Strategic Development area identified in the emerging Local Plan (DSB1).
- 3.2 The basis for commissioning the masterplan was based on several objectives:
- 3.2.1 Assist delivery of the Local Plan
 - 3.2.2 Bring together the landowners with a co-ordinated vision for the site
 - 3.2.3 Devise a strategic vision for the site which can then be promoted to developers and investors.
- 3.3 As part of the masterplan process, a review of the housing market found limited interest from private sector developers. The research suggests that

this was due to Biddulph being a secondary location in comparison to larger towns such as Congleton and Tunstall which offer more amenities and job opportunities. Consequently, the consultants found the sales rates anticipated for new build at Wharf Road would be slightly lower given its rural location and poor public transport links. The consultants also identified it is possibility not a lack of demand, but also lack of development opportunities. No land has been allocated for new residential development since the 1998 Local Plan. The emerging Local Plan identifies suitable land for 3802 homes across the whole the Staffordshire Moorlands over the Local Plan period.

- 3.4 Three options were developed for the site, in line with the emerging Local Plan DSB1 policy. The options focused, not on what should be delivered in terms of residential dwellings or mix, but where on the site it should be located.
- 3.5 Options 1 & 2 focused the retail/ employment element of the scheme to the north of the site, whilst option 3 identified an area in the south of the site for this use.
- 3.6 The Council's preferred option 3 would potentially deliver approximately 471 residential units (including land to the east of Meadow Way) and an additional 145 residential dwellings with the land at BDNEW. Subsequently, following post hearing comments from the Local Plan Inspector in December 2018, the area of land known as BDNEW, which lies to the West of the Biddulph Valley Way has been deleted by the Council (in June 2019) as a Local Plan allocation. The Wharf Road Masterplan had already been commissioned and was nearing completion before the inspector sent his comments to the Council. The completed masterplan therefore recognises this change by providing two options, including and excluding BDNEW.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Wharf Road Masterplan seeks to deliver housing growth anticipated in the Local Plan and will therefore have implications the following aims of the Corporate Plan:
 - Aim One - Help create a safer and healthier environment for our residents to live and work
 - Aim Three – To create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages
 - Aim Four - Protect and improve the environment.

5. Alternative Options

- 5.1 Option 1 (recommended) that the Cabinet note the Wharf Road Masterplan, recommendations and next steps. Officers suggest that the masterplan not be formally adopted as an Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) , to allow maximum flexibility in the delivery of the site.
- 5.2 There are no options as the report is for noting only.

6. Implications

- 6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)
No implications
- 6.2 Workforce
No implications
- 6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment
- 6.4 Financial Considerations
A budget of £29,425 was approved by Cabinet in April 2018. There are no further financial considerations going forward.
- 6.5 Legal
No legal implications
- 6.6 Sustainability
The masterplan was prepared according to wider sustainability considerations
- 6.7 Consultation
No public consultation event was held as part of the masterplan process due to the local plan examination process.
- 6.8 Risk Assessment
A risk assessment was carried out of part of the masterplan process

Dai Lerner
Executive Director (Place)

Web Links and Background Papers

Accelerated Housing Delivery Programme (April 2018)

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7. Detail

- 7.1 The Council is committed to accelerating housing delivery across the Staffordshire Moorlands area. The District has suffered from low levels of development for many years. Planning approvals are being granted on sites but some are not coming forward to the construction phase. In order to tackle this problem we listened to the issues raised by developers and developed a comprehensive delivery programme to tackle the problem. The Accelerated

Housing Delivery programme was approved by Cabinet in April 2018 and focuses around 2 core aims;

- Deliver community benefits in the form of increased income from council tax, business rates and New homes Bonus for reinvestment in the community.
- Drive forward delivery of the local plan and maintain 5 years land supply by proactive measures and Council led interventions where appropriate..

7.2 The emerging Local Plan identifies the land at Wharf Road, Biddulph as a Strategic Development site (local plan policy DSB1). The development of a masterplan is pivotal in developing the strategic vision for the Wharf Road area to assist with bringing the site forward for development. Therefore Sanderson Weatherall were commissioned back in September 2018 to prepare the plan.

Site details

7.3 The land at Wharf Road is a key mixed use development site. It is in a sustainable location close to the town centre and presents an opportunity to comprehensively plan for a range of uses to make a significant contribution to Biddulph's development needs.

7.4 Local Plan (Submission Version) Policy DSB1 stated the following:

The Wharf Road site is a 23.4 hectare site which is allocated for mixed use development of:

- Housing 20.4ha (approximately 588 dwellings)
- Employment 1ha
- Retail 0.5ha (food store of around 1000m² net sales floor)
- Retention of school playing field 1.5ha

7.5 Following post hearing comments from the Local Plan Inspector in December 2018, the area of land known as BDNEW, which lies to the West of the Biddulph Valley Way has been recommended for removal as a Local Plan allocation.

7.6 On 26th June 2019, the Council agreed a schedule of main modifications to the Local Plan (Submission Version) to address the Inspector's feedback. This includes the removal of site BDNEW and consequential amendments to the Policy DSB1. They included increased housing densities on the remainder of the Wharf Road allocation in light of the masterplan preferred option, a reduced site area (18.5ha) and revised housing yields (442 homes).

7.7 Consultation on main modifications will take place during September / October before the Inspector draws further conclusions.

7.8 The Wharf Road Masterplan had already been commissioned and was nearing completion before the inspector made this decision. The completed masterplan therefore recognises this change by providing two options,

including and excluding BDNEW.

7.9 The emerging local plan through policy SS6 seeks to enhance the role of Biddulph as a significant service centre and market town and support its regeneration through the following actions:

- Improve the local housing market and range of community facilities by increasing the range of house types available especially for first time buyers, families and older people.
- Create employment growth and increase diversity of employment opportunities
- Strengthen the role of Biddulph as a significant service and retailing centre

7.10 Wharf Road was identified as a priority site for delivery intervention due the large number of landowners, 14 in total (shown in Appendix 2). The landowners comprise a range of stakeholders including the District Council, County Council, James Bateman Junior High School, private investment companies and a range of individual owners with little or no development experience. In addition to the large number of landowners, the site is also heavily constrained and requires a harmonized approach to maximise the development potential of the site. It was felt that the development of a cohesive masterplan would ensure a sustainable vision for the site which will be promoted to suitable private sector investors/developers once the Local Plan is adopted.

7.11 Planning History

7.12 Land at the northern end of the site was allocated for retail, employment and non food retail as part of the Biddulph Area Action Plan (2007) whilst the principal of residential development was identified for the southern section of the site, (previously known as area 4) in the Core Strategy (2014).

7.13

Planning ref	Description	Decision
SMD/2009/0284	change of use of land, erection of garage, office building and parking for 10 coaches	Approve
SMD/2006/0647 SMD/2007/0024	& erection of non food retail units	Outline approval
SMD/2011/0332	erection of 8 retail units (approval of reserved matters)	refused
SMD/2011/0332 SMD/2012/0175	approval of reserved matters relating to 07/00170/ OUT_MJ	Refused & withdrawn
SMD/2006/1224 SMD/2007/0593	& residential development	Refused
SMD/2015/0684	Extra care development	Withdrawn

Masterplan process

- 8.0 The masterplan is split into 4 key areas, each of which will be covered in detail below:
- Market Demand
 - Options
 - Viability & deliverability
 - Recommendations and next steps

Market Demand

- 8.1 The consultants felt the housing market in Biddulph had stalled due to a number of factors, summarised below:
- Very limited major new build residential developments (Uplands Mill in 2012 being the most recent)
 - Identified lack of supply of executive new build detached properties within Biddulph.
 - Sales rates achievable for new build at Wharf Road are slightly less than comparables given its rural location.
 - Lack of public transport links as Biddulph relies solely on bus links.
 - Biddulph is a secondary town and in comparison to larger towns such as Congleton and Tunstall which offer more amenities and job opportunities.
 - Lack of evidence of demand for development opportunities could be due to the limited availability of suitable sites and given the predominant green belt status.
- 8.2 Even though the current housing market has stalled the consultants felt the site offered an excellent opportunity to deliver open market/ affordable housing and suggested the following mix of properties types.
- 1/2 bed apartments – Extra Care/ Sheltered
 - 2 bedroom terrace house- high density
 - 3 bedroom semi detached house – high density
 - 3/4 bedroom detached house- mid density
- 8.3 The predominant theme identified by the consultants was a perceived lack of demand for housing in the Biddulph area. As noted earlier the last major new build development commenced in 2012. It is important to note, that as the consultants identified, it is possibly not a lack of demand, but a lack of development opportunities which has stalled the housing market. This can be directly linked to the Local Plan process where no land has been allocated for new residential development since the 1998 Local Plan. The emerging Local Plan identifies suitable land for 3802 homes across the whole of the Staffordshire Moorlands area over the Local Plan period.

Options

- 8.4 Sanderson Weatherall developed 3 options for the site, shown in Appendix 1.

- 8.5 The 3 options focus on how different layouts would impact on deliverability of the site, rather than the amount and type of proposed development.
- 8.6 The options are summarised below, including the additional land east of Meadow Way:
- Option 1- 482 residential units (627 units including land at BDNEW)
Option 2 - 515 residential units (660 units including land at BDNEW)
Option 3 - 471 residential units (616 units including land at BDNEW)
- 8.7 Option 3 was identified as the Councils preferred option. Due to the Local Plan examination process we were unable to carryout a public consultation event. The decision to move forward with option 3 as the Councils preferred option was made by senior council officers in conjunction with Sanderson Weatherall after reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of each option.
- 8.8 The executive summary shown in appendix 1 highlights the benefits of each option in detail.
- 8.9 Officers felt that option 3 delivered greatest benefit and was the scheme most aligned with owner aspirations. The benefits identified were:
- Sports provision located closer to existing school building
 - Retail/ employment located close to housing, creating a village green surrounded by housing and retail
 - Access to the site in three locations
 - Higher density units to suit extra care / sheltered housing for elderly positioned closer to town centre facilities.

Viability and deliverability

- 8.10 Sanderson Weatherall completed a detailed viability assessment of the scheme which indicates that both scenarios i.e. with or without land at BDNEW are viable and produce positive land values in the region of £113,000 - £125,000 per acre.
- 8.11 The viability section of the masterplan is crucial as it demonstrates to landowners and potential developers that the site stacks up financially, and is worth investigating further. There has already been considerable interest from several discount supermarkets for the retail element of the site and discussions with the County Council are on going.
- 8.12 The most significant challenge to delivering the Wharf Road site relates to the large number of landowner's, 14 in total, or 12 excluding the land at BDNEW. The consultants recommend that, in order to secure a sensible layout and maximise development potential it will be necessary for co-operation between the various landowners. This is a challenge as different owners have different aspirations and levels of willingness to co-operate. There are some landowners who understand the need to work with others collectively to enable the development, whilst others who did not engage with the masterplan

process and may assume that they can deliver their site in isolation. Whilst some landowners did not engage with the masterplan process, all landowners are supportive of the Local Plan land allocation.

8.13 Given the size of the Wharf Road site, the consultants suggest the site be delivered in 3-4 phases. Of critical relevance to the phasing and delivery of the site is the ability to access the land and identify which parcels of land effectively control access to the site. With this in mind there are a number of packages which naturally flow from the landownership and anticipated levels of co-operation which are shown in detail in the executive summary in Appendix 1.

- Phase 1 – plots 1, 2, 6 and 9
- Phase 2 – plots 8 and 10
- Phase 3 – plots 3,4,5 and 7
- Phase 4 – plot 11 (land at BDNEW) (since completion of the masterplan, BDNEW land allocation has been removed from the emerging Local Plan)

Recommendations and Next Steps

8.14 The masterplan recognises that the main challenge to delivering the site is the large number of landowners. To successfully deliver the scheme the landowners will need to work together and agree to sell the land through a formal joint venture or by working with a third party developer and agreeing options to ensure the whole site is delivered, rather than pockets of isolated development.

8.15 While the masterplan provides a good indication of what the site can deliver and demonstrates the site is financially viable, the document will not be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

8.16 Through the masterplan process, a vision and preferred option has been developed which we feel meets both the Councils and wider landowner aspirations most effectively. It is envisaged that masterplan will promote and stimulate interest in Wharf Road development opportunity. Ultimately it is for the open market, through developers and landowners to a lesser extent to decide how the site will come forward. The anticipated Local Plan provides detailed requirements through policy (DSB1 & SS6) but does allow some flexibility if required.

8.17 Sanderson Weatherall suggested next steps are;

1. Ascertain / acquire ownership of the land that has not been registered
2. Carry out feedback session with landowners to discuss the findings of the report
3. Discuss potential sales value with landowners
4. Carry out formal valuation of residential properties
5. Carry out formal pre-application for the site to help de-risk the project
6. Source development partner through competitive tender

- 8.18 Officers recommend that no further work is commissioned to consultants at the present moment in time. This may be reviewed at a later date once the Local Plan is adopted and market demand for the site has been established. In the mean time officers will proactively work with landowners to understand and explain the findings of the masterplan and the implications this will have on development potential and expected land values.
- 8.19 In order to facilitate and promote development of the site, on adoption of the Local Plan the Council will actively engage private sector developers and promote the site. The Council will also work closely with Homes England to investigate funding opportunities and will bid for funding as and when appropriate.