

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO THE
CABINET

Date 12 November 2014

1. **Council response to Newcastle-under-Lyme & Stoke-on-Trent Joint Local Plan – Call for Sites**

Submitted by: The Property Manager

Portfolio: Planning and Assets

Ward(s) affected: Numerous Wards

Purpose of the Report

To advise members that the Borough Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council, in their capacity of joint local planning authorities are undertaking an information gathering exercise to help identify sites having the potential to satisfy demand for housing, employment and other needs, and;

To seek approval for the nomination and inclusion in this process of a number of Borough Council owned sites, as listed in this report.

Recommendations

- (a) That officers be authorised to complete and submit pro-forma responses to the local planning authority for all Borough Council owned sites listed in the appendix to this report.
- (b) That officers be authorised to incorporate the identified sites listed in the appendix in the scope of the proposed masterplan (around the former Keele Golf Course and western / southern fringes of urban Newcastle) and to proceed, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to agree the principles of a brief with appropriate land owners.
- (c) That the financial implications arising from recommendation (b) be addressed through the 2015/16 budget setting process.
- (d) That the sites listed in the appendix to this report be used to inform the next and future Asset Management Strategies / Plans.
- (e) That officers bring forward at the earliest opportunity a further report identifying any additional sites which may be identified as appropriate for alternative use or development once key strategy documents have been finalised as described in the report.

Reasons

- The exercise will secure information about sites, help inform planning policy and

provide for supply of development land within the Borough to meet alternative land use needs and generate capital receipts to fund the Council's future capital programme requirements (in those cases where land disposals are progressed).

1. **Background**

- 1.1 A key role of the authority's planning policy function is to monitor the supply and availability of land for future housing and employment development purposes. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and Employment Land Review (ELR) contains information that has previously been captured but there is now a need to refresh and update this information as part of the preparatory work for the forthcoming Local Plan (being prepared jointly with the City Council).

As one of the early stages in the process the two authorities have launched a 'call for sites', seeking information from landowners, developers, agents and members of the public, for sites for all types of land uses, not just housing and employment sites. In the case of potential housing sites, the criteria for consideration is that the site must be of an area sufficient for a minimum of five dwellings and potential employment sites must be a minimum of 0.25 ha (0.62 acres).

- 1.2 It is intended that the new Local Plan identifies and brings forward sites in both public and private ownership that are capable of meeting land use needs, be this for housing, industrial or commercial development purposes. The call for sites went out in early September and asked land owners to complete a pro-forma questionnaire (see Appendix 1) in respect of any site which they own and which they potentially would like to be considered as suitable for future development. Land owners are also being requested to provide updated information about those sites which they own and that are already included in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and Employment Land Review (ELR). The information will provide a comprehensive picture about future land options and enable plans to be made for development in the right locations that meets the needs identified in the next version of the SHLAA and the next ELR, both of which will inform the process of site allocation in the forthcoming Local Plan. In addition a new Play Pitch Strategy and a refreshed Green Space Strategy may identify other land which is capable of beneficial alternative use or development.
A list of Borough Council owned sites in respect of which pro-forma are proposed to be completed can be found at Appendix 2.
- 1.3 The other relevant background is reflected in reports considered by Cabinet in February and October of this year. Those reports acknowledged the importance and necessity of securing funding for the Council's capital programme from the disposal of land that is not required to meet either a strategic or operational service need.

2. **Issues**

When allocating land for development in the Local Plan there is need to demonstrate that all options have been considered which include sites in the Green Belt, that the development proposals are realistic and deliverable within the timescale of the plan, which is 15 to 20 years.

It is possible that the current use of a site may not be one for an alternative planning use could easily be secured, however this does not necessarily preclude it being considered and possibly re-designated. At this early stage it is not considered important what the prospects are of a site gaining permission because policy may change. This exercise is one of information gathering and it is caveated that an owner's submission of information in respect of a site does not imply that the council agrees with the information and arguments put forward to support its possible development for any particular use. Additionally the process does not bind the Council, as a land owner, to any disposal in due course.

The other key point to highlight at this stage is that the Council is about to commission a review of its Green Spaces Strategy (and is close to completing a Playing Pitch Strategy) as other key documents in the Local Plan evidence gathering stage. The outcome of these documents will assist the Council in determining the future use of some Council land and consideration of such land should not be pre-judged at this time. Nevertheless officers should report, at the earliest possible future date, the outcome of these Strategies where they identify potentially surplus land because such land may be capable of beneficial alternative use or development.

Finally this process would provide for a more comprehensive approach to be adopted to the previously-agreed masterplanning around the former Keele Golf Course. Members' previous decision in this regard acknowledged the potential benefits of reviewing the Council's land in the context of other local land owners' needs and aspirations. It is now intended to incorporate other Council-owned land in the wider area on the western and southern sides of urban Newcastle in order that the area could be reviewed and planned much more comprehensively, including the assessment of any necessary infrastructure requirements. The relevant sites are grouped together at Appendix 2 for ease of reference.

It is important to explain that this Town Planning process is designed to inform a strategic approach to planning the medium to long term development of the Borough and to enable some broad spatial planning principles to be considered. At this stage there is no commitment by the Council as a land owner to dispose of any of the subject land. Nevertheless any sites which are considered to be broadly compliant with prevailing Planning policies should be regarded as appropriate for inclusion in future Asset Management Strategies. At this stage a small number of sites have been identified as potentially appropriate for taking forward in the next such Strategy (referred to as "Tranche 3" sites at Appendix 2).

3. **Options Considered**

3.1 **Option 1 – Do not respond to the 'call for sites'.**

A landowners failure to respond to the 'call for sites' would lead to difficulties in identifying sites having the potential for alternative planning uses and being available for development to meet future demands.

3.2 **Option 2 – Respond to the 'call for sites'.**

In responding to the call for sites landowners will provide vital information that will shape the Local Joint Plan, enable policy to be formulated and should lead to the identification of sites having the development potential to meet future use demands. In addition the option could be taken to assemble a cluster of sites on the western and southern fringes of urban Newcastle as part of a master-planning approach linked to the former Keele Golf Course.

4. **Proposal and Reasons for Preferred Solution**

4.1 As a major landowner the Borough Council has an obligation to participate in this initiative so option 2 is proposed. The provision of information is not a commitment to release land for development, rather it is to identify sites that have the potential to meet differing use demand requirements over the next 15-20 years. In addition the scope to undertake comprehensive master-planning should optimise both the community outcome and the assessment of financial benefits.

5. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

5.1 The identification of sites having the potential to meet future land use needs will enable the achievement of priority outcomes in all four of the Council's corporate priorities. Should Borough Council owned sites be identified as suitable, appropriate and approved for release and development then the council would secure a 'best consideration' capital receipt upon disposal.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 There are no legal or statutory implications arising from the provision of the requested information. Nevertheless the Council has a duty to achieve best consideration in the disposal of any land.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 There are no such issues arising directly from this report.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 There are no such issues arising directly from this report. But clearly the Council's engagement in this process has the potential to assist not only the spatial planning of our borough but also to establish the principle of developing Council land in the future. Of course this would enable the Council to take a long term and comprehensive view about its disposal programme with the aim of aligning it with capital programme needs.

8.2 The cost of the Council's contribution towards the procurement of a significant masterplan of the Council-owned land including the former Keele Golf Course and other land around the west and south of urban Newcastle (estimated to be at least £100,000) will be addressed through the 2015/16 budget setting process. A contribution to these costs will be sought from the other stakeholders.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1 It is necessary to identify sites which satisfy planning policy and that are capable of different alternative uses in order to satisfy future potential demand.

9.2 Failure to engage effectively in this process would undermine the Council's ability to optimise the value of its property portfolio thereby threatening future service delivery.

9.3 Failure to undertake a comprehensive master-planning exercise may undermine the potential to develop a coherent development-led outcome to meeting community needs.

10. **Key Decision Information**

10.1 The content of this report is not considered as such. A list of Borough Council owned sites in respect of which these forms will be completed can be found at Appendix 2

12. **Appendices**

12.1 Blank 'call for sites' pro-forma

12.2 List of sites for potential inclusion in the Council's response to the Call for sites.

12.3 Plans of the sites

13. **Background Papers**

13.1 Cabinet reports considered at meetings in February and October 2014 in respect of the Council's funding strategy for its capital programme.

13.2 The local planning authority's call for sites process.