

Report to: Cabinet 10 January 2022

Lead Cabinet Members: Councillor John Batchelor (Housing)
Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins (Planning Policy and Delivery)
Councillor John Williams (Finance)

From: Councillor Grenville Chamberlain, Chair, Scrutiny and Overview Committee
Councillor Judith Rippeth, Vice-Chair, Scrutiny and Overview Committee

Update from Scrutiny and Overview Committee

Purpose

1. This report is to inform Cabinet about relevant discussion among members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at their meeting on 16 December 2021 and to make recommendations at paragraphs 3 and 5.

Final Accounts Update

2. The Head of Finance reported that a meeting had taken place on 3 December 2021 between External Auditors Ernst Young (EY) and officers from South Cambridgeshire District Council. All information required as a result of that meeting was passed to EY by 8 December, so they now have all the information they need, and the Council is just waiting for a response.

North East Cambridge Area Action Plan (NECAAP): Proposed Submission (Regulation 19)

Recommendations

3. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee recommends that Cabinet
 - a. Recognises that Milton Country Park is already operating at capacity and that the future strategic open space beyond the Area Action Plan area should be delivered in part through financial contributions from development at North East Cambridge.

- b. Recognises the nature of North East Cambridge as a high-density, urban development that should eventually become a part of Cambridge city (unrelated to Milton parish), with a boundary review being undertaken sometime in the future.
- c. Commits to the provision of an appropriate amount of recreation space onsite with easy access for future residents.
- d. Incorporates into the development faith, cultural and community facilities, and workspace for small and start-up businesses (based on demand in the light of changed working practices because of the Covid-19 pandemic).
- e. Seeks reassurance that there is adequate provision for future cemetery requirements.
- f. Acknowledges the issues around the Fen Road Level Crossing and asks officers to continue to engage with Network Rail on this matter through the preparation of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan.

Comments

4. In response to the Proposed Submission NECAAP and supporting documents, Committee members made the following comments:

Open space on the development and sports provision

- the proposed increased provision of children's play space and informal open space is welcomed, but one member queried whether it was reasonable to include open space within employment areas as part of open space provision.
- Recreation space must be provided with easy access to facilities or on site. Milton is already lacking in the level of recreational facilities.
- Regarding the provision of formal outdoor sports provision, Committee members queried whether this might have an adverse impact on adjacent communities and wondered whether the North East Cambridge development could provide more open space on-site.
- Regarding the future use of the existing Milton Waste site, one member noted that the AAP should safeguard a route to this area as it could be used as open space in the future.

Milton Country Park

- The new community will be located on the opposite side of the A14 to Milton Country Park which presently runs at capacity on several days each year. It will be completely overrun if not significantly expanded or additional informal recreation space is not provided. A tunnel connecting to Milton

Country Park should be provided under the A14. Parkrun has already discontinued use of Milton CP because of capacity issues.

- Regarding any impacts of the development on Milton Country Park, Committee members note that the AAP will add further pressure onto the park and that financial contributions should be sought from North East Cambridge to further develop and / or expand the country park as well as mitigate any impact on biodiversity.

Connectivity and transport

- Committee members regret that no provision has been made to connect the residents and businesses beyond the level crossing on Fen Road by securing a permanent means of crossing the increasingly busy railway tracks. While noting that discussions with Network Rail are ongoing, Members feel that a greater degree of urgency and robustness should be applied. There is a clear requirement for an additional vehicle access for 500+ residents and 200+ staff of businesses in that location.
- Regarding parking provision at Cambridge North Station, one member queried the quantum of parking proposed and how this related to the Trip Budget as well as the potential impacts of parking displacement on adjacent communities.
- Regarding the proposed trip budget, one member queried the assumptions around the use of public transport.
- The design of the development which will restrict car usage and parking creates concern for overspill parking in adjacent areas and Milton Village.
- There are concerns about congestion along Milton Road and surrounding areas remain.
- One member suggested 'car barns' should be called 'multi-storey car parks'.

Health and other facilities

- Some members specifically welcomed the provision of health facilities on-site.

Water

- Regarding the implementation and on-going management of water systems as well as water usage requirements, one member queried whether this had been achieved elsewhere at a scale similar to NEC and whose responsibility was it to maintain water systems. Another member queried about the amount of open space on-site and how much water would be needed to maintain these spaces.
- Regarding the Development Consent Order (DCO) for the relocation of the Wastewater Treatment Plant and the provision of water to serve the

development, one member questioned whether the Area Action Plan was premature as it is undeliverable.

- Regarding the relocation of the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP), one member noted that the AAP was not transparent enough on this issue given the two projects are interrelated.
- The report targets water usage of 80 litres per person per day but even at that level the provision of a reliable, ongoing supply of water cannot presently be guaranteed and clarity on how this requirement will be met is needed.

Quantum, Building heights and densities

- Members generally supported the reduction whilst one member noted that higher heights and densities could have been retained from the draft AAP provided it was well designed.
- Regarding the overall quantum of development, one member noted that housing numbers should be reduced as it would have no impact on the emerging strategy for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan.

Other comments

- No indication is given of the timeframe for the construction and occupation of the first phase which incorporates 4500 homes.
- If the Development Consent Order fails and this area cannot be used for the construction of these homes, where will the alternative site or sites be?

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Asset Management Strategy 2021 - 2026: Building Strong Foundations

Recommendations

5. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee recommends that Cabinet
 - a. recognises that the Strategy should seek to maintain not just the fabric of the Council's housing stock but also the estate surrounding that stock.
 - b. considers buying back the equity share in part-owned homes where that provides good value for money to meet the needs of residents which could offer very much better value for money than seeking to build new houses.
 - c. Subject to viability, and where the Council proposes to sell land, considers the option of itself building on that land to increase its own housing stock.

Comments

6. Scrutiny and Overview Committee members made the following comments

- The Council needs to take a very flexible approach to addressing housing needs which are not met by the market. The Council must recognise that even when it does secure 40%affordable housing on new developments that may subsequently be reduced by viability. And those houses are not truly affordable because of market house prices in South Cambridgeshire,
- The Council must recognise the need to extend this policy by looking at rural exception sites given there will be few new homes, whether council or market houses, built in smaller communities and thus making it very difficult to maintain the viability and sustainability of those communities in social, economic, and environmental terms.
- Ermine Street Housing and Shire Homes play an invaluable role in enabling the Council to acquire houses and rent them out to those who need them without necessarily having to own those homes.
- It is essential that the Strategy is supported by appropriate staff in terms of both numbers and skills.
- When insulating council housing, priority should be given to those residents most at risk of encountering fuel poverty.

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