

Part I

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WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 19 NOVEMBER 2024
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)

LAND WEST OF BROOKMANS PARK RAILWAY STATION (HS22) MASTERPLAN
(STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK)

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Site HS22 (Land West of Brookmans Park Railway Station) is allocated for development in the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (adopted October 2023) with an indicated site capacity of 428 dwellings plus a 2FE (Form Entry) primary school.
- 1.2 The site meets the criteria in policy SP9 for the requirement of a masterplan (or strategic framework), as the site is mixed-use and requires integration into the surrounding area. The strategic framework should be informed by an appropriate evidence base together with consultation and be endorsed by the Council prior to the determination of any planning application.
- 1.3 A strategic framework has been prepared by the developer and landowner, in conjunction with a consultant team and in collaboration with officers from Welwyn Hatfield BC, to ensure the site is planned comprehensively and integrates well with the surrounding area. The document has been prepared in line with the Council's Approach to Masterplanning Guidance note which was endorsed by the Council in March 2024.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel (CPPP) recommends to Cabinet that the strategic framework for HS22, as detailed in Appendix A, be endorsed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes.
- 2.2 If unanimously agreed by the Panel, for the decision to be taken by the Executive Member using their delegated powers under paragraph 18.1(b) of the Cabinet procedure rules.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 The Adopted Welwyn Hatfield Draft Local Plan (2016), sets out the Council's strategy for delivering growth in the Borough over the Plan period up to 2036. This includes identifying opportunities on specific sites in and around the towns and excluded villages to facilitate the delivery of this growth over the plan period.
- 3.2 The Plan sets out that a comprehensive approach will be taken to large sites. Masterplans will provide a spatial framework that will be endorsed by the Council prior to the determination of any relevant planning application. They will set out the vision and objective for the development; establish the quantum and distribution of land uses; identify sustainable transport linkages and a movement hierarchy; and

- establish the core design concepts for the site, building on the principles set out in the Local Plan.
- 3.3 Masterplanning is not a one-size-fits-all approach, the process is based upon a collaborative approach to identifying and resolving issues, creating a vision for what the site aspires to achieve, testing design options and seeking views upon preferred solutions. The output of this process is a Masterplan or Strategic Framework which is presented to members for consideration.
 - 3.4 Site HS22 (Land West of Brookmans Park Railway Station) is located adjacent to the excluded village of Brookmans Park, to the west of the Midland Mainline railway line which runs north/south through the borough. Most of the site was removed from the Green Belt by the adoption of the Local Plan in 2023, with a landscape buffer proposed in the southern part of the site which remains within the Green Belt.
 - 3.5 Policy SADM31 of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (2016), allocates land at HS22 to accommodate development of approximately 428 homes and a 2FE primary school in the first 10 years of the plan period. The policy contains a requirement for a new pedestrian/cyclist bridge over the railway line and sets out further site specific considerations in Table 15 of the Local Plan.
 - 3.6 Policy SP9 sets out a number of criteria where masterplans are required. In this case, HS22 meets the criterion for a mixed-use site where consideration needs to be given to the integration of the site into the surrounding area. The masterplan is to be informed by an appropriate evidence base together with consultation and be endorsed by the Council prior to the determination of any planning application.
 - 3.7 A Strategic Framework, or Masterplan, has been prepared and is included as Appendix A. The document has been produced by consultants Prior and Partners and PRP, on behalf of the developer, Hill Residential Ltd, and the landowner, The Royal Veterinary College. Officers from WHBC have reviewed the document at various stages of production and provided feedback.
 - 3.8 The Strategic Framework is informed by a wide range of background and contextual site information.
 - 3.9 A project Steering Group was established comprising cross-party councillor involvement, including Ward representation from Welham Green and South Hatfield Ward and the adjacent Ward of Brookmans Park and Little Heath. Two Steering Group meetings have been held and together with an accompanied site visit.
 - 3.10 Separately, the high-level principles that are within the Strategic Framework been subject to a public engagement event, this event was organised by the landowner/developer as was held in Brookmans Park in July 2024.
 - 3.11 In September 2024, the Draft Strategic Framework proposal was presented and tested at the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel, an independent and impartial process for evaluating the design quality and sustainability of development proposals in Hertfordshire. Following a site visit the panel of multidisciplinary experts reviewed the Draft Strategic Framework and gave constructive criticism.
 - 3.12 The Strategic Framework is now presented here for consideration (see appendix A).

Next Steps

- 3.13 Should members choose to endorse the Strategic Framework for Development Management purposes it will become a material consideration in determining applications for development at HS22 (Land West of Brookmans Park Railway Station). The Strategic Framework will set the principles for more detailed planning of the site. It is the intention that the steering group will continue to be involved in the development of the scheme as it progresses towards a detailed planning application.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly in relation to this report. A planning performance agreement (PPA) has been agreed with the developer/landowner. The strategic framework will be a material consideration in determining planning applications for development at HS22 (Land West of Brookmans Park Railway Station) and as such will provide greater certainty for the developer and hopefully reduce the risk of poor quality applications coming forward, being refused and then going to appeal.

5.2 Risk Management Implications

- 5.3 Production of a strategic framework for HS22 (Land West of Brookmans Park Railway Station) is compliant with local plan policy SP9. The strategic framework sets the principles to guide future sustainable development of the site and should help to shape development proposals by setting standards for layout, and design quality in the interests of the community.
- 5.4 The strategic framework will provide a useful tool for officers when negotiating with the developer and determining applications for development and should therefore reduce the risk of uncoordinated poor-quality development coming forward.

6 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 6.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising directly in relation to this report.

7 Procurement Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no procurement implications arising directly in relation to this report. The strategic framework has been produced by the landowner, developer and their consultant team with input from Council Officers.

8 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 8.1 The strategic framework proposes development on what is currently a greenfield site and as such has several climate change implications. Construction of this scale will use high levels of raw materials and energy and a function of the development

will obviously lead to greater energy consumption. Development of agricultural land will inevitably lead to more hard surfacing which can have implications for surface water runoff and drainage. Details of mitigation measures will be necessary at the planning application stage.

- 8.2 The strategic framework identifies sustainability principles and promotes sustainable design and forms of development both in terms of construction and function of neighbourhoods. Having the strategic framework in place should help to secure more sustainable forms of development by setting the principles for more detailed design and providing a tool for officers when reviewing applications and negotiating with the developer.

9 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 9.1 There are no Human Resources implications arising directly in relation to this report. The presence of the strategic framework for development management purposes will assist planning officers in decision making.

10 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

- 10.1 Health and wellbeing has been considered in the strategic framework design process. The strategic framework aims to facilitate active travel by providing attractive environments for walking and cycling and ensuring access to public transport, such as the railway station. The form of development, layout of streets and location of the school has been designed to provide pleasant environments to encourage community engagement.
- 10.2 Community green space, links to existing walking and cycling routes outside the site and views of the wider countryside encourage active recreation and enable residents to connect to the surrounding natural environment.

11 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 11.1 The allocation of the site for development has been consulted upon and the subject of examination by the Inspector of Welwyn Hatfield Draft Local Plan over several years. The strategic framework has been subject to engagement with the Steering group and a public engagement event.

12 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 12.1 The subject of this report is linked to several of the Council's Corporate Priorities, including homes to be proud of, action on climate change (increase and promote biodiversity) and together create opportunities for our communities.

13 Equality and Diversity

- 13.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

Background papers: None

Appendices : Appendix A: Land West of Brookmans Park Railway Station (HS22) Strategic Framework