

WOODLANDS AND EASTERN LINK ROAD SOUTH
Councillor Paternoster
Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure

1 Purpose

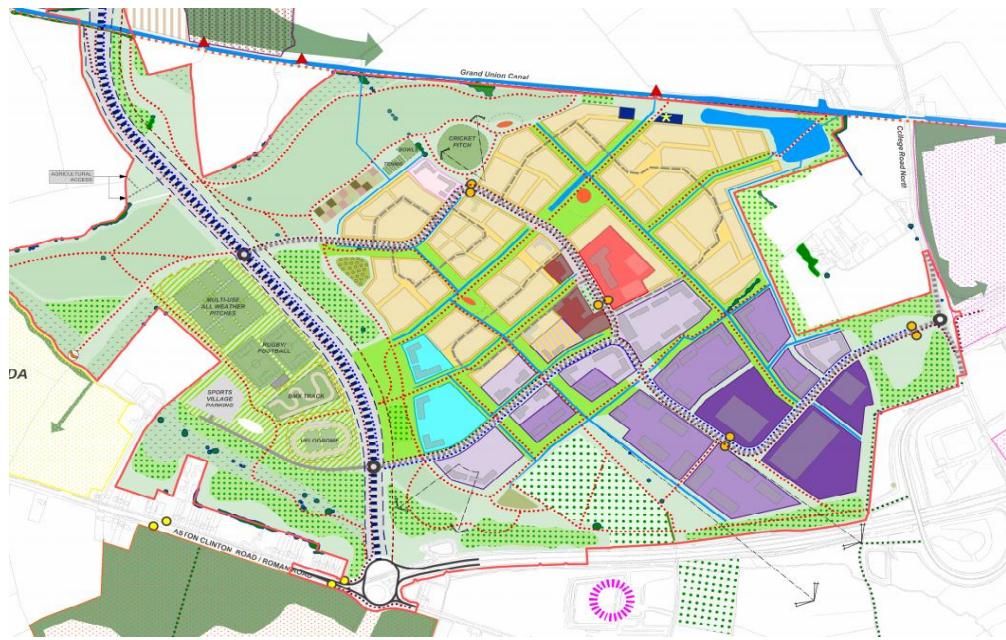
- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to secure £350k of funding (matched with £350k of BCC funding) to allow Buckinghamshire Advantage (BA) and Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) to continue with its work as promoter of the Woodlands Site. The funding will enable BCC to continue with the design and planning requirements of the Eastern Link Road.
- 1.2 There is a total funding ask of £700k that will allow BA to continue its role as the Promoter of the Woodlands site and to allow BCC to continue with design of the Eastern Link Road and conclude a comprehensive financial and due diligence exercise. This funding is intended to cover work until the outcome of the HiF allocation is known (at the end of 2019) and includes;
 - Commence the design of the carriageway for the whole of ELRs.
 - Progress the detailed design for A41 roundabout (Phase 1a).
 - Progress the infrastructure delivery plan including site wide drainage strategy.
 - A comprehensive legal and financial due diligence exercise to be conducted by BCC that will include red book valuations, financial modelling, governance structure including direct delivery, key risk validation and consideration of ownership matters. The purpose of the due diligence work is to ascertain the viability of such an investment and the appropriate governance structure to manage or oversee the disposal.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet approve the £350,000 funding so that Buckinghamshire Advantage can continue its work as promoter of the Woodlands Site and BCC can continue with the design and planning requirements of the Eastern Link Road, and conclude a business case in relation to Woodlands.

3 Supporting Information

- 3.1 Aylesbury Woodlands Development would provide high quality commercial floorspace (102,080m²), 1,100 market and affordable dwellings, additional 60 residential extra care units, mixed use local centre, new primary school and the Eastern Link Road South (ELRS).
- 3.2 A diagram of the Woodlands Masterplan is set out below;



- 3.3 There is a joint planning promotion partnership between BCC and AVDC via the Aylesbury Vale Advantage Legacy Board (AVALB) - now Buckinghamshire Advantage (BA).
- 3.4 Both councils originally committed to promoting this scheme as private sector developers were unwilling to promote the scheme because of the high costs of development and the associated infrastructure requirements associated with the South East link road.
- 3.5 Working through BA via AVALB, both Councils have spent the past 3 years promoting and producing a scheme that delivers the objectives and meets the infrastructure requirements.
- 3.6 Both AVDC and BCC have been funding BA for the Woodlands related activities for some time. Costs incurred to date on taking Woodlands forward total c£3.5m (£750k BCC, £750k AVDC, £550k LGF, £60k Enterprise Zone and £1.390m AVA legacy funds).
- 3.7 This funding has been contributed on the basis that it will be fully recouped from the project but there are risks associated with this and it will ultimately depend on the total cost versus income derived from the scheme. If the scheme does not achieve minimum expected returns the councils may achieve a reduced, or potentially no reimbursement.
- 3.8 A Housing Infrastructure Fund Forward Funding (HIF FF) and Gap Funding bid totalling £54.15m has been submitted to Homes England to support the development infrastructure and assist with land assembly for Woodlands and the Aylesbury Garden Town.
- 3.9 If successful, the HIF bid will provide funding to continue some of the planning and preparatory work, but a total of £700,000 is required between now and November in order to minimise any delays on the 2 schemes and to make sure all information is available to support the HIF bid submission.
- 3.10 A total of £550,000 is required to progress the design of the A41 roundabout and the design and planning application for Eastern Link Road South and £150,000 is required to develop the full business case options and returns for the Woodlands scheme in time for the November HIF funding decision.

- 3.11 The project is now at a critical point in the delivery phase and BA are close to securing a planning consent. However, all allocated funding has now been committed and without further contributions the project is imminent danger of stalling.
- 3.12 The project remains a priority for the Shadow Unitary authority, and it considered a report on 23 July 2019 which supported Bucks County Council's and Aylesbury Vale's ongoing financial commitment to this project.
- 3.13 Bucks County Council has already obtained the necessary consent to commit its share of the funds required to keep work continuing on the project.
- 3.14 BCC are conducting due diligence which will be shared with AVDC and include how the governance of Woodlands might look and how the project will be delivered.

4 Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Woodlands development is largely regarded as the exemplar development in the emerging Aylesbury Garden Town Masterplan. The current planning consent will deliver 1,100 new homes, 1 million sq ft of Employment space and a key part of the Aylesbury Link Road.
- 4.2 Because of the complexity surrounding this development, reaching planning consent and formulating a clear set of delivery options has taken longer than originally envisaged.
- 4.3 A future tranche of funding is therefore required to ensure the development continues to progress and so that a series of delivery options can be presented to council. This information is also partially required to support the HIF bid submission.
- 4.4 The funding required (£700,000) will be jointly contributed by Bucks County Council and Aylesbury Vale District Council. As the funding exceeds the threshold set out in the Spending Protocol, this report was considered and endorsed by Shadow Executive on 23 July 2019.

5 Resource implications

- 5.1 As at the end of March 2019, the Council had £1.548 million in unallocated New Homes Bonus sat in a reserve. It is proposed that £350,000 of this reserve is allocated to fund this contribution, in anticipation that it is reimbursed to this or the new Buckinghamshire Council at a future date.