

DRAFT TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

Executive Summary

The Executive at its meeting on 15 July 2021 asked Officers to prepare the Town Centre Masterplan with the purpose of providing an overarching framework to help guide development and investment decisions in the Town Centre. The Executive specifically requested that public engagement should be central to the Masterplan preparation process. The Draft Masterplan has been completed accordingly and is attached as Appendix 1. An accompanying Site Analysis of each allocated and Housing Infrastructure Fund sites is in Appendix 2. An Executive Summary of the Draft Masterplan is in Appendix 3. A Consultation Plan setting out how the community will be consulted and engaged during the consultation period is in Appendix 4. The contents of the Masterplan reflect views expressed by the Residents' Panel and key stakeholders during an initial community engagement. A summary of the comments made during the early engagement is in Appendix 5. The LDF Working Group has considered the draft Masterplan on 5 July 2022. Officers are satisfied that the preparation of the Masterplan meets statutory requirements, and the Executive is requested to approve it for public consultation between 25 July 2022 and 16 October 2022.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

- (i) the contents of the Draft Woking Town Centre Masterplan and the accompanying Site Analysis and Consultation Plan be noted and approved for public consultation and engagement between 25 July 2022 and 16 October 2022; and
- (ii) delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director – Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, to approve any minor amendments to the Masterplan and the accompanying documents before it is published for community consultation and engagement.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: To give the public an opportunity to comment on the Draft Town Centre Masterplan and for their comments to be considered before the Masterplan is adopted.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Draft Town Centre Masterplan

Background Papers: None.

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Date Published: 6 July 2022

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Executive at its meeting on 15 July 2021 asked Officers to prepare the Town Centre Masterplan with the purpose of providing an overarching framework to help guide development and investment decisions in the Town Centre. The Executive specifically requested that public engagement should be central to the Masterplan preparation process. The Draft Masterplan has been completed accordingly and is attached as Appendix 1. An accompanying Site Analysis of each allocated and Housing Infrastructure Fund sites is in Appendix 2. An Executive Summary of the Draft Masterplan is in Appendix 3. A Consultation Plan setting out how the community will be consulted and engaged during the consultation period is in Appendix 4. The contents of the Masterplan reflect views expressed by the Residents' Panel and key stakeholders during an initial community engagement. A summary of the comments of the Residents' Panel is in Appendix 5. The Working Group has already scrutinised an earlier draft of the Masterplan, and their comments are incorporated in this latest version.

1.2 The vision for the Masterplan has been informed by suggestions made by the Residents' Panel and key stakeholders during the initial engagement:

Woking Town Centre will be:

- the primary focus of sustainable growth to maintain its status as an economic hub and a location for inward investment with a flourishing diverse, innovative, and digitally enabled economy,
- a transport hub which provides transport services, links and communication linking people to jobs, services and facilities;
- undergoing a significant change to be shaped by the Town Centre Masterplan, this change includes the provision of a range of shops, homes, jobs, cultural, health and leisure facilities to meet the needs of residents and modern businesses whilst enhancing the heritage and environmental assets of the area;
- a place where it is expected that development will be of exemplary design within the framework of the Townscape Strategy for the Town Centre and with green infrastructure embedded as essential and integral part of the design;
- a place where development is accessible to the disabled and all other users; and
- a place where development will be informed by appropriate public engagement.

1.3 The vision provides a clear sense of focus and direction for the key requirements and expectations of what is needed for development to achieve to be acceptable. The report requests the Executive to approve the draft Masterplan for a 12-week consultation and engagement from 25 July 2022 – 16 October 2022. This will give the public sufficient time to comment and for the comments to be considered before the draft Masterplan is finalised for adoption. It is also an opportunity to test whether the issues the community wanted to be addressed by the Masterplan are adequately covered where possible.

1.4 The Masterplan covers a range of topics that residents and key stakeholders want the Masterplan to address. Below is a summary of what each of the topics is broadly about. However, Members are encouraged to read the Masterplan in full to understand its detailed requirements and how they will apply to day-to-day planning and investment decisions.

1.5 The Masterplan is informed by robust evidence base. The Council appointed GL Hearn to undertake a Housing Market Assessment to assess the capacity of the Town Centre to accommodate the nature and type of housing being proposed at the Town Centre and over what period. The Study concluded that there is sufficient demand for the nature and type of housing and the Town Centre is well placed as a location to meet that need. Members were invited to receive updates and presentations on the Housing Market Assessment by GL Hearn.

The Housing Market Assessment has been completed and Members have received a copy of the Study Report. The Townscape Strategy and the Site Analysis undertaken by Allies and Morrison have also been completed (subject to any minor amendments of editorial nature) and are an important and an integral part of the Masterplan (see Appendices 1 and 2). Like the Housing Market Assessment, Members have already received a presentation on the Townscape Strategy by Allies and Morrison.

- 1.6 The Site Analysis sets out development principles for each site, including the height of development on the site. This is further work requested by the Working Group. The work on heights has been informed by a design-led approach which provides a justifiable and defensible approach. There is a risk of a successful challenge if heights proposed are not justified.
- 1.7 A significant part of the Town Centre Masterplan had been prepared in-house. Apart from the Townscape Strategy, all the other topics were undertaken in-house by Officers. The Working Group has considered the in-house work at its meeting on 14 June 2022. All Members were invited to this meeting and their comments are already incorporated in this latest version of the Masterplan.
- 1.8 Given the extent of the Working Group's involvement, scrutiny and oversight of the Masterplan preparation process to date, the Executive is requested to approve the draft Masterplan for community engagement and consultation.

2.0 Summary of content covered by the Masterplan

- 2.1 It was agreed earlier in the process that community engagement would be central to the preparation of the Masterplan. An early engagement was undertaken to seek views from the Residents' Panel and key stakeholders on what they envisage the Town Centre to be and the issues they wish the Masterplan to address. A range of issues were raised that has informed the type of Masterplan and the topics covered within it. Some of the key stakeholders that were engaged include Ward Councillors, Political Group Leaders of the Council, local business groups, Surrey County Council, statutory consultees, Network Rail and local businesses.
- 2.2 The following is a summary of the topics covered in the Masterplan. Members are reminded that by law, the content of the Masterplan should be in general conformity with the development plan for the area:
 - **Townscape Strategy** - The design quality of new development in Woking town centre has a direct bearing on its success. In supporting relevant Local Plan policy, the masterplan promotes high quality design in new development. In doing so, it is important that a proper account is taken of the existing character of Woking town centre. The Town Centre Masterplan defines new character areas across the centre which will help developers to do just this.

The town centre has seen some new very tall buildings. Tall buildings in the right locations can bring significant benefits to Woking. High density developments in central locations takes pressure off releasing more sensitive land in less central locations. But the town centre needs a coherent and a strategic approach to where new tall buildings should be located. The Woking Town Centre masterplan presents an evidence-based building heights framework for the whole town centre, identifying areas that might be better or less-well suited to new tall buildings.

- **Sustainable construction** – The Council has declared a climate emergency, pledging to accelerate its effort to bring greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 in line with national targets. The Masterplan sets out clear policy requirements that development must achieve to be acceptable. It highlights opportunities that exist to assist in achieving the requirements and provides good practice examples as a guide.
- **Green Infrastructure and biodiversity** – Green infrastructure provision has a positive bearing on the health and wellbeing of the community. There are significant opportunities to enhance green infrastructure and biodiversity at the town Centre. The Masterplan provides an overview of the current green infrastructure provision, good examples of what could be achieved and the requirements that development will be expected to achieve to be policy compliant.
- **General Infrastructure** – It is important for development to be supported by adequate and appropriate infrastructure in a timely manner. The Council has undertaken an Infrastructure Needs Assessment, which has informed the Masterplan. The Masterplan sets out infrastructure requirements that development should contribute to provide.
- **Heritage Assets** – Woking has a rich heritage that needs to be conserved. It includes Listed Buildings, ancient monuments, and Conservation Areas. The Masterplan makes sure that development proposals take full account of the heritage assets of the area and their settings with the aim of enhancing them.
- **Leisure and Culture** – Woking has a diverse and rich leisure and culture assets with significant opportunities to be enhanced on the back of future development proposals and partnership working between the public sector and the development industry. The Masterplan sets out how this can be achieved.
- **Flood risk and surface water drainage** – Development has the potential to adversely affect surface water runoff and flood risk if measures are not taken at the earliest stages of a scheme's development to help avoid or minimise the effect. The Masterplan is clear on the sources of flooding, provides examples of practical measures that can be applied and sets out clear requirements that development should consider to be acceptable.
- **Economy** – The Town Centre is the primary focus for economic growth in the borough to maintain its status as an economic hub. The period of the pandemic has had an impact on the economy of the town centre and in particular, on retail and hospitality. For example, the way people shop and working patterns are changing, and measures should be put in place to respond to these changes. The Masterplan responds to these challenges by setting out measures to facilitate sustainable economic growth and how developers can work in partnership to deliver that.
- **Housing** – The Council has a policy obligation and a statutory duty to meet several housing requirements, including planning to meet locally identified housing needs. The Masterplan ensures that the housing development that comes forward is sustainable, embedding appropriate and adequate green infrastructure and is design-led within the framework of a well-considered Townscape Strategy. It also sets out a Townscape Strategy that will help determine anticipated capacities for the HIF sites taking a design-led approach.
- **Transport** – congestion is a key concern of residents and key stakeholders that needs to be addressed. Development should be accessible to all transport modes, and given the location of the Town Centre, by walking, cycling and public transport in that order before car-based travel. The Masterplan has specific proposals to help achieve this goal.

- **Delivery** – The Masterplan should be deliverable. This section of the Masterplan sets out how the provisions of the Masterplan will be delivered.
- **Site Analysis** – The Site Analysis takes a design-led approach in assessing how individual allocated and HIF sites could be managed within the overall Townscape Strategy. It sets key development principles covering access, land uses, public realm, relationship with surroundings, massing and height.

3.0 How the Draft Masterplan has been prepared

- 3.1 This section of the report deals with engagement undertaken in preparing the draft Masterplan up to this stage and the engagement that will be undertaken when the Masterplan is published for consultation.
- 3.2 The Council had been committed to make sure that the community and its stakeholders take some ownership of the Masterplan. The commitment to prepare the Masterplan was by a cross-party consensus of the Council. Members were appropriately briefed and engaged to provide a steer on what type of Masterplan they want for the Town Centre. Three options for the Masterplan were considered, and Members agreed that their decision on the preferred option should be informed by community and stakeholder engagements.
- 3.3 The initial engagement focused on the concept of Master planning rather than its detailed contents. In parallel to this initial consultation, the story about the journey to date in establishing the current pattern of spatial distribution of development was explained and discussed to seek views on whether the trajectory of the spatial distribution of development as set out in the Core Strategy should continue. Given the importance of the initial engagement, and the necessity to reach as many sections of the community as possible, a specialist consultant was engaged to work with the Council to undertake one to one engagement with key stakeholders. The outcome of the engagement was used to inform the preferred option for the Masterplan, and the Working Group received a report on that.
- 3.4 The initial engagement also sought views on the HIF housing requirement. Given the scale of the housing provision, it was deemed appropriate to seek views from the community about the overall scale of the housing to be provided and how it should be spatially managed. The Masterplan addresses this by using the design-led approach of the Townscape Strategy to estimate the anticipated capacities for each of the HIF sites (see Appendix 2). This approach is not influenced by housing numbers but rather by what is appropriate in design terms for the sites. Whilst the Site Analysis demonstrates that the overall quantum of the HIF housing ask could not be met on the 13 identified HIF sites, the Townscape Strategy provides a robust framework for other windfall sites to come forward. The Council will continue to monitor delivery and respond to future trends.
- 3.5 A digital engagement platform was used to provide a civic site for engagement and consultation. The platform, the Woking Community Forum, was used for the Residents Panel engagement sessions and to seek views on the Masterplan.
- 3.6 There has been significant Members' engagement. The Portfolio Holder, the Shadow Portfolio Holder and the Chair of the LDF Working Group received regular updates throughout the preparation of the Masterplan. All the above were engagement undertaken prior to the Draft Masterplan being prepared and agreed for formal engagement and consultation.
- 3.7 The Masterplan will be published for formal consultation and engagement between 25 July and 16 October 2022. The Consultation Plan in Appendix 4 provides specific details on the events that will be undertaken to reach all sections of the community. The Consultation Plan ensures that the community engagement meets all statutory requirements as set out in the Regulations and the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), but more importantly, it goes beyond that to help reach all section of the community. A variety of consultation methods will be employed,

as set out in Appendix 4, to ensure effective, fair and comprehensive consultation. The proposed consultation methods are well tailored to the various sections of the community to encourage them to respond. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) provides guidance on consultation requirements for the preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents. The Consultation Plan takes that into account.

- 3.8 Some of the key engagement activities which is planned to be undertaken include the opening of a pop-up shop in the town centre, exhibitions and a video walking tour setting out the overall ambition for the place, and how residents can engage on the proposal. Further digital options are being considered such as the use of a digital map for residents to pin ideas and views on.

4.0 Status of the Masterplan

- 4.1 The Masterplan will have the status of a Supplementary Planning Document and as such must meet prescribed statutory consultation requirements before it can be adopted. By legislation, its contents should be in general conformity with the development plan for the area, in this case, the Core Strategy, the Site Allocations DPD and the Development Management Policies DPD. Officers are satisfied that these requirements have been met.

5.0 Next stages

- 5.1 Subject to the recommendations of the Executive the Draft Masterplan and the accompanying documents will be published for a series of community consultation and engagement. The report includes a Consultation Plan (see Appendix 4) setting out how the Council will engage with the community and stakeholders during the consultation period. Statutory consultation requirements will be completed alongside positive engagement with Neighbourhood Forums, residents' Associations, neighbouring authorities, local businesses and statutory consultees. Further to this, several key engagement activities will be undertaken which is planned to include the opening of a pop-up shop in the town centre, exhibitions and a video walking tour setting out the overall ambition for the place, and how residents can engage on the proposal. Further digital options are being considered such as the use of a digital map for residents to pin ideas and views on.
- 5.2 The Masterplan will be published for twelve weeks consultation period instead of the normal six weeks to take account of the holiday period/season and to give the community sufficient time to respond. The consultation period is scheduled between **25 July 2022 and 16 October 2022**. A report on representations received with a recommendation to adopt the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will be considered by the **LDF Working Group**, the **Executive and Council in early 2023**.
- 5.3 The Portfolio Holder, the Chair of the LDF Working Group and the Leader of the Council will continually be briefed on progress with the preparation of the Masterplan until it is adopted. This will give them the opportunity to ask questions and for any concerns to be addressed.
- 5.4 There will be pre-consultation publicity to let people know about the consultation. For example, there will be an article to be included/published in the Woking Magazine on the preparation of the Masterplan and progress so far. This will be widely distributed across the borough.

6.0 Woking for all strategy 2022 - 2027

6.1 The Masterplan supports the following objectives of the Woking for All Strategy 2022 - 2027:

Engaged Communities – A healthy, inclusive and engaged community-

- Reducing social inequality – the masterplan will guide the delivery of new housing and affordable housing developments and support both the Homelessness and Housing Strategy.
- Engaging our communities – engagement will be central to the preparation of the masterplan.

Healthier Communities – An enterprising, vibrant and sustainable borough-

- Promoting a strong economy – setting a vision for the town centre will promote investment, support business retention and promote Woking as a destination for business to relocate to.
- Improving the health and wellbeing of all residents – the masterplan will set out areas of open space, health and leisure provision and support the town centre as a cultural hub. The masterplan will support the emerging Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- Improving the Borough's biodiversity and green infrastructure – the masterplan will set out the quality and quantity of open space.
- Sustainable development – The masterplan will highlight the vision of a sustainable and inclusive town centre and identify opportunities for energy efficiency and generation.

Prospering Communities – An innovative, proactive and effective Council -

- Strengthening partnerships – the masterplan has/will be developed following engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders and the wider community.
- Effective use of resources – setting a clear vision of the town centre would support the effective use of limited resources, in particular, the reuse of previously developed land.

7.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

7.1 The Executive has approved a budget of £100,000 for the preparation of the Masterplan. Members should note that a significant section of the Masterplan has been prepared in-house by Officers of the Council. The cost of these is being met from existing Service Plan budgets. The indirect benefits that the Masterplan is likely to generate would far outweigh the cost of preparing the Masterplan.

Equalities and Human Resources

7.2 There are no equalities and human resources implications for preparing the Masterplan.

Legal

7.3 Planning law requires the Masterplan to be prepared in accordance with the development plan for the area. Care has been taken to ensure that this is adhered to.

8.0 Engagement and Consultation

8.1 See Section 3 above.

REPORT ENDS