

Chesham Renaissance Community Interest Company

Paper for the meeting of the Chesham and Villages Community Board

Wednesday 7 July 2021 at 6.30pm

1. For this meeting it is assumed that the Members present are aware of the content of the Masterplan and its Objectives. All should have received copies of the reports, which are also available on the CRCIC [website](#). An Extract of the Executive Summary is attached as an Appendix to this paper.
2. The purpose of this paper is to update the Community Board on the progress with the Chesham Masterplan and to explore ways that Chesham Renaissance Community Interest Company (CRCIC) can communicate and work with this Community Board.
3. The Chesham Masterplan Stage 2 Report was published in February 2018 and soon after the Chesham Masterplan Consultation Report in April 2018. This Stage 2 Report was produced after public consultation in late 2017 on Stage 1 of the Masterplan. This consultation was with Chiltern District and Chesham Town Councils as well as large numbers of residents, businesses and other local organisations.
4. CRCIC is now working on delivery of Stage 2 which covers some fifteen sites in and around the town centre. The developer of the first site has almost completed the land assembly phase with three major landowners. A pre-application response was received from CDC for up to 75 dwellings and some workspace. A full planning application will be submitted to Buckinghamshire Council (BC) soon. Existing industrial use will be relocated to a site on the edge of Chesham. The proposed siting of this should be of interest to the Community Board.
5. CRCIC has worked closely with BC since its formation in April 2020. The decision to not pursue the Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan resulted in a strategic re-think moving the focus from the Planning to the Regeneration route. BC advised that this will enable faster progress and easier access to central government funding.
6. The Chesham Regeneration Group Committee was formed in late 2020. This includes BC, CTC, CRCIC and local Chesham based community groups. It was initially chaired by Cllr Steve Bowles, the Cabinet member for regeneration. This has resulted in Chesham, the third town in Buckinghamshire, being identified for Regeneration, behind Aylesbury and High Wycombe, which were recognised before formation of the Unitary Authority. It is disappointing after six months and three committee meetings that Terms of Reference and specific actions have not been forthcoming. CRCIC is still committed to this Regeneration Group.
7. It is encouraging that Chesham Town Council (CTC) has started to produce a Chesham Neighbourhood Plan (CNP) with its objectives including most of the wording from the Chesham Masterplan and indeed the content appears to be closely aligned. It is noted that the timing and actual content of the CNP is not available yet but BC has stated that progress with this plan will not delay regeneration.
8. In early June BC Economic Development committed to submitting a Levelling Up Fund bid entitled "Chesham Station Quarter Regeneration". This was supported by CRCIC which supplied a large dossier of supporting information for inclusion in the bid. BC completed the bid in record time, a major and impressive undertaking. It is recognised that the chance of success is low, not helped by the newly elected local

MP needing to sign this bid on the day after election.

9. It is recognised that BC is the major authority which can submit bids for central government funding that will be required for infrastructure funding needed for any significant development in Chesham.
10. CRCIC is in discussions with developers to work on other sites within the Chesham Masterplan. It is recognised that many of these sites are owned by BC and currently used as car parks. This is only part of the reason that CRCIC must work in a close partnership relationship with BC, and indeed with CTC as part of the local Chesham community.
11. It must be borne in mind that CRCIC is a Community Interest Company which means that all assets generated by this CIC will, under the terms of the Asset Lock, remain property of the Chesham Community. All work carried out to date has been privately funded and the Company Directors are not drawing any financial benefit.

12. What is CRCIC asking from the Community Board today?

13. The Chesham Masterplan Stage 2 currently is initially focussed on the Town Centre. Stage 3 will cover the rest of area within the Town Boundary and the adjoining parishes. These parishes have not been engaged with yet but will be when funding is available. CRCIC will need their assistance.
14. It is recognised that the Chesham Masterplan was initially focussed on dwellings, employment and infrastructure. Further input on community well-being, sustainability, work patterns and other issues is under consideration and community input will be sought.
15. Strategic Employment Site. In relation to point 4 above, an old brownfield site has been identified as a suitable location close to Chesham. It is in within the area protected landscape and wrongly classified. It will need to be considered with care and sympathetic design. This will be progressed after detailed discussion with Parish residents and the CCB. Local input will be essential, with confidentiality for now.
16. The CRCIC policy is, where possible, to build on brownfield sites in Chesham and replace old housing stock and infrastructure – in summary Regeneration. Villages will not be ignored and their needs to survive and be viable in the future recognised. CRCIC will need their input.
17. CRCIC is not asking the Community Board for funding now because it is recognised that limited funds are available. It is hoped that assistance may be available for specific projects yet to be identified.
18. This document should be read as a Positioning Paper to open a discussion with a different audience to Buckinghamshire Council (Aylesbury) and Chesham Town Council. There has not been an opportunity since April 2020, to meet with this new Cabinet. We should not dismiss this opportunity.

Tony Molesworth
Chairman, CRCIC
29.06.2021

Annex A, Extract from the Master Plan executive summary

1. Development of the Chesham town centre in the manner described in the Masterplan is essential before the full potential for tourism and further inward investment can be realised. The centre of Chesham will be home to a substantial increase in residential accommodation with a higher density and a corresponding increase in population together with the retail and other necessities to support it. Land must also be found adjacent to the town to accommodate enhanced commercial development.
2. The alternative is to have isolated and remote hilltop settlements surrounding the decaying original core of the town located in the bottom of the valley. Its physical working and living environment must change from a rather tired legacy of its largely industrial manufacturing past to become a significant outward focused town. It must be welcoming to new businesses and new residents resulting in substantial inward investment of capital and revenue. This inward capital investment must go towards re providing some of its public and private end of life assets and its ageing and deficient infrastructure provision which must be expanded to accommodate substantial commercial and residential growth.
3. The Chesham Renaissance Community Interest Company (Chesham Renaissance) has been inspired by the vision to embrace newer residential accommodation, not in the Green Belt periphery of the town but within the town itself. It accepts the increase in population density, and welcomes capital investment and long term inward investment which will result from this. It accepts that developer levies in various forms will be insufficient to provide the income needed for this perhaps counterintuitive and ambitious plan.
4. In addition, the focus cannot be entirely on additional residential accommodation. There is already a thriving industrial business sector in Chesham. It is an attractive place for people and new businesses to locate because of its geographic location in the South East and closeness to London, the West Coast Main Line at Watford, the Chiltern Railways connections at Great Missenden and Little Chalfont, and the point of termination in the town of the TfL Metropolitan Line. There are two circumstances which require the commercial element to receive attention sufficient to do justice to its importance. First, there is already a need to update or create new business premises or locate commercial enterprises out of the town in different accommodation forms to meet the needs of new conventional and higher technology businesses with adequate access. Second, the imposition of higher density residential accommodation in and around the urban core of the town will gradually require the re location of those industries currently located in this area. Residential accommodation will gradually displace commercial use.
5. In simple micro economic terms, Chesham Renaissance is aware of the fragility of the current perilous state of some of the smaller commercial enterprises located in and around the town centre and the retail offering which is available. The published census data illustrate all too clearly the root of the problem with insufficient disposable income to sustain a growing, vibrant and demand led retail offering.
6. The masterplan was commissioned by Chesham Renaissance. The service provider's Alison Morrison, who are at the forefront of work of this nature and based in London. Alison Morrison have produced many master plans of urban developments for settlements like Chesham. The masterplan is being produced in 3 stages. Stage I has been completed and was essentially a scoping exercise, although it did produce

the basis for the stage II masterplan which has now been completed. These 2 stages combine to provide the draft masterplan for Chesham.

7. The masterplan provides an interesting and essential introduction to Chesham and its history. Without this historical narrative it is difficult if not misleading to make judgements about some of the future characteristics of the town. One of the essential features of the town is its location both in terms of geography and geology in the Chilterns. This provides an interesting perspective on the town and its prospects for growth.
8. It has been clear for some years that the town's population is growing, in part because of the location of the Metropolitan line underground station and to the increase in small business employment. This is having the effect of gradually increasing the population of the town which in turn is meaning that the available space inside the AONB or in green belt is becoming severely constricted. The result of this is a gradual increase in the price of land and house prices.
9. The masterplan addresses five principles for growth. The first concerns town life. This like many market towns, the shift in shopping patterns has led to gaps in Chesham's provision. Consolidating shops in a central area will ensure this area is active and successful. The focus on shops in this way will also help to generate the second principle which is developing the evening economy. Chesham has a potential evening economy but which is now largely underutilised. It is possible that these future uses will be clustered in areas which will be attractive to those who operate and use them.
10. The third and fourth principles concern the civic buildings which are scattered around the town, and the theatre. The Elgiva Theatre it is proposed should be integrated better with the town centre with strong pedestrian connections and preferably a front door presence to the street. Creating a group of related civic buildings in a way which is both recognisable and easy to access is an important consideration. The Masterplan is proposing that those which need regenerating are re provided in a way which groups most if not these buildings together as a coherent whole.
11. A common principle of urban design in many towns is to provide space for pop-up uses. The masterplan considers that the popular market in the town provides a good base for enabling this activity in the town centre through events and performances. This can be focused on the high street, but also on sites identified for development in the short term. It may be that this can be related to a revival in craft industries. The beer brewing and fabric weaving and joinery industries are all part of Chesham's industrial heritage and are all crafts which are being revised as cottage industries across the country. This is something which the Masterplan encouraging stop
12. The last two principles for growth are related to commercial enterprise. The Masterplan regards it as important to retain some SME knowledge-based businesses in the town centre and to encourage others. There are many buildings identified in the masterplan for encouraging this, many of which are successful and others hold huge potential for similar adaptation.
13. The last of the principles for growth concerns the current large employers which are embedded in and around the town centre. The masterplan has identified that the release of some of this land, to the benefit of the large users of these sites, will enable housing to be re-provided on a scale not seen in Chesham for a long time. The Masterplan's proposal therefore is for the gradual relocation of many large

industries, and the transport arrangements necessary to support them, towards the periphery of the town. This basic principle is fundamental to the masterplan and provides the land required for new residential accommodation.

14. The provision of new homes is a central part of the master plan proposes. Reference has already been made to some of these proposals in the section on principles for growth. The provision of new homes is based on the following seven principles:
 - a) prioritise homes in the town centre;
 - b) redevelop poor quality buildings;
 - c) make use of former industrial sites;
 - d) promote living above the shop;
 - e) exploit background and parking areas;
 - f) ensure a broad mix of homes; and
 - g) provide homes for older people.
15. The character of Chesham is also referred to in the Masterplan and makes the conventional point of having to work with the historic urban grain and re-establish and recognise some of the historic approaches to the town. It also advocates the rejuvenation of historic yards and lanes and most particularly safeguarding the historic buildings and settings. An important element of the town which is emphasised is to retain views of the Chiltern Hills and Lowndes Park, and to reflect the materials which have been used over many centuries in creating some of the older buildings which still exist.
16. The streets and spaces in the town are also recognised in the Masterplan. It advocates consolidating parking to create more space for homes and businesses, and to change the character of Saint Mary's way which the Masterplan recognises is a key barrier between the centre of the town and Lowndes Park. This is in addition to another important characteristic related to streets and spaces which the need to strengthen the links to and from the town centre and relate these to the underground station and the bus network, and to invest in network of public spaces which are currently fragmented connected within the town centre.
17. This the masterplan has made some tentative proposals with a series of propositions for sites in around the town centre for either residential development, relocated car parking and similar uses. For example, proposals are made for many of Chesham's yards to provide a series of interconnected opportunities for mixed-use redevelopment. For Saint Mary's Way it is to provide an opportunity to reconnect the town centre with Lowndes Park, the Church and residential hinterland thus creating a strong new first impression for the town.
18. This approach also includes the Backs. The Master Plan makes proposals to consolidating parking for the station and the Waitrose store and introducing new street frontage development. The provision of accommodation in a central place for buses adjacent to this transport hub is also considered.

19. In addition to these proposals' others are made for some more distant sites. For example, Water Meadow car park and some of the areas to the south are considered for residential development, as are some other sites further to the north.
20. One of the most significant changes that is proposed relates to St Mary's Way. The Masterplan refers to the development of St Mary's Way which was instrumental in taking the pressure off traffic away from the High Street thus creating a much more attractive town centre environment. However, over time the Masterplan acknowledges that this new road introduced further problems of its own to the town including cutting off historic connections to the park and the parish church and the wider residential Internet.
21. The masterplan acknowledges that approaches to road design have changed considerably since St Mary's way was built. The Masterplan makes proposals which provide opportunities to address some of them whilst recognising that the road has an important part of play in the national highway network.
22. This the masterplan therefore provides a broad comprehensive introduction to the possibilities of regenerating the central part of Chesham and providing an increase in housing growth on a regulated basis for market sale and affordable homes, and providing for small businesses to thrive and prosper. It recognises Chesham as an historic market town and it recognises its position within the valley system of this part of the Chilterns. The industrial legacy of the town is recognised and built upon and it is anticipated by Chesham Renaissance that the Chesham which we see today will be very different and much improved because of the implementation of this Masterplan.