

Local Plan Panel Meeting		Agenda Item: 6
Meeting Date	17 th October 2019	
Report Title	Second Stage Assessment of the Four New Garden Community Proposals	
Cabinet Member	Cllr Mike Baldock, Cabinet Member for Planning	
SMT Lead	Emma Wiggins	
Head of Service	James Freeman	
Lead Officer	Natalie Earl	
Key Decision	No	
Classification	Open	
Recommendations	<p>Recommend to Cabinet that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They note the draft technical assessment material in Appendix I and agree their finalisation and publication; and 2. Work on the proposed submission for Land at Ashford Road, South of Faversham (NS5) be removed from further consideration given the potential impact on the AONB; and 3. Progress the other major new development proposals through the 'Issues and Options' consultation to be considered against other options for development within the Borough. 	

1. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report considers an assessment of the risks, opportunities and uncertainties associated with the four submitted garden communities in Swale. The assessment looks at a variety of issues such as viability, infrastructure needs, affordable housing provision, and landscape impact.
- 1.2. Although the technical assessments are fairly site specific, Members are not being asked to consider and resolve the future of any specific scheme at this stage; rather they are asked to draw upon the draft assessment to consider in a broader, more conceptual fashion, their overall capabilities in terms of their likely suitability, implementation and delivery.
- 1.3. If the recommendations are agreed, officers will feed the proposals into the Local Plan Issues and Options paper at a Local Plan Panel in Spring 2020 which will seek Members views in respect of all the possible spatial development options that should be considered by the Local Plan Review. These in turn will form part of a future document presented to Members that would, if agreed, be subject to public consultation in spring/summer 2020.

2. Background

- 2.1. As you will be aware, the Council has been considering the potential role, if any, that new garden communities, should play in the Local Plan review. It has tested the appetite from landowners and developers via its own Prospectus and this led to the submission of five proposals. (One at Queenborough Marshes was quickly withdrawn.) At the same time, early community views were sought, via the document 'Looking Ahead' (reported to Panel in September 2018), on the general role that new garden communities might play in meeting Swale's future development needs. The submitted schemes were subjected to on-going enquiry and technical assessment which were reported to Local Plan Panel on 14th March 2019. At that meeting members agreed that the draft technical assessment be noted and published and that be agreed and that work on new garden communities continued in order that their position be considered as a potential option(s) for the Local Plan Review process. This previous work can be viewed at <https://www.swale.gov.uk/new-garden-communities/>
- 2.2. Since then further work has been ongoing with the four site promoters and their teams and more technical assessments and reports have been undertaken and submitted to the borough council. The Council has been working with Peter Brett's Associates (PBA) in order to assess the four sites to a finer level of detail. Throughout this process, each prospective developer has responded in an iterative fashion to queries and flexed proposals as requested. There is also obviously a significant amount of further technical work needed to support the schemes but it must be remembered that evidence must be proportionate (NPPF, para 35.).
- 2.3. The four proposals are:
- SE Sittingbourne: circa 8,000 homes (20% affordable housing), new commercial space, Kent Science Park now within the red line, community uses, local retail space, medical facilities, education (3 x 3FE primary schools, secondary school, Inc. 6th form and further education provision), sport and leisure, green infrastructure. New motorway junction and M2/A2 link road to be provided and completion of the Northern Relief Road to the A2.
 - Bobbing: circa 3,000 homes (up to 40% affordable housing), 100 ha of open space, community facilities including primary school, health centre, local centre, village hall and sports pitches, employment floorspace (Inc. starter units), re-alignment of Sheppey Way and green infrastructure.
 - SE Faversham: circa 2,500 homes (aim for 40% affordable housing), up to 20,000 sq. m of commercial space. Community uses (local centres, health centre), education (primary schools and potentially a secondary school),

sport and leisure (Inc. possible relocation of cricket club and football ground), network of green infrastructure.

- North Street, Sheldwich, Faversham: circa 5,000 homes (a 'strong emphasis' on affordable housing). Employment provision, a High Street for retail/mixed use, primary and secondary school, community uses, allotments, community orchard, playing fields, open space and woodland. Re-alignment of the A251 through the site is indicated, together with improvements at J6 M2.

3. Proposal

- 3.1 The PBA work comprises a main report, which sets out the national policy background, highlights the changes made to each scheme since the first stage of assessments and any remaining critical questions for the site promoters. It also includes summaries of the red line boundary assessments undertaken, and the landscape and design and heritage commentaries. The report also looks at the utilities and highway infrastructure the site promoters have assessed necessary and whether that is adequate. There is a section on the viability work undertaken for the Council which gives a high level commentary of the findings.
- 3.2 The report highlights issues affecting the submitted schemes, before making a series of recommendations. PBA will be present at the meeting to outline their work and answer questions arising.
- 3.3 The PBA work confirms that the process has successfully encouraged schemes which could, if promoted by the Council, make a significant contribution to meeting the future needs of Swale. The process has also had benefits for both the Council and promoters, both in terms of learning and because it has enabled issues to be explored which are not usually possible as part of the normal plan making process.

The Technical Assessments

- 3.4 Section 9 'Conclusions' in PBAs report succinctly sets out the key findings of all of the technical assessments for each site.
- 3.5 PBA's report states that if the option of progressing major strategic sites is to be supported and consulted upon as part of the Issues and Options Local Plan, further work will be required, including:
 - Work is progressed and discussions continue with the promoters to further clarify and remove the potential risks identified in the PBA assessment
 - Continued liaison with stakeholders and technical consultees, particularly relating to highway issues, Historic England and KCC Archaeology

- Continuing masterplanning support to address the issues raised and facilitate the most appropriate layout in relation to the landscape, sensitive locations and relationships with existing communities which is then followed up with the use of SPD or masterplan in due course to direct design parameters of any preferred options
- Further work to understand the implications of proposed jobs numbers, employment land issues relating to cross boundary issues of commuting, labour supply and competition implications within the context of the overall job numbers and how the Local Plan should address this
- Establishing a utility working group to address cumulative issues and timing; and
- Dedicated engagement support to achieve sustained community involvement in the throughout the life of the development.

3.6 At its meeting on 26th June 2019 the Council resolved:

‘This Council notes the demonstrable lack of public support for a Southern link road dependent on house building and/or commercial development for funding. This motion supersedes the previous motion passed by Council on 26th July 2017 and confirms that a southern link road dependant on housebuilding and/or commercial development for funding delivery is not a strategic objective of Council.’

- 3.7 Whilst the Council has declared its concerns about housing development to the south east of Sittingbourne, we would not recommend at this stage removing the inclusion of the South East Sittingbourne site at this stage of the Local Plan review process, although references could be made in the Issues and Option consultation paper about the concerns the Council has regarding its environmental and character impact on the local area and reflecting the issues raised in this report. Once the consultation has been completed, the Council can then consider fully the merits of the proposal taking into account any formal representations submitted as part of the consultation and whether the site should be removed from consideration as part of the Preferred Option Local Plan to be prepared early in 2021.
- 3.8 The PBA assessment notes that NS5 (Land at Ashford Road) has become the most challenging of the four options and the only one we are aware is likely to attract an ‘in principle’ objection from the AONB unit – relating the scale of the proposal and its impact on the setting of the AONB. This has always been a concern, but one the site promoters considered could be overcome by mitigation. The AONB unit remain unconvinced. With the prospect of an ‘in principle’ objection, PBA recommend that, as currently scoped, it is not a proposal that could be taken forward as a reasonable option through the Local Plan process. PBA recommend that the 3 other sites are reasonable options for Members and the public to consider going forward.

- 3.9 The proposal is that members note the draft technical assessment by PBA and recommend to Cabinet that the proposal for the Land at Ashford Road be removed from further consideration given the anticipated impact on the AONB as a show stopper issue. At this stage no other confirmed show stopper issues have been identified for the three other submissions although significant concerns remain, which require further work and consideration of potential mitigation work which can be explored through the Issues and Options consultation and through further work with the proposed developers.

Next Steps

- 3.9 The Council are now moving towards the next stage of the Local Plan, Issues and Options, and it is envisaged that this will be reported to a Local Plan Panel in Spring 2020. At this stage it is advisable to keep all of the growth options open, remembering that members can express a preference at this stage if desired. These assessments will feed into the Issues and Options document. The key message is to keep all options open to allow the public, statutory agencies and community groups to give their considered views at the Preferred Options stage in late 2020.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1. Whilst members could decide not to note the technical assessments and to recommend to Cabinet that work stops on new garden communities submissions (large development sites) and they are not included as an option at the Issues and Options stage of the Local Plan, this would be a serious risk for the Council as it could be argued that they had not looked at all of the reasonable alternatives available to meet their housing target. This could lead to an Inspector finding the Local Plan 'un-sound.'
- 4.2. It should also be noted that whilst the submissions have been labelled under the 'new garden communities' label and have been prepared taking into account the TCPA new garden community principles, there are no proposals for these to come forward through any development corporation mechanism and in some instances can be considered as large urban extensions rather than new communities in their own right.

5. Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Direct consultation has been undertaken with specific bodies as part of the technical assessments such as with the Kent Downs AONB, Kent Highways, Swale Conservation officer and the Swale Design Officer. All of the four site promoters have plans to undertake community consultation in the near future.

6. Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Priority 1: Delivering regeneration; and Priority 2: Delivering improved quality of life
Financial, Resource and Property	Within Local Plan budget.
Legal and Statutory	None anticipated at this time.
Crime and Disorder	None anticipated at this time.
Environment and Sustainability	The Local Plan process will be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal.
Health and Wellbeing	None at this time.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None at this time.
Equality and Diversity	The Local Plan process will be subject to Community Impact Assessments at appropriate points.
Privacy and Data Protection	Any data has been processed in a manner compliant with GDPR.

7. Appendices

- 7.1. Appendix I – PBA New Garden Communities Assessment of Stage 2 Submissions

8. Background Papers

- 8.1. None