

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

17th October 2018

UNIVERSITY GROWTH CORRIDOR

Submitted by: Executive Director, Regeneration and Development
Principal author: Economic Regeneration Officer
Portfolio: Planning and Growth
Ward(s) affected: Keele and Silverdale directly; and other adjacent wards

Purpose of the Report

To report the views of the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee on the vision and proposals which has been prepared for the 'University Growth Corridor', an area of land to the west of Newcastle substantially comprising the Keele University campus and the site of the former Keele Municipal Golf Course.

Recommendations

1. To receive feedback from the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee in this matter along with comments received from the public engagement event referred to in the report.
2. That, having reviewed the comments referred to at recommendation 1, the vision and proposals be approved and that the proposals be submitted for consideration for inclusion in the emerging Joint Local Plan including the following additional commitments:
 - a. That the Council agrees to the commissioning of a site-specific Design Brief at the most appropriate stage of any disposal process to establish key principles about matters such as housing type and tenure, density of development, open space provision and provision of space for any necessary community facilities.
3. That officers be authorised, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder(s), to continue working with key partners in order to make any necessary representations to the local planning authority.
4. That, subject to the inclusion of the proposals in the Draft Local Plan, officers be authorised, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder(s), to continue working with the key partners to facilitate practical implementation of the vision for the area, reporting back to Members at key milestones and in particular to seek approval for any significant resourcing requirements, including the commissioning of a site-specific Design Brief referred to above.

Reasons

To help enable the continued growth and development of Keele University and the Science and Innovation Park and to provide for much needed development land for more high quality housing in the Borough.

To respond to both the needs and opportunities presented by the emerging Joint Local Plan and to demonstrate the potential appropriateness of the development in the context of the said Local Plan.

To assist the Council in its medium to long term asset management planning and capital programme funding.

1. Background

- 1.1 Members will recall considering the substantive matter at their last meeting where it was resolved that the broad thrust of the proposals were acceptable but wanted to seek the views of the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee before making a final decision.

2. Feedback from referral to Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee

- 2.1 The Committee reviewed the matter at its meeting on 26 September. A representative of the consultancy responsible for preparing the masterplan (on behalf of the two Councils and Keele University) delivered a brief presentation confirming the boundaries of the study area; the technical constraints relating to the land (highlighting the Green Belt designation); the broad principles of arranging the land uses to respond to the Local Plan requirements for housing and employment and; indicative plans showing the arrangement of housing-led development on the former golf course (amongst retained woodland areas and public open space), along with a new primary school and expansion of the University to enable delivery of more Science and Innovation Park business space, academic floorspace, post-graduate accommodation and renewable energy provision.
- 2.2 Members were asked to focus upon the implications of this piece of work for the Council as the land owner. Members were advised that the main objective at this stage is to prepare a document that makes the case for Green Belt release which can be considered as part of the Joint Local Plan process. Officers confirmed that there was no requirement for the Planning merits (including any detailed review of the illustrative layout) to be considered; that is the job of the latter process. Essentially the Scrutiny Committee was asked to confirm to Cabinet that this piece of work is consistent with the Council's agreed approach to disposing of its interest in the former golf course.
- 2.3 Contributions were received from most Members of the Committee. The general consensus was that the principle of development was acceptable and that the ambition to deliver growth in this location had been agreed over a number of recent years (some Members referred to frustration about the length of time it was taking). Nevertheless there were some notable points of concern raised as follows:
- quality of housing / density; there was general agreement that any housing should meet wider community needs whilst being of good quality overall. Specific concern was raised about the potential risk of the development being too dense for this urban fringe/rural location.
 - mix of housing; there should be a wide range of house types and tenures to meet local need as well as any demand arising from the University's growth.
 - Transport and community infrastructure; Members felt that it was important for the development to reflect future infrastructure requirements in the wider area

particularly in relation to highways but notably in relation to medical facilities such as a GP and dental practice.

- open space; linked to the earlier point about housing density Members were keen to ensure that there would be adequate levels of publicly accessible open space in addition to the retained woodland areas.

2.4 To conclude the discussion Members were asked to focus upon the following three questions:

1. Are Members happy that the main objectives of the masterplan have been met; in particular, in relation to the case for Green Belt release? (see paras. 2.1, 3.2, 4.1 to 4.7).

Members agreed that the masterplan objectives had been met subject to the points raised in paragraph 2.3.

2. Are Members satisfied with the economic growth case put forward? (see para. 4.3).

Members agreed that there was a very compelling case for economic-led growth in this location.

3. Are Members content, in principle, that the proposed quantum, scale and nature of development on the former golf course are consistent with the Council's objectives for land disposal? (see paras. 1.3, 4.5, 9.2 and 9.3).

Subject to any future, more detailed plans addressing the specific points set out in paragraph 2.3, Members were satisfied with the indicative proposals in respect of the Council-owned land.

3. Feedback from call-in to Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee

- 3.1 The Committee met on 11 October to review a call-in. Whilst the formal minutes of the meeting were not available at the time of writing this report, officers can confirm that the call-in was rejected thereby allowing the original Cabinet decision to stand. Details of the main points raised at the Call-in meeting are detailed under paragraph 5.4.

4. Further public engagement event

- 4.1 A public engagement event took place in The Guildhall on 10 October. In the limited time available at the time of this report being published it had not been possible to summarise the responses made other than to confirm that the general consensus was supportive of the vision. A further verbal report will be provided at your meeting.

5. Issues

- 5.1 The matter having been referred to and called into the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee (see above) it is necessary for Cabinet to review its resolutions (as set out in section 2 above).

- 5.2 Firstly Members will note the general thrust of the Scrutiny Committee's response which was supportive of the proposals. With regard to the specific areas of concern highlighted officers would comment as follows:

- quality of housing / density. Your officers can confirm that these matters would be dealt with at a much later stage of the process (at detailed design stage). The masterplan work undertaken to date has sought to model the potential location of

housing reflecting site topography, key features (e.g. woodland areas) and constraints in order to derive a potential quantum of development for the purposes of undertaking high level viability assessment work and to inform the Local Plan. The main focus at this stage is to make the case for Green Belt release rather than focusing upon matters such as density. It is likely, in the event that the Local Plan allocates this area for development, that the Council would want to commission a Design Brief for the site to establish design parameters appropriate to this urban fringe/rural location which would guide prospective developers and assist the Development Management process too.

- mix of housing. Officers can confirm that there should be a wide range of house types and tenures to meet local need (including affordable housing) as well as responding to any particular demand arising from the University's growth (such as housing to meet the requirements of people employed at both the Science and Innovation Park and the University itself). Again this would be a consideration for the longer term should the land be removed from the Green Belt.
- transport and community infrastructure. At this stage the consultants have only been asked to undertake high level viability modelling in order to demonstrate deliverability of the overall package of proposals; this work has made assumptions about contributions to both highway and community infrastructure (noting the specific indication of a new primary school). The Local Plan process will involve the modelling of traffic impacts in order to assess requirements for specific highway improvements whilst consultees such as the various health organisations would have the opportunity to identify their requirements to provide any health facilities on the site. Once known these matters can and should be addressed through any future Local Plan allocation or a site-specific Design Brief as referred to above.
- open space. Officers can confirm that in addition to the retained woodland areas any detailed scheme proposals in due course would be expected to meet, as a minimum, the prevailing standards for the levels of publicly accessible open space. Again a Design Brief would clarify such provision.

5.3 So the key additional requirement arising from the referral of the matter to Scrutiny Committee would be the future commissioning of a site-specific Design Brief to address the matters raised in the preceding paragraph, should the land be taken out of the Green Belt through the Local Plan process. It is considered that these matters, taken individually or collectively, do not present grounds for changing course with regard to the principle of the proposals.

5.4 The main points raised at the Call-in meeting of Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee were:

- Protection of green / open spaces;
- Adverse public reaction;
- The financial and legal costs arising from the process of case-making for Green Belt release (through the Local Plan) and;
- The need for closer examination of the major risks highlighted in the original Cabinet report:

5.5 Taking these points in turn:

- **Protection of green / open spaces.** This concern was highlighted by the Scrutiny Committee review when it met on 26 September. Your officers are

satisfied that the approach to this matter was set out in the original Cabinet report and is further addressed at paragraph 5.2 above.

- **Adverse public reaction.** Officers consider that the strategic rationale for bringing forward these proposals has been set out in the original Cabinet report, noting the key decisions that were made about the closure of the former municipal golf course and the subsequent decisions from a strategic asset management perspective. In short Members have agreed the principle of the land being developed and have agreed to this masterplanning process to inform the Joint Local Plan. The latter process enables the general public and stakeholders multiple opportunities to engage with the emerging proposals. In addition the public and other stakeholders would have the opportunity in the future to influence and inform any detailed proposals during the preparation of any site-specific Design Brief and, ultimately, through any planning application(s). Finally Members will be aware that any final decision about the potential inclusion of this land in the Local Plan (subject to the views of the Planning Inspectorate) would be a matter for Full Council.
- **The financial and legal costs arising from the process of case-making for Green Belt release** (through the Local Plan). Officers can confirm that budgetary provision for the preparation of the masterplan has been made and the expectation is that the final cost will fall within that financial envelope. Whilst with regard to the case-making for Green Belt release this will be dealt with as a necessary cost of the overall Local Plan process for which provision has been made as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and annual budget setting process.

Inevitably, in the event that the land were to be taken out of the Green Belt, there would be further costs in the medium to long term in order to bring the site forward for development (including the preparation of any Design Brief; unlikely to be for at least two years). But these costs would be funded from the overall future income derived from the sale of the land.

- **The need for closer examination of the major risks highlighted in the original Cabinet report.** Any large scale initiative such as this one carries risks and the report demonstrates that officers are aware of the risks. In particular Members will note the officers' views / comments in respect of the likelihood of the risk arising in each instance along with the mitigating measures identified.

6. **Background papers**

- a. Report considered at the Cabinet meeting on 19 September 2018 and associated Indicative masterplan.
- b. Reports considered by Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee meeting on 26 September 2018 and 11 October 2018.