

GOMM VALLEY AND ASHWELLS DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

Cabinet Member: Councillor David Johncock

Wards Affected: Ryemead, Tylers Green and Loudwater and Micklefield.

Parishes Affected: Chepping Wycombe and High Wycombe unparished area.

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PROPOSED DECISION

That the Cabinet adopt the Gomm Valley and Ashwells Development Brief: Draft for Adoption (Appendix A) as planning guidance for the area.

Reason for Decision

Land at Gomm Valley and Ashwells is reserved for future development under the Council's Core Strategy. Cabinet has previously agreed that the reserve sites need to be released for development to meet the current development needs of the District, particularly for housing.

The development brief contains detailed planning guidance that will be a material consideration when planning decisions are made on planning applications in this area. The guidance is site specific and therefore more detailed than the current policy framework in the Development Plan. The brief will help co-ordinate future development and the provision of infrastructure. It will therefore be important to the quality of the final development to have an up-to-date development brief.

Corporate Implications

1. The development brief will be a non-statutory document and a material consideration when considering planning applications within the brief area. It will be a useful tool for improving the quality and the consistency of advice provided to developers, the efficiency of the planning process and the quality of the built environment and will provide a link between the provisions of the Development Plan and the requirements of a planning application.
2. The purpose of a Development Brief is to inform developers and other interested parties of the constraints and opportunities presented by a site and the type of development expected or encouraged by local planning policies. Thus they are aimed at improving the planning process, the efficiency of any subsequent planning application and the quality of the final development of the site. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) acknowledges that the planning system is plan-led and that early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties.
3. Direct financial or budgetary implications: This report has no direct financial consequences to the council.
4. Equality issues have been considered by carrying out scoping. Regard has been given to the implications of the Human Rights Act, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Act and to the Council's Environmental Policy.

Executive Summary

5. This report sets out the consultation that has taken place in relation to the Gomm Valley and Ashwells Development Brief and provides an assessment of the consultation responses received during the most recent consultation period.
6. The development brief has been drawn up following extensive work analysing the planning issues and opportunities for future development in this area which is reserved for development within the Council's Core Strategy.
7. It is recommended that Cabinet adopts the development brief which has been amended in response to the consultation responses.

Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications

8. The Gomm Valley and Ashwells Development Brief has implications for the Community Strategy:
 - Thriving economy – The future development will provide much needed housing including affordable housing. Construction jobs will be created during the construction period. Some small scale employment development is proposed.
 - Safe communities – the development brief encourages a form of development that will minimise the future risk/fear of crime and therefore contribute to the creation of safer communities.
 - Community Involvement – the community has been involved in the brief both in terms of the Liaison Group and public consultation.
 - Sustainable environment – the proposals represent sustainable development.
 - Health and well-being – the brief will encourage future development to include new footpaths, cycleways, open spaces and access to the wider countryside.

Background and Issues

9. Gomm Valley and Ashwells was one of five sites reserved in the Council's Core Strategy 2008 as a location for future development (Policy CS8). A major public consultation took place on the New Local Plan from February to April 2014. This re-stated the need for the development of the reserve sites. The summary leaflet stated "*We expect to see these sites developed in the next few years*". On November 17th 2014 the Cabinet agreed to release the five strategic development sites to contribute towards meeting local housing needs. In June 2016 consultation on the emerging New Local Plan took place, which proposed the allocation of Gomm Valley and Ashwells for mixed use development (focus on housing) in line with the draft Development Brief. The site continues to be proposed for allocation in the emerging New Local Plan.

10. The development brief covers the Gomm Valley (southern part of the site) and Ashwells (northern part of the site). Gomm Valley is in multiple ownerships. The majority land owner at Gomm Valley and promoter of development is Aviva¹. Taylor Wimpey owns a parcel of land in the south-western corner of the site where employment generating development is proposed. There are two other small scale land holdings; no development has been proposed on those holdings. The development of Ashwells is promoted by the Major Projects and Estates Executive at Wycombe District Council. Both Aviva and the Major Projects and Estates Executive at Wycombe District Council have been closely involved in the production of the development brief.
11. If and when adopted, the development brief will provide up to date planning guidance for both Gomm Valley and Ashwells. Development proposals will be expected to have regard to the contents of the brief and the brief will be a material consideration for the Planning Authority when planning decisions are made.

Consultation and Engagement

12. The release of the Gomm Valley and Ashwells site and preparation of the development Brief has been the subject to extensive public engagement and consultation.
13. Following release of the reserve sites by Cabinet, which includes Gomm Valley and Ashwells, a public workshop took place on 31 January 2015. The workshop was managed by AR Urbanism (Urban Design consultancy) and Phil Jones Associates (Transport) and took place from 10:00 – 15:00. The workshop was attended by 42 people. The purpose of the workshop was to allow the community to identify key issues and influence thinking on the site at the earliest opportunity. Officers and the developers participated in the workshop.
14. Following the workshop, a liaison group was set up, which comprised members from various locations around the site, representatives from the local community groups and elected ward and parish members (20 liaison group members in total). Representatives from the Council and development teams have been present at the majority of liaison group meetings. The liaison group met 12 times through 2015 and 2016 to discuss issues as the development brief evolved. The discussions that have taken place during those Liaison Group meetings have influenced the development brief and officer negotiations with the developers.
15. The development brief has been through two rounds of Liaison Group consultation and 1 full public consultation. Therefore, individuals from the liaison group and wider public have had an opportunity to comment on the brief.

¹ Originally promoted by AXA, but has more recently been sold to Aviva.

16. The public consultation exercise went from 19 September to 30 October 2016 and included a two day drop-in event on Wednesday 12 October and Thursday 13 October. The Penn and Tylers Green Residents Association also hosted their own consultation drop-in event for local residents at Tylers Green Village Hall using the Council's presentation boards on Friday 21 and Saturday 22 October. Separate to the Local Planning Authorities public consultation events the two main land owners (AXA² and Major Projects and Estates Executive at Wycombe District Council) also held their own public consultation events in July and November in 2016 respectively.
17. Over the course of the preparation of the development brief the Liaison Group has had a significant and ongoing influence on the content of the Brief. In particular Liaison Group members have influenced:
- a) The quantum of development proposed, both in terms of dwelling numbers and the extent of the developed area (the majority of the site would remain undeveloped).
 - b) The introduction of a spine road to preserve the majority of Cock Lane - albeit partial widening of the northern end of Cock Lane is still considered to be necessary but remains contentious locally.
 - c) The extent and nature of the gap between High Wycombe and Tylers Green. The gap has been increased following initial consultation with the Liaison Group, albeit not as far as most consultees would like.
 - d) The direction of the walk/cycle access for parcel 1 (i.e. via Gomm Road rather than under the railway bridge on Hammersley Lane, which would have necessitated signalled working under the bridge).
 - e) The provision of a second access for Ashwells to reduce the impact on existing residents.
 - f) The nature of the undeveloped area and the preference for an ecological rather than recreational focus.
 - g) The provision of a walk/cycle network on the site.
 - h) The provision of a single form entry primary/middle school on the site.
18. The most recent consultation event resulted in a total of 89 consultation responses 12 from organisations, 2 from landowners/developers and 75 from liaison group members and the general public. A summary of the responses is available at <https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/pages/About-the-council/Have-your-say/Consultations/Consultation-on-the-Gomm-Valley-and-Ashwells-development-brief.aspx>. Hard copies of the consultation responses had been provided to the Cabinet Members. 319 separate issues were identified, which have been categorised under 18 separate headings. The officers response to the comments raised are given adjacent to the comment. Where changes were proposed to the development brief the officer response is set out in red. Where an explanation is given as to why a change has not been made it is provided in black. The Consultation exercise led to 100 identified changes to the Brief. Many of the comments related to wider infrastructure issues and/or requests for a level of detail that simply went beyond the scope of the Brief and therefore did not lead to changes.

² AXA subsequently sold the land to AVIVA.

19. The main additions/alterations to the Brief were as follows:
 - a. The introduction of a vision for the developed and undeveloped area (see comments 34, 40, 145 & 215 for further detail).
 - b. Identification of a site for a future community hub (see comment 33 for further detail).
 - c. Additional clarification on the delivery of the undeveloped area (see comments 41 & 43 for further detail).
 - d. Detailed guidelines to manage the relationship between the existing dwellings in Ashwells and any new development (see comments 47, 48, 204 & 205 for further detail).
 - e. A detailed design specification for the spine road (see comments 97, 104 & 118 for further detail).
 - f. An alteration to the layout approach for parcels 4 and 5 to better address the topography (see comment 103 for further detail).
 - g. An illustrative option to alter the route of the spine road to limit its impact on the landscape. The Brief acknowledges that further work is required before the design and alignment of the spine road can be fixed (see comment 98, 99 and 103 for further detail).
 - h. Maximising the ecological opportunities on the site with the provision of additional areas of chalk grassland (see comment 53 for further detail).
 - i. Ashwells to be served by existing No.31 bus rather than an extension of the existing service (see comment 136 for further detail).

20. As Cabinet members will note, a large number of issues were raised through the consultation process. These are addressed in full in the summary of consultation response. The key issues where the public' requests could not be accommodated are as follows:
 - a. Officers are not recommending the removal of parcels 7, 8 and 9 to enlarge the gap, beyond the proposed 200 metres, between High Wycombe and Tylers Green, because additional housing can be provided in this location to contribute to the District's need for housing, whilst still providing a gap between the settlements. To improve the sense of separation increased planting has been proposed. (See comment 211 for further detail).

 - b. Officers are not recommending the retention of the narrow section of Cock Lane between parcels 8 and 9. The County Highway Authority has advised that the retention of a single track section of road would be detrimental to highway safety because it would result in a significant bottle neck, which would be put under severe pressure from the anticipated increase in north and south bound traffic resulting from the development. It is anticipated that the additional traffic from the development when added to existing traffic levels would lead to significant congestion at this point, causing frustration for drivers and increased levels of risk taking by motorists. The capacity issues on the narrow section of Cock Lane will be further exacerbated by anticipated growth in background traffic. The County Highway Authority are also

advising that the widened section of Cock Lane be traffic calmed, which will serve to keep traffic speeds low and limit the attractiveness of the spine road to new traffic from further afield, being drawn through Tylers Green. The aim is to ensure the spine road delivers traffic slowly, but steadily through the site. It should also be noted that the introduction of the spine road has removed the need to widen the majority of Cock Lane thereby preserving much of its character (see comment 105, 107, 114, 121 for further detail).

- c. Officers are recommending a vehicular access from Parcel 1 may be either onto Hammersley Lane or from the new spine road. However access onto Hammersley lane is still subject to further highway safety testing. The topography from the valley bottom to Parcel 1 is very steep, and the landscape impact could be significant in achieving this route for all vehicles, including buses. This needs further assessment.
- d. Officers are recommending the option is retained of a possible bus route through the site. This could include bus access from Pimms Close down the valley and up the other side and out onto the Hammersley Lane and thence Robertson Road. By doing so, it would also be able to serve existing dwellings on Hammersley Lane and Robertson Road that currently have no immediate access to a bus. However, this is subject to the issues set out in the paragraph above. An alternative would be to run the bus up and down Gomm Road/spine road with a turn at the top. Officers are recommending that the Council reserves its position in this regard. Bus operators have advised that any bus service to the site would be of marginal viability. To maximise viability, it is necessary to ensure that the bus passes as many front doors as possible and route duplication is minimised. The aim is that any bus servicing the site is sustainable in the longer term and does not require public subsidy. The Council can review its position in respect of this matter when more information is available on public transport viability. (See comment 124 for further detail). There is a further issue of the landscape impact of any road designed to take buses, given the topography of the site from Pimms Close.
- e. Officers are not recommending development being delivered at a density of circa 15 dwelling per hectare at Ashwells. Existing development at Tylers Green has been built at a range of densities, albeit predominantly at the lower end of the density range. Existing densities have been informed by the areas more rural location, the evolving character of the area and the prevailing social and economic conditions at the time of construction. The resulting characteristics are a more spacious green rural feel relative to more urban parts of the district. As part of a national trend densities have been rising in the past few decades to reflect the social and economic conditions of our time; this trend is evident in the existing housing stock at Tylers Green. Ashwells will represent a new chapter in Tylers Greens evolution and at a density of circa 25 dwellings per hectare, would be commensurate with the evolving character of Tylers Green. Delivery of housing at a density of 15dph would be very low and make poor use of this green field site, putting additional pressure on other land in the District, much

of which also has a rural aspect to its character. The final density will be determined by design considerations, which will need to ensure more generous spacing between buildings and verdant character, than would be expected in a more urban locations (see comment 200, & 201 for further detail).

21. Some representations supported and acknowledged:
 - a. improvements on earlier iterations of the Brief;
 - b. the landscape led approach to the layout of development;
 - c. the need for house building generally and the contribution that this site could make to that need;
 - d. the overall presentation of the Brief;
 - e. the provision of a new school;
 - f. the approach to the undeveloped land;
 - g. the clear link between objectives and outcomes; and,
 - h. the proposed preservation of the undeveloped area for ecological purposes in perpetuity.

22. Many of the consultation responses focus on transport matters and wider infrastructure issues. However, it should be noted that for the most part transport and wider (off-site) infrastructure issues are not proposed to be addressed by the brief. Instead the Council looked at the infrastructure requirements of all the reserve sites together (including Slate Meadow in relation to strategic transport) and held a number of meetings of an Infrastructure Roundtable which was established with representatives from each of the Reserve Site Liaison Groups including the Gomm Valley and Ashwells Liaison Group. This led to the production of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan which was consulted on separately. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan addresses the following issues, which are relevant to the Gomm Valley and Ashwells site:
 - a. a transport package for the site, which includes offsite infrastructure for cars and walk/cycle, which links to the infrastructure provided onsite to ensure a sustainable and accessible site;
 - b. the need for a single form entry primary/middle school to be delivered on Gomm Valley; and,
 - c. The provision of sports pitches off site on the Terriers Farm site and Derehams Farm.

23. Cabinet members have been provided with the Gomm Valley and Ashwells Development Brief: Draft for Adoption. This document is the consultation draft updated to reflect the consultation responses and is intended to be the final adopted brief (subject to proof reading). This will follow the delivery of the Cabinet papers. The version of the brief that was the subject of the public consultation can be viewed on the Council's web site (see link below).

Options

24. The options include:
 - (a) Adopt the Gomm Valley and Ashwells Development Brief [Draft for Adoption] as recommended.

- (b) Refer the brief back to Officers with direction for preparation of further amendments.
 - (c) Do not adopt the brief.
25. The lack of an adopted Development Brief for Gomm Valley and Ashwells would leave the authority without detailed planning guidance which is critical in shaping the future development of the two sites. Consequently, option (a) is recommended.

Conclusions

26. It is recommended that Cabinet adopt the Gomm Valley and Ashwells Development Brief [Draft for Adoption] as a planning document that will have weight in the future decision-making process in the planning of the Gomm Valley and Ashwells area.

Next Steps

27. If adopted, the brief will be published as the adopted brief and attract weight in any future decision making. Pre-application discussions are already underway and will be informed by the Brief.

Appendix

28. Development Brief: Draft for adoption

Background Papers

- 1 Summary Comments and responses to issues raised in the public consultation draft of the Development Brief. This can be found on the WDC web site Gomm Valley and Ashwells page (see link below).
- 2 Gomm Valley and Ashwells Development Brief – consultation version:
 - <https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/pages/About-the-council/Have-your-say/Consultations/Consultation-on-the-Gomm-Valley-and-Ashwells-development-brief.aspx>
- 3 WDC web site Gomm Valley and Ashwells page:
 - <https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/pages/Planning-and-building-control/Major-projects-and-reserve-sites/Gomm-Valley-and-Ashwells-reserve-sites.aspx>

This includes documents relating to earlier workshops and consultation.