

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**Report Title:** Knutton Masterplan

**Submitted by:** Executive Director, Commercial Development & Economic Growth

**Portfolios:** Planning and Growth

**Ward(s) affected:** Knutton and Silverdale

**Purpose of the Report**

To report on the Knutton Masterplan, prepared by planning consultants White Young Green, and jointly commissioned and overseen by Newcastle Borough Council, Aspire Housing and Staffordshire County Council which assesses the opportunities for bringing forward new housing investment in the Knutton area and for making improvements to the quality of the community facilities and the physical environment enjoyed by the people of Knutton.

**Recommendations**

- 1. That the Knutton Masterplan be approved in principle for public consultation and the result of that consultation be reported back for Cabinet's consideration.**
- 2. That opportunities be explored and taken to pursue funding through the Government's Town Deal programme for Newcastle to provide some of the resources necessary to deliver some of the investment proposals contained in the Knutton Masterplan.**
- 3. That when the outcome of the Newcastle Town Deal submission is known and therefore the fuller financial implications of delivering the Knutton masterplan are clearer, a more complete report is brought to Cabinet.**
- 4. That a Project Board be established to take forward the masterplan and any subsequent delivery plan, with membership including Newcastle Borough Council, Aspire Housing and Staffordshire County Council and that this council's representation to include officers, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency.**
- 5. That discussions are held with Aspire Housing to explore options for the early redevelopment of the Borough Council-owned sites identified for possible housing development as a means for expediting the delivery of this aspect of the masterplan.**
- 6. That should any suitable sites become available in the area that authority is given for the Council to directly purchase or work in partnership with Aspire to make appropriate purchases.**

**Reasons**

To establish a clear and agreed approach to meeting the investment needs of the Knutton area, to assess the opportunities for new housing development and for the improvements which might be made in the community and business infrastructure of the area.

## 1. **Background and issues**

- 1.1 Knutton is one of the more deprived areas of the Borough and is an area characterised by low incomes and a housing mix mainly comprising older terraced housing and post war social housing. The area, together with neighbouring Cross Heath and Silverdale has been the focus of regeneration activity in the past, i.e. through an SRB Programme and the Housing Renewal Pathfinder programme, which helped bring about initiatives such as the local Children's Centre (the Sure Start Centre), the redevelopment of the former Eternit Tileries (now a small business park), investment in the 'Knutton Terraces' Facelift project, and the redevelopment of the former Collins and Aikman factory for the new housing development at Millrise including the provision of a new medical centre and pharmacists.
- 1.2 Knutton has a number of social and community facilities which are now in very poor physical condition, and has a very limited High Street retail offer with only a small number of basic convenience shops. There is a sizeable vacant site in the centre of the village which was the site of the former recreation centre (demolished some years ago following the building of Jubilee 2 in the town centre). A County Council run enterprise centre is located on the High Street, providing some local employment, but, as a converted pre-war middle school, is not really fit for the needs of modern business and visually is a negative feature in the townscape. Two local Aspire owned and run residential schemes in the area are also now showing their age and they too are no longer considered to be fit for purpose. The major outdoor recreation facility in the area, 'The Wammy', is the base for a number of local sports pitches but is unable to operate to its full potential as it doesn't have the benefit of changing and showering facilities.
- 1.3 Knutton could be so much better, but it lacks investment and with appropriate targeted investment, it is considered that Knutton could be a much more attractive place in which to live and work. The purpose of commissioning a masterplan for the area is to assess the needs of the area and the opportunities for investment, both in new housing development and in improved social and community facilities.
- 1.4 In May last year, the Borough Council was offered £50,000 from OPE (the government's 'One Public Estate' programme, which encourages collaboration amongst public landowners) to commission a masterplan for the area. To this, a further £25,000 was added by Aspire Housing so that it would come aboard the commissioning team helping to shape and oversee the project. This work stream was reported to Cabinet in November 2018 (One Public Estate – Knutton Masterplanning Project, Cabinet 7<sup>th</sup> November 2018).
- 1.5 A brief was prepared for the study and in August last year, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth, planning consultants White, Young, Green (WYG) were commissioned to undertake the masterplan. Since this time, WYG has been working closely with representatives of the three commissioning bodies to take the work forward and develop emerging options and proposals.
- 1.6 In March this year, when options and proposals were beginning to emerge, a workshop was held with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth, the two ward councillors and representatives of Knutton Community Centre and Knutton Ex Servicemen's Club. A number of messages emerged from this, three key ones being;
  - broad political support, in principle, for the development of land at Black Bank Road for new housing, particularly if linked to improvements in sports facilities on The Wammy,

- concern / objection to the idea of re-locating the community centre to The Wammy, as this was seen as too far from the village centre (in spite of the financial benefits to be gained by co-location with a football club), and
- the expectation / demand that all s.106 monies arising from housing or other development in the Knutton area must be retained within the Knutton area and not added to a wider Borough-wide 'pot' used for funding infrastructure projects elsewhere.

Consequently WYG prepared a draft masterplan for discussion with the commissioning team, and this has since been developed further and revised. This work was substantially completed in May since which time the consultants and the commissioning team have been discussing how to undertake a public consultation on the Plan given the constraints of Covid. A plan for this has now been drawn up comprising local posters drawing attention to a dedicated web site, together with a social media campaign.

## 2. Proposal

2.1 The Knutton masterplan and its sister document, the implementation plan, which sets out how the three commissioning bodies might go about delivering the recommendations made, runs to 80 pages and for this reason an 11 page excerpt is reproduced as an appendix to this report (the full report is, of course, available and will be posted out to Members on request). The plan comprises:

- A market review of the area, assessing, amongst other things, a realistic expectation of land values and house values in the area (necessary to ensure that the proposals are grounded in financial realism)
- A review of the local context including the physical characteristics of the area and relevant planning policy
- An assessment of the key development opportunities
- Optioneering
- the recommended masterplan, and
- An assessment of viability and delivery.

2.2 The key features of the Plan are:

- The provision of a **new village hall**, together with the creation of a new **village green** with **equipped play facilities** close to the High Street frontage of the former Recreation Centre site. This has three important benefits, it would allow Knutton's existing ageing and rather dilapidated community centre to be replaced, it would help to 're-make' the fractured High Street, both in terms of physical presence and in terms of helping generate greater footfall and, together with the new village green, it would create **a stronger focus** of activity to the centre of the village (The High Street).
- This would allow for the redevelopment of the present community centre site to be redeveloped for (about **23 units of**) **housing**. (It is also recommended that the now

closed PCT health clinic next to the community centre might be acquired in order to create a larger site for redevelopment. This is being pursued through the Town Deal bid)

- The Orange telecom mast located at the centre of the former Rec. site would then need to be re-located to a site elsewhere in the Knutton area allowing the remainder of the Rec site, together with open land to the south, currently occupied by disused tennis courts and an old 3G five a side pitch, to be redeveloped for (around **65 units of**) **housing**.
- **A new pavilion** would be built at the front of the Wammy, beside the existing car park, providing changing and showering facilities and meeting space for teams using the grouped football pitches located there, allowing the pitches to be used to their full potential. The Borough Council already has some s. 106 monies 'banked' from an earlier development for this facility to help pay for its cost..
- This development would allow for land to the west of the Children's Centre off Black Bank Road to be developed for (around **123 units of**) **housing**. This site probably offers Knutton with its best opportunity to attract higher income families to the village which, in turn, helps to raise local property values and broaden the range of people using local facilities, including the local school.
- The plan puts forward proposals to **replace two wings of the Knutton business centre** which occupies a prominent site on the south side of The High Street, next to the former Rec. site. This would enable some of the more outmoded accommodation to be replaced with that better suited to modern business needs. Development of the Black Bank Road site (see above) would provide the County Council with some additional financial resources which would, with County Council agreement, be available to be re-invested into modernising the business centre. As well as creating better business accommodation, this investment would also, like the new village hall and green, enhance the townscape and appearance of the centre of the village.
- Proposals are put forward for '**traffic calming**' to reduce the speed of traffic from both commuters and HGVs, passing through the centre of the village and so improve pedestrian safety along Black Bank Road and Knutton High Street, making Knutton a more attractive and safer living environment..
- WYG have met with but have been unable to persuade the owners of the **Ex-Servicemen's Club** to pool resources with the Community Centre and house the two together in a purpose designed new building which would meet the needs of both on one site as the Club did not wish to move from its current premises. In this one respect, one of the hoped for outcomes of the brief could not be met. The Plan does though provide for a modest (three unit) housing development on the corner of the car park to the Ex-Servicemen's Club, land which is owned by the Borough Council, and this would provide something of a new gateway to what is presently an open bare and visually unappealing site at the entrance to The High Street.
- The Aspire-owned housing sites at **Gordon Court and Castletown Grange** (the latter located a little to the east of The Wammy) would be redeveloped in situ with a form of housing which Aspire considers to be more appropriate to modern needs.
- Proposals are included in the Plan for a re-configuration of the **junction arrangement** at Milehouse Lane / Church Lane, together with improved pedestrian crossing facilities here, designed to both improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety.

- **Implementation and funding** for much of the new social, leisure and business investment would come primarily from a bid to Government for Town Deal funding (to be submitted in January next year), together with complementary funding from the County and Borough Councils, Homes England and Aspire Housing in the case of the affordable housing provision and the private sector (the largest element of the overall programme) in the case of the private sector housing development proposed.

### 3. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

3.1 The masterplan is recommended for adoption as a basis for future targeted investment in the Knutton area, as it fundamentally meets the objectives of the brief, which are to:

- increase and speed up the pace of new housing development in and around the centre of Knutton
- create a stronger focus to the High Street (both functionally and in townscape terms) and
- modernise local community, leisure and business facilities, specifically in this case in providing a new Village Hall and village green, a new Sports Pavilion on The Wammy and improvements to the business centre. (The decision by the PCT to close the small PCT health clinic next to the existing community centre is outside the Borough Council's influence).

3.2 Clearly to take ideas set out in the draft masterplan will require significant investment and dedication of resources. In order to effectively manage this it is recommended that a Project Board is established to take forward the masterplan and any subsequent delivery plan. It is recommended that the membership of this Board includes Aspire, the County Council, with Borough Council representation to include Officers, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth, and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency.

### 4. **Options Considered**

4.1 Much debate has taken place between the consultants and the client team over whether a new community centre might be better co-located alongside an existing sports club based on The Wammy as this was seen as being more financially sustainable in the long run. This option however was rejected at the stakeholders' workshop as it was seen as taking (another) facility out of the centre of the village.

4.2 Similarly, there has been much debate about the future of the after school club, currently located next to the community centre and whether this could be provided within either the Children's Centre on Black Bank Road or within St Mary's Primary School. It has financial implications for the proposed village hall as it requires the hall to be bigger to accommodate it. On the other hand, it generates footfall and provides the village hall with further purpose and this is the option recommended.

4.3 Options for *how* the plan might be delivered has been the subject of more discussion amongst the client group than the recommended land use proposals themselves (since they are largely uncontroversial). This is because many of the proposals listed in para 2.2 above, other than the proposed new privately funded housing, will need to be funded and these costs will largely fall on the local authorities. One of the reasons why the proposals show the level of ambition set out in the plan is that during the life of the commission, it became clear that Newcastle could / would be the recipient of funding from the Government's Town Deal programme, and consequently elements of the emerging masterplan have been shared with the Town Deal team and a project has been devised, 'Putting the Heart back into Knutton Village'. This has formed part of

Newcastle's Town Deal Board's submission, the outcome of which will be known in the new year.

## 5. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

5.1 There are none.

## 6. **Equality Impact Assessment**

6.1 Knutton is one of the Borough's more deprived neighbourhoods and therefore investment in this area of the Borough would have the effect of improving the local housing offer, the quality of the physical environment, local social facilities and the local business infrastructure and, together, would have the effect of reducing Borough inequality.

## 7. **Financial and Resource Implications**

7.1 Most of the overall cost of the full scheme set out in the masterplan is in the form of housing and would therefore fall on the private sector in the form of most of the new housing proposed and Aspire Housing (backed by Homes England) in providing new affordable housing.

7.2 The remainder will fall on the local authorities to meet. Until the result of the submission for Town Deal funding is known, the extent of the financial costs to the Borough and County Councils is not known and it is suggested, that following that decision, a follow-up report is made which clarifies the financial implications arising from the proposals on the Borough Council more precisely.

7.3 The Town Deal Board (and through them, Government) has been asked to provide:

- £200,000 to cover the cost of acquiring the former Knutton Clinic and clear the site for redevelopment
- £200,000 toward the cost of de-risking the former Recreation Centre site (much of which is made up of the cost of relocating the telecom mast on the site)
- £250,000 to cover the cost of drilling and grouting the two key development sites in the masterplan - former Rec site and the land at Black Bank Road
- £790,000 to meet the cost of building a new village hall and a new village green and play area
- £200,000 toward the cost of building a new sports pavilion at The Wammy to provide changing and showing facilities (toward which the Borough Council will also contribute)
- £300,000 for a sustainable urban drainage scheme (SUDS) on the Black Bank Road site
- £920,000 toward the cost of remodelling the business centre, with the provision of two modern wings, of purpose built business centre accommodation (toward which the County Council will also contribute),
- £150,000 to pay for the cost of traffic calming measures on Black Bank Road and The High Street, and
- £400,000 toward the cost of implementing the redesign of the Knutton Crossroads highway junction, including the provision of a pedestrian crossing.

7.4 The development of the Black Bank Road site will provide a financial surplus for the County Council, some of which can be used to meet the cost of the business centre improvements not met by the Town Deal (see 7.3 above).

7.5 Part of the cost of redeveloping the former recreation centre site, the community centre site, a small part of the Ex-Servicemen's Club car park and Aspire's two existing housing schemes, will be the subject of detailed discussions between Aspire Housing and Homes England.

7.6 Aspire Housing have offered to project manage the redevelopment of the housing sites listed above in a collaborative arrangement between themselves and Newcastle Borough Council (this will not necessarily involve the County Council) and it is recommended that this is explored further as it may provide a quicker means of delivering the desired form of development proposed than to negotiate the sale of individual development sites. This will need to take account of the value of the Borough Council's land holdings (the former Rec. site, the Acacia Avenue site, part of the Club car park and the community centre site), which will be the subject of negotiations between the two parties in the normal way. The financial implications of this approach are not known at this stage.

## 9. **Major Risks**

The major risks are as follows:

### 9.1 Some of the identified housing sites not being viable.

- Likelihood: medium to high
- Impact: high
- Mitigation: early engagement with Homes England with a view to their providing gap funding

### 9.2 Unforeseen development costs, e.g. In terms of ground conditions and / or drainage

- Likelihood: medium to high
- Impact: medium to high
- Mitigation: as above - early engagement with Homes England with a view to their providing gap funding:

### 9.3 Lack of sufficient demand for housing

- Likelihood: low to medium
- Impact: medium to high
- Mitigation: the provision of quality homes at an affordable price, together with the improved social and environmental conditions in the Knutton area would be expected to drive up appeal of the area and the demand for the new housing

### 9.4 The failure of the Town Deal bid / inability to fund the proposed improvements to social and business infrastructure

- Likelihood: low to medium
- Impact: high
- Mitigation: ensuring a well-argued quality Town Deal submission. Scale back proposals if this is unsuccessful.

### 9.5 Lack of public support for the proposals

- Likelihood: medium
- Impact: medium to high
- Mitigation: the clear demonstration of the benefits of the scheme as a whole to the people of Knutton.

## 10 **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

- 10.1 The proposals contained in the masterplan support the principals of urban renewal and urban regeneration by investing in the infrastructure and in the housing environment of an existing urban village, re-employing (mainly) brownfield sites and supporting the retention and growth of the population in the urban area rather than following the market-driven trend of moving into suburbia or the wider countryside, which are less sustainable locations in the long term, being less accessible by means of travel other than the car and being more demanding of green field land.

## 11. **Key Decision Information**

- 11.1 The proposals are expected to lead to a need to make financial commitments to the area, though the details of this are not yet known. This will be reported in more detail to Cabinet once the result of the Town Deal submission is known.

## 12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

- 12.1 'One Public Estate – Knutton Master Planning Project', Cabinet 7th November 2018.

## 13. **List of Appendices**

- 13.1 Knutton Village Master Plan; White Young Green and Thomas Lister.