

EXECUTIVE – 2 FEBRUARY 2023

MASTERPLAN UPDATE AND NEXT STAGE

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. On 14 July 2022 the Executive agreed the draft text for the Draft Woking Town Centre Masterplan and the accompanying Site Analysis and Consultation Plan be noted and approved for formal public consultation and engagement. The public consultation ran for 12 weeks from 25 July 2022 to 17 October 2022. During the consultation period, there were nearly 5,000 visits to the Masterplan website, and over 5,900 views of the video, almost 500 people attending roadshows and seminars, and 500 visitors to the Masterplan pop-up shop.

There were over 850 formal consultation responses from almost 450 individuals and organisations, including developers with interests in the town centre. As part of the public consultation process, the Council received a potential challenge to the approach taken in bringing forward this document as a Supplementary Planning Document providing guidance as opposed to Development Plan Document. Following the close of public consultation officers have reviewed all representations made and have also taken legal advice in relation to a potential challenge through Judicial Review if the Masterplan is adopted as drafted. Furthermore, on 3 November 2022 the Planning Inspectorate issued their decision on the Crown Place Development, granting planning permission for a scheme of up to 28 storeys to the east of the town centre. This appeal decision changes the nature of the townscape and has a considerable impact on the proposed townscape and 'bell curve' set out in the Masterplan which is also being considered by officers in determining the appropriate steps moving forward. The likely consequence of the appeal decision, along with a potential legal challenge, and changes to the planning system set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, are covered in more detail in this report.

A report setting out options for the next steps, which requires further detailed work for officers, will be brought to a future meeting of the Executive for decision.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

- (i) the report be noted; and
- (ii) Officers to bring back a details options report to future meeting of the Executive.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: For officers to fully assess options to provide thorough advice for Members to agree next steps.

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

- Background Papers:** [Background paper - Crown Place appeal decision](#)
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- Date Published:** 25 January 2023

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. At that time it was considered that the Masterplan should have the status of a Supplementary Planning Document. The procedure for preparing and adopting Supplementary Planning Documents must be carried out in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Public consultation on the Draft Masterplan (carried out in accordance with Regulation 13) ended on 17 October 2022. National Planning Practice Guidance states that 'Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) should build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan. As they do not form part of the development plan, they cannot introduce new planning policies into the development plan. They are however a material consideration in decision-making'.
- 1.2 The Masterplan set out to establish an overarching vision for the town centre to enable designed, sustainable development, such as building new homes, cultivating a thriving retail and business environment and strengthening Woking's cultural and leisure offer. It contains detailed standards and principles that deliver a shared vision for the town centre, including guidance on building heights and density, and provides a long-term vision for Woking's skyline to 2030 and beyond.
- 1.3 On 14 July 2022 the Executive agreed 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, which ran from 25 July 2022 to 17 October 2022. During that time eight roadshows were held in locations across the Borough, seminars and question and answer sessions held, and a pop-up shop opened in Mercia Walk in the centre for four weeks. A thorough Consultation and Communication Plan was prepared, outlining specific detail of consultation methods and events. Detailed information on the consultation and engagement methods used can be found at Appendix 1.
- 1.4 The consultation was publicised through posters, banners and publicity (including postcard size flyers) around the centre and the Borough, through an introductory promotional video shown on the big screen on Jubilee Square, through social media, e-newsletters and multiple inclusions in local newspapers. QR codes enabled the public to interact with 'talking statues' (and at other focal points) through their mobile phones, which signposted the Masterplan consultation. The Masterplan consultation material was available on the main engagement hub website (clearly signposted on the Council website) and the Planning Policy (woking2027) website. Hard copies were available in the Borough's libraries and at the Civic Offices for the whole 12 week consultation period, and in the pop-up shop and at roadshows.
- 1.5 During the consultation period, there were nearly 5,000 visits to the Masterplan website, and over 5,900 views of the video, almost 500 people attending roadshows and seminars, and 500 visitors to the Masterplan pop-up shop.
- 1.6 There were over 850 formal consultation responses from almost 450 individuals and organisations. These were received through the Masterplan engagement hub website (793 surveys completed) with the remainder being email or postal responses to Planning Policy. Each of those representations have been individually reviewed and consideration given to how they may be addressed moving forward. A consultation summary report is attached as Appendix 2. For most chapters of the Masterplan it will be noted that matters raised can be quite readily addressed. However, with the key chapter on Townscape there are more challenging issues that may not be as easily addressed within the drafting and form of the current Masterplan.
- 1.7 The first such matter, separate from the Masterplan consultation process, is the Planning Inspectorate decision on the Crown Place appeal, dated 3 December 2022 and which granted

planning permission for a development of a group of buildings, notably 3 of which are 23, 25 and 28 storey towers, providing 366 residential units, commercial and community uses and associated car parking.

- 1.8 Secondly, as part of the public consultation exercise in response to the draft Masterplan, a representation was received on behalf of a number of developers with interests in the town centre regarding a possible legal challenge if adopted. This was accompanied by a Counsel opinion which in effect challenges the adoption of the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and also considers some of the specific details of the Masterplan in relation to existing adopted planning policy. The representation also suggests that, should the Masterplan be adopted as drafted and as a SPD they would seek a legal challenge in the form of a Judicial Review. In the light of a possible legal challenge, the Council has sought its own independent Counsel's opinion (KC) on all of the matters raised by this particular representation.
- 1.9 Thirdly, the proposed changes set out within the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the current consultation on changes to the NPPF could affect the way this Plan should come forward and the weight given to it in the long term as an SPD.
- 1.10 Section 2 of this report considers both of these matters in more detail.

2.0 Crown Place appeal decision and potential challenge to masterplan as drafted

- 2.1 Crown Place appeal. This site is identified as UA15 in the Site Allocation Development Plan Document 2021 (SADPD) and also in the Masterplan appendix. The site lies to the east of the town centre and the Masterplan document itself (page 95) suggests that an appropriate height for development of this site would be 4-10 storeys. This scale of development is also reflected in the bell curve diagrams on the first few pages of the appendix document.
- 2.2 The appeal decision has granted permission for demolition of all existing buildings including existing footbridge to Victoria Way Car Park and redevelopment of site to provide a new building ranging from 5x to 28x storeys plus basement level comprising up to 366x residential units (Use Class C3), commercial (Use Classes A1/A2/A3) and community uses (Use Classes D1/D2) at ground floor and first floor level and associated internal and external amenity spaces, basement level car parking, cycle parking, bin storage, ancillary facilities, plant, new public realm, landscaping and highway works. Three of the approved buildings are 23, 25 and 28 storeys in height respectively.
- 2.3 In paragraph 26 of the appeal decision, the Inspector concludes on the issue of character and appearance, that she "did not consider that the proposed development would have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area. There is no doubt that the towers would be highly visible and would not reflect their immediate surroundings in terms of height. However, that does not mean that the scheme would thus be unacceptable. The existing built environment within the eastern part of the town centre is generally uninspiring and has little to commend it. The proposal would introduce a development of high quality and distinction and a landmark at the easterly approach to the town centre. Overall, the development would enhance townscape character and, in this respect, comply with development plan policy, including policies CS1, CS2, CS21 and CS24 in the CS. Furthermore, it would be in accordance with the principles of the Design SPD".
- 2.4 The Inspector further considered there was no policy impediment to a tall building of any particular height on the appeal site. It is important here to distinguish between policy, contained in the adopted local plan (Core Strategy and SADPD) and guidance contained within the adopted 2015 design guide, including the section contained therein on tall buildings, and the guidance which the Masterplan would provide as an SPD, which is not part of the adopted planning policy framework for the Borough. It should also be noted that in relation to the draft Masterplan the Inspector commented that she was "*aware that there have been a number of*

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responses, including an objection by the Appellant. At this stage it is therefore not known whether the current approach in the Masterplan will be carried forward or not. For that reason, it can be given very limited weight as a material consideration in this appeal.”

- 2.5 This appeal decision has clear implication for the Masterplan in that it has changed the nature of the townscape. As a minimum, the design principles for this site, including what prospective heights may be appropriate, will need reconsidering. Realistically the eastern part of the town centre, not just this 'gateway' site will need to be reviewed and the 'bell curve' amended accordingly. This level of amendment could have quite a significant impact on the Masterplan as currently drafted and will therefore likely require further public consultation.
- 2.6 The second, perhaps less obvious, implication builds on the Inspector's reference to the weight attached to policy as opposed to guidance. The Inspector's approach here is sound. Whether or not an adopted masterplan as an SPD would have led the Inspector to reach an alternative conclusion would be mere speculation. What is perhaps clearer is that, given the weight correctly attached to adopted policy, should consideration be given to what form of document the masterplan should be. I.e., is there merit in considering bringing forward a DPD which could introduce policy and would be a more robust tool in resisting taller buildings within the town centre? This is considered further as an option in section 3 below.
- 2.7 The potential legal challenge to the Masterplan if adopted. The potential legal challenge on the draft Masterplan is raised on two matters. The first is whether the Masterplan should be produced and adopted as a DPD rather than an SPD. Section 17 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 ('PCPA 2004') provides for the Secretary of State to make regulations as to the preparation of certain types of planning documents. Those regulations are the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012 in particular Regulation 5. These regulations are very complex. The second matter raised is whether or not the Masterplan is in conflict with the already adopted plan, a test set out in Regulation 8(3) of the above Regulations.
- 2.8 It may be useful here to set out what the role of an SPD is. The National Planning Policy Framework (last updated July 2021) define SPDs as "Documents which add further detail to the policies in the development plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan". In National Planning Practice Guidance (2019) this is further specified in that "Supplementary planning documents (SPDs) should build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan. As they do not form part of the development plan, they cannot introduce new planning policies into the development plan. They are however a material consideration in decision-making. They should not add unnecessarily to the financial burdens on development".
- 2.9 The Council has sought its own Counsel's (KC) opinion on these matters, in order to determine the next stage for the Masterplan and to provide clear advice to Members. It is recognised that the plan published for consultation does provide site specific guidance in order to present a clear position for developers who wanted certainty as to the Council's position on building heights as well as a vision for the townscape that residents could understand. However, while that guidance was welcomed by many the advice of the KC in this regard is that the plan as drafted, with the aims that it seeks to achieve, would be most appropriate as a DPD rather than an SPD.
- 2.10 On the matter of conflict with the adopted development plan, the Masterplan as drafted does conflict, in particular with the adopted SADPD, in terms of site yields for some individual sites which are lower than what the adopted policy states, notwithstanding the Masterplan as drafted does suggest a higher overall number of homes could be achieved in the town centre, with the inclusion of HIF and windfall sites.

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- 2.11 Given the above, Counsel's advice is that the Masterplan as it stands could not be safely adopted as an SPD given the challenge presented by the representations received.
- 2.12 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which is currently in the House of Lords, and the current consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and proposed National Development Management Policies published in December 2022 sets out proposed changes to the planning policy framework, including changes to legislation on planning policy, which include reforms to the plan making system and the role of Supplementary Planning Documents. These may have an influence on how this plan should come forward.
- 2.13 The Crown Place appeal decision, the legal advice the Council has received and the proposals related to changes within the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill suggest that the Council should not proceed to adopt the Masterplan in its current form. In the light of the above, officers are now considering options that will achieve the aims as originally set out, those being the production of a Town Centre Masterplan with the purpose of providing an overarching framework to help guide development and investment decisions in the Town Centre.
- 2.14 Notwithstanding the above, the Council has published and consulted on its vision for the town which has been welcomed by many. The ambition and need for a clear and robust plan to guide development in the town centre, to give certainty to developers wishing to invest, and provide officers with an effective tool to assess planning applications and defend decisions on appeal remains. Options for next steps are therefore now being considered by officers. A report on those options will be brought back to a future meeting of the Executive.

3.0 Corporate Strategy

- 3.1 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.
- 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.

4.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 4.1 There are significant cost implications for the Council if a claim is issued for Judicial Review and progressed through the High Court. In order to avoid unnecessary additional expense to the taxpayers purse and in view of Counsel's opinion it is clear that the best approach for the Council is not to proceed to adopt the Town Centre Masterplan in its draft form.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 4.2 The report does not have any direct equalities implications.
- 4.3 There are no HR issues arising from this report.

Legal

- 4.4 The legal implications are referred to in the body of the report.
- 4.5 Further to the letter received with a threat of Judicial Review the Council has sought and received Counsel's opinion regarding the matters raised.
- 4.6 Attention is drawn to the main legal issue arising from this report; that there is a real risk of Judicial Review with a reasonable probability that the claim would succeed if the Town Centre Masterplan is adopted as drafted as a SPD.

5.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 Detailed in paragraphs 1.3 to 1.6 above.

REPORT ENDS

Masterplan Engagement

Roadshows and Zoom

Date	Venue	Attendees
28-Jul	Byfleet	41
02-Aug	Zoom (Capped to 15)	9
03-Aug	Sheerwater	8
08-Aug	Goldsworth Park	44
09-Aug	Westfield	46
17-Aug	Woking	35
23-Aug	Goldsworth Park with SCC	80
01-Sep	Zoom (Capped to 15)	16
16-Sep	Stakeholder Zoom	14
28-Sep	WeAct: Net-zero visioning walk	8
29-Sep	Pyrford Cricket Club	30
30-Sep	Woking Chamber Networking	30
04-Oct	Horsell Village Hall	54
12-Oct	Woking Means Business Seminar	
Sep	Retirement homes	46
Total		534

EHQ* Masterplan Themes

Theme	Downloads	Surveys Completed
Townscape Strategy	884	158
Herritage	119	67
Leisure and Culture	145	104
Flood Risk	52	34
Green Infrastructure	61	61
Housing	194	56
Sustainable Construction	93	71
Transport	124	126
Economy	108	62
General Infrastructure	150	58
Total	1,930	797
Email submissions		71
Postal submissions		4
Grand total		872

Pop-Up Shop

Date	Number
20-Aug	48
22-Aug	30
24-Aug	68
31-Aug	26
02-Sep	33
03-Sep	30
05-Sep	29
07-Sep	33
09-Sep	N/A
10-Sep	N/A
12-Sep	N/A
14-Sep	N/A
16-Sep	N/A
17-Sep	N/A
21-Sep	49
23-Sep	40
24-Sep	105
Total	491

* **EHQ** - Engagement HQ = Engagement hub website, including interactive

QR code data

QR code name	Scans
Masterplan generic shopping centre entrances	16
Masterplan post cards	16
Pop-up shop exterior	18
Woking News and Mail	8
Jubilee Square board	9
Borough Boards	11
Pop up shop exterior	18
Generic location pop up banners	11
Surrey Ad	1

Facebook advertising

Driving traffic to the masterplan landing page

Date	Reach	Clicks	Amount spent
Aug 2 2022 - Aug 16 2022	31,094	1,703	£200
Aug 25 2022 - Sept 8 2022	28,200	1,019	£200
Sep 28- Oct 17 2022	36,280	1,090	£259

Masterplan videos

Video	Views
Full video	4.2k
Transport	225
Economy	77
Flood risk	79
Green infrastructure	130
Heritage	66
Housing	161
Infrastructure	157
Leisure and culture	320
Sustainable construction	161
Townscape	310

E-newsletter promotion results

Edition breakdown:

Date	Theme	Link(s)	no. clicks
July 25 2022	General	General Video	420
		General Video	136
July 29 2022	General	General Video	165
		Landing page	60
August 5 2022	General	Landing page	32
		General Video	84
August 12 2022	Townscape Strategy	Townscape video	218
		Woking by 2030	137
		Townscape strategy landing page	60
August 16 2022	Pop-up shop special	General Video	80
		Shop map location	49
		Landing page	27
		Pop up shop press release	19
August 19 2022	Green infrastructure	Biodiversity video	104
		Biodiversity landing page	44
		Landing page	32
August 26 2022	Leisure and culture	Leisure and culture video	131
		Leisure and culture landing page	21
September 2 2022	Housing	Landing page	56
September 23 2022	General	Landing page	24
September 30 2022	Sustainable construction	Sustainable construction video	51
		Sustainable construction landing page	20
		Landing page	8
October 7 2022	General	General Video	42
		Landing page	16
October 14 2022	General	General Video	41
		Landing page	35

Overall results

Link	Total clicks
Landing page (general)	290
General video	965

Town Centre Masterplan – Consultation summary report (draft)

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1. Background and summary of the consultation

The Masterplan sets out to establish an overarching vision for the town centre to enable design-led, sustainable development, such as building new homes, cultivating a thriving retail and business environment and strengthening Woking's cultural and leisure offer. It contains detailed standards and principles that deliver a shared vision for the town centre, including guidance on building heights and density, and provides a long-term vision for Woking's skyline to 2030 and beyond.

The Council's Executive requested that public engagement be central to the preparation of the Masterplan, and initial community engagement, through sessions with the Council's Residents Panel and other key stakeholders was carried out in the autumn of 2021 (detailed [in the Report on Masterplan Stakeholder Interviews](#)). This engagement informed the preparation of the draft Masterplan, which was subject to extensive and comprehensive consultation, lasting 12 weeks from 25 July to 17 October 2022. During that time eight roadshows were held in locations across the Borough, seminars and question and answer sessions held, and a pop-up shop opened in Mercia Walk in the centre for four weeks. A thorough Consultation and Communication Plan was prepared, outlining specific detail of consultation methods and events, which can be found at Appendix 1. Detailed information on the consultation and engagement methods used can be found at Appendix 2.

The consultation was publicised through posters, banners and publicity (including postcard size flyers) around the centre and the Borough, through an introductory promotional video shown on the big screen on Jubilee Square, through social media, e-newsletters and multiple inclusions in local newspapers. QR codes enabled the public to interact with 'talking statues' (and at other focal points) through their mobile phones, which signposted the Masterplan consultation.

The Masterplan consultation material was available on the main engagement hub website (clearly signposted on the Council website) and the Planning Policy ([woking2027](#)) website. Hard copies were available in the Borough's libraries and at the Civic Offices for the whole 12 week consultation period, and in the pop-up shop and at roadshows.

During the consultation period, there were nearly 5,000 visits to the Masterplan website, and over 5,900 views of the video, over 500 people attending roadshows, seminars and events, and nearly 500 visitors to the Masterplan pop-up shop.

There were over 850 formal consultation responses from almost 450 individuals and organisations. These were received through the Masterplan engagement hub website (793 surveys completed) with the remainder being email or postal responses to Planning Policy.

2.a. Themes and structure

The Town Centre Masterplan is structured into themed chapters, and the Engagement hub webpage (which included consultation summaries and survey questions) followed these themes. Where email responses or letters have been received, these have been broken down into representations (or comments on a specific point) which fit under the themes. While there is some necessary overlap between themes, this is acknowledged as part of the complexity of planning for any place, and leads to cross-referencing between chapters.

The theme based structure forms the basis for the summary report. Under each themed section, a snapshot of one or two comments is given, as a flavour of responses received. Then key issues from each chapter or theme are pulled out, a comment is given on how those issues are or will be addressed in the Masterplan or through other means.

Due to the level of response received, it must be noted that this report provides a high level summary of consultation responses and outcomes. A detailed breakdown of all representations received and an officer response has been collated and will be available in due course.

2.b Townscape Strategy

What stakeholders said:

Historic England were concerned about the potential for a 'plateau' effect to arise from the definition of building heights, and recommended a toolkit developed by Oxford City Council.

Most responses from developers and landowners referred to the Townscape Strategy. The Counsel opinion commissioned by three of them, although it focussed on the Site Specific Guidance, also stated that the Townscape Strategy conflicts with existing DPDs in some respects. Outside the Counsel opinion, further conflicts between the Townscape Strategy and elements of the Core Strategy, Site Allocations DPD, and Design SPD were claimed. There was a proposal that the height ranges should be given by character area, rather than by block. The analysis in the strategy was said to be insufficiently detailed, with not enough attention to existing tall buildings or to street level views. It was proposed that other skyline options than the bell curve should have been assessed. One developer commissioned a detailed critique of the Strategy from an urban design perspective.

Summary of key issues:

This Masterplan chapter received a high level of response, with 157 responses from members of the public through the Engagement Hub and 13 by email.

Out of the members of the public who responded, 48 supported the Tall Building Framework. 106 people thought it inappropriate, of whom 70 people wanted building heights to be lower (in some cases this was an objection to the potential for new 30+ storey buildings in the central cluster, while a few objected to anything above 4-5 storeys, and in a minority of cases the respondent appeared to be objecting more to recent developments than to the Framework itself). 14 people wanted some site specific change, and 14 people said the Framework was too restrictive of height.

Specific points raised by several members of the public included frequently expressed dislike for tall buildings, and concern at the pressure on infrastructure they will generate; a smaller number of people who supported tall buildings, either for what they contribute to the town centre or as a way of relieving development pressure elsewhere; a desire for more green space; concern at the spread of tall buildings south of the railway line; various proposals for overall height limits between 3 and 18 storeys; a desire for more detail on streetscape and materials; and issues of safe public spaces, wind tunnels, shade and privacy.

How those issues will be addressed

The townscape character analysis is considered broadly valid and appropriate as evidence. The presentation could be improved and factual errors corrected, which would lead to a small number of consequential amendments to the strategy itself. It could be made clearer that the Townscape Strategy is a high level strategy and different heights could be accepted if adequately justified by evidence. Heights could be expressed in metres rather than number of storeys; and there is potential to include the Town Centre fringe areas in the character area review. The concept of the 'bell curve' is proposed to be dropped, in light of comments received and of the Crown Place appeal decision. Questions raised in the Counsel opinion are proposed to be addressed through an overall review of the Masterplan project.

2.c Sustainable construction

What stakeholders said:

Surrey County Council *“We support the masterplan’s ambition that buildings should minimise emissions and incorporate measures that adapt to future weather changes due to climate change. We also welcome its encouragement for new and redeveloped buildings to exceed local planning policy and national building regulations requirements and to pursue net zero where feasible.”*

Summary of key issues

The Sustainable Construction chapter received over 70 responses from individuals and organisations. Those who responded were generally supportive of the Sustainable Construction masterplan, however many of those who responded felt the Council should aim for higher technical standards and meet targets sooner than the set dates of, for example, net zero by 2050.

There is concern arising from the sustainability of new development, particularly with regard to the construction of tall buildings, as well as demolition of existing buildings and associated embodied carbon. There is a clear desire to increase green infrastructure provision across the Town Centre and to integrate suitable climate change mitigation methods, such as on-site energy generation in new developments.

It is worth highlighting in this section that Thameswey (local energy provider) have raised concern regarding distribution of development across a wide geographical area, referencing sites identified in the Masterplan. The wide distribution of development would require extra infrastructure to extend the decentralised energy network, which could be unfeasible. Lastly, the issue of sustainable transport was raised in many responses.

How those issues will be addressed

The Masterplan sets out an appropriate ambition for sustainable construction and design within the remit of a supplementary planning document (SPD). It presents local case studies in the Town Centre, which demonstrate a range of design solutions that can be integrated to deliver development built to a high environmental standard. The Masterplan is ambitious in encouraging new buildings to exceed minimum local planning policy and Building Regulations requirements, and also highlights the ‘retrofit first’ principle to encourage re-use of good quality existing buildings. The Masterplan covers green infrastructure in a separate chapter, however there are many design solutions presented in the Sustainable Construction chapter, which include green infrastructure measures to mitigate against effects such as overheating.

The Council will continue to work with Thameswey to explore feasibility of opportunities for sites to be incorporated in the CHP. Lastly, Transport is covered in the General Infrastructure and Transport sections of the Masterplan, which set out sustainable transport strategies. However, the Sustainable Construction chapter highlights the need to incorporate suitable electrical vehicle (EV) charging points and cycle parking to support development.

2.d Heritage

What stakeholders said:

Surrey County Council *“The masterplan mentions the possibility of installing information boards outside key assets and as part of a wider signage strategy. The borough council might, however, like to consider a more inclusive approach of establishing a Woking Town Centre “Heritage Trail” to link the surviving assets together and to lead people to discover both sites and features that perhaps they may have missed in the past due to the poor connectivity within the area (mentioned elsewhere in the document). Such a trail could be considered as part of the town centre shopping/visitor experience and linked with the more recent art and sculptural installations in the town centre.”*

Summary of key issues

The Heritage chapter received over 70 responses from individuals and organisations. Those who responded were generally supportive of the Masterplan’s intentions to protect and enhance heritage assets in the Town Centre, including the introduction of tighter controls in the Town Centre Conservation Area. The Police Station and Basingstoke Canal were highlighted as particularly important heritage assets with opportunities for enhancement. There is a general feeling that heritage could be better celebrated, with many raising the idea of implementing a heritage trail or exhibitions to connect visitors and residents with Woking’s history. Furthermore, there is a feeling that new development has not respected the Town Centre’s heritage assets, and that unsympathetic design of new development has detracted from the character and historic elements of the Town Centre.

How those issues will be addressed

The Masterplan sets out numerous proposals to address the key issues associated with heritage in the Town Centre. For individual assets such as the Police Station and Basingstoke Canal, ways in which these assets could be improved are outlined in the opportunities section of the Heritage chapter. Furthermore, the commitment in the Masterplan to explore the production of a Design Code will aid in enhancing heritage assets by addressing the issue of unsympathetic design of new development. Aside from physical enhancements, the Masterplan commits the Council to utilise heritage assets for educational purposes, such as through the installation of information boards to explain an asset’s historical interest. This will be key in addressing the issue of celebrating heritage assets, as it will allow the public to engage with and have a better appreciation of Woking’s history.

2.e Economy

What stakeholders said:

Woking Chamber of Commerce *“are in broad agreement with the contents of the masterplan and welcome the intent to support small business, which helps the borough’s economic vibrancy and enhances the local character”*.

Mr Sutton (local resident) *“Keep investing in the public realm to create a quality feel to the centre (Dukes Court landscaping is a great example of improvement).*

Encourage developers to create alternative uses at ground level (rather than unlettable retail on periphery of centre), small office studios, artists studios (many artists/creatives are being priced out of London premises, great opportunity to create an artists quarter as part of the town’s cultural offer).

The modern office isn’t dead, still a demand for high quality space but business need flexibility.

Create a nurtured/supported zone dedicated to independents”

Summary of key issues

The Economy chapter of the Masterplan received responses from over 60 people and organisations. Key issues raised were around the need to attract more independent shops to the town centre and a desire for an increased entertainment and ‘experiential’ activities. Also highlighted was a need for lower rents and business rates, to support businesses, and reduced parking rates to encourage higher numbers of visits and increase visit time in the centre.

How those issues will be addressed

The town centre has a diverse mix of shops, restaurants and bars but until recently there has tended to be a dominance of chains. There has been a recent, gradual shift towards local and independent businesses (e.g. Lionsheart bookshop/ coffee shop, Bare & Fair amongst others) and further independent businesses will be encouraged and supported as part of the town centre’s growing offer. The Council's retail agents and Estates Team are in dialogue with many retail and hospitality businesses in an effort to attract them to Woking.

The Council has sought to attain competitive rents on its estate, whilst also taking steps to support small independent businesses, and encourages other owners and developers to do the same.

The Council are working to provide activities to attract people to the town centre, including entertainment, street art and a varied restaurant and bar scene. High quality public realm and streetscene is also a factor that attract business and customers, and

With regard to the need to reduce car parking rates, the Council has introduced reduced parking charges at the weekends (£3 for 3 hours at Victoria Place) which is set to remain, and has a reasonable evening tariff (from 6pm to 6am) to encourage visitors to stay longer and enjoy the diverse mix of retail, leisure and hospitality in the town centre.

2.f Housing

What stakeholders said:

Surrey Police requested the inclusion of text on Secured by Design as used in the London Plan.

Several representations from developers and landowners included reference to housing. Some developers noted the Woking Town Centre Housing Market Assessment, and the high demand it identifies for town centre housing, claiming that this is not reflected in the volume of development proposed. Some also stated there was insufficient focus on meeting housing need (contrasting with the emphasis on housing need in an appeal decision and in the HIF bid), and claimed that reduced levels of housing numbers on some sites could lead to the non-viability of delivering housing allocations and even of the overall housing requirement. It was asserted that the Masterplan would need to be reviewed if housing requirements go up in the next Local Plan revision. A specific needs and viability assessment, and designation of sites, for Build to Rent housing was sought.

Summary of key issues:

This Masterplan chapter received responses from 54 members of the public through the Engagement Hub and 5 by email.

Some commenters on this chapter were opposed to the construction of further high-rise buildings, while others were not concerned about building heights so long as a good living environment was provided. The majority accepted or supported the building of flats while wanting to see a wider mixture of dwellings provided in the Town Centre, in particular more 2 and 3 bedroom flats and 'genuinely' affordable/social rented housing, as well as some town houses. It was suggested that more dwellings will be built than needed.

There was concern for the needs of families (of varied sizes), disabled and older people and a lot of support for the provision of both communal and private open space, in particular balconies, multifunctional communal roof gardens and new and improved publicly accessible green spaces close to residential buildings. Several people requested that design requirements take into account the requirements of climate change adaptation and increased home working. The provision of parking on residential developments was also raised, as well as the need for infrastructure generated by new housing.

How those issues will be addressed

The comments made on this chapter in relation to design are largely in line with, and support the importance of, the guidance contained in the Housing chapter, albeit in a few cases saying that it should go further (mainly on size of dwellings, which cannot be addressed through an SPD). The comments also underline the importance of the guidance in the Green Infrastructure and Sustainable Construction chapters. The comments will therefore be addressed by retaining the proposed guidance.

Many comments urge an increase in the provision of Affordable Housing. The draft revised Affordable Housing Delivery SPD was published a month after the end of the Masterplan consultation, and is expected to help increase Affordable Housing provision once adopted.

The issue of autism-friendly development was raised; we would consider that several of the recommended features of autism-friendly development are already covered by the proposed guidance on communal spaces, however, more could be done on this and also to include reference to guidance on best practice to designing for people with disabilities.

Should the document be taken forward in its current form, additional evidence on viability would be necessary to support this.

2.g. Leisure and Culture

What stakeholders said:

Mr Hayes (local resident) “...think pop up food stalls, linked with local breweries and producers and try to cultivate an evening economy that caters for more than just cheap pints at Wetherspoons. There’s no alternative or independent music scene in Woking either. Perhaps a music venue or arts centre. The new development would have been a great opportunity for this but instead it’s a cavernous space with generic shops inside it... Use space more effectively - create interesting and engaging places for the community to get together. Try to get rid of the generic-ness of Woking. More culture, more independent businesses, more alternative things to do and see.”

Theatres Trust “We welcome the objectives of this Masterplan to ensure a dynamic, varied and vibrant cultural and leisure economy through enabling and expanding cultural facilities and provision. The document has provided a good appraisal of provision along with opportunities and constraints. We are supportive of the Masterplan’s policies to achieve this.”

Summary of key issues

This chapter received a high level of response with around 110 contributors. There was a very strong positive response to a survey question asking whether they support expansion of the evening economy (88% agreed) and an even stronger response, with 91% agreeing, to support flexible use of indoor and outdoor spaces to enable a variety of changing activities, events and displays to add interest and animation to the centre. Respondents want more and better leisure and culture in Woking and came up a wide variety of suggestions for what culture and leisure activities are needed. These included: more play space for children and young people; space to enable physical activity for all; more permanent activities such as chess and other board games (on the back of wide appreciation for the Summer Zone at Jubilee Square); space for art including studios; food, farmers’ and craft markets; and community gardening. Responses highlighted that new public spaces, such as those around Victoria Square, could be better used for a range of activities. Also highlighted was a need for more indoor community spaces that can be used flexibly all year round.

There was also strong support for increasing the range of small and independent cafes, bars and restaurants, including pop-ups, to add a distinctiveness to the centre, which is covered further under the Economy chapter. Some further interesting suggestions were to celebrate the railway, aviation and motorsport heritage of the town, as part of its identity, and continue to provide a home of the Hockey Museum.

A key issue to be addressed is the need for an alternative music and concert venue to accommodate Woking Symphony Orchestra and replace that lost at HG Wells. Space for other live music and entertainment, and associated community hub, as had been at Phoenix Cultural Centre was also flagged as missing from the town.

How those issues will be addressed

The consultation has provided a valuable insight into what people in Woking want to see to enhance leisure and culture, and help build a distinct sense of place in the town. The Masterplan sets out that development should assess and explore potential to accommodate cultural and leisure activity, and this insight gained here should be used by the Council to inform continuing work with partners and developers of various sites.

With regard to finding an alternative venue to HG Wells, the Council will work with relevant parties to find a solution and space to enable Woking Symphony Orchestra, and various other music and arts groups, to rehearse and perform in the town. This should be considered valuable cultural assets to the town, which we do not want to lose. Venues for live performance, including music, are encouraged and the Council will work to help facilitate this. We are aware of the funding issues that the Phoenix Cultural Centre faces and options to enable it to re-establish are being explored.

2.h Green Infrastructure

What stakeholders said:

Mr Foster (local resident): *“Lock-down showed the importance of green outdoor space to mental health and well being . The benefits will cascade into improved life satisfaction, lower illness and crime . It will more than pay for itself .”*

Surrey Wildlife Trust: *“The Council states that Green Infrastructure is embedded as essential and integral within design proposals. We note that the Council has declared a climate and ecological emergency, which confirms the importance of wildlife and ecology within Woking. Within this context, we highlight the Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) approach to nature recovery. NBS describe natural responses to challenges including development; climate change; and emergency risk management, amongst other things. NBS come in many forms, from protecting or restoring existing ecosystems or projects that protect or enhance the natural environment, ranging from the restoration of hedgerows and rivers; to planting meadows. An added benefit of NBS is to improve health and wellbeing, particularly in recent years”*

Summary of key issues

The Green Infrastructure chapter of the Masterplan received responses from over 60 people and organisations. Overall there was strong support for the measures and objectives outlined in the chapter. A prominent desire was to see the town centre look and feel greener, and promote biodiversity (including insects) to balance and soften the concrete urban fabric. There is strong support for more useable green space, including green roofs, gardens, trees, shrubs and green roofs, to enable people to enjoy being outdoors and to allow children and young people to play. There is some scepticism about green walls in terms of effectiveness, sustainability (irrigation and maintenance) and utility costs.

There is also a desire to see greater linkages with green areas near the town centre, such as the Basingstoke Canal and Woking Park. Safety in open spaces, and on the Canal, was raised as a concern.

The promotion of Nature Based Solutions by the Surrey Wildlife Trust is noted, and many of the green infrastructure features and measures outlined in the Masterplan are examples of Nature Based Solutions. However a minor amendment is suggested to explicitly refer to them.

How those issues will be addressed

A key objective of the Masterplan is to take proactive steps to support more, bigger, better and joined up habitats, green ways and spaces. This simple but effective ambition should inform all development proposed in the town centre and mean development plays a significant role in making green infrastructure and biodiversity gains. Green infrastructure and biodiversity requirements should be considered from the outset of all design processes, with a priority to provide green features and measures on site where feasible. However, the Masterplan also sets out how effective,

functional green infrastructure can be made elsewhere where it is demonstrated (through a comprehensive design process) it can not be made on site.

Enhancements to town centre streets and spaces, including pocket parks and various forms of planting are put forward within the Masterplan. Better connectivity, permeability for pedestrians and cyclists, and access to green spaces is also highlighted. Ensuring safety through adequate lighting and visibility is something that will be addressed.

Further reference to nature based solutions in the Masterplan will be considered, as part of the new and enhanced green infrastructure that should be considered in the design of development.

2.i Flood Risk and Surface Water Management

What stakeholders said:

Surrey County Council noted that the risk of surface water flooding identified in this chapter should be better linked to the site specific guidance, to ensure sites adequately assess localised surface water issues and opportunities, and incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs)

Affinity Water also set out that new development should use “*water efficient fittings and fixtures such as rainwater harvesting, rainwater storage tanks, water butts, green roofs, and water efficient appliances in all new developments (residential and commercial).*”

Summary of key issues

This chapter of the Masterplan received nearly 40 responses. The vast majority of respondent (89%) agreed that the Council should work with its partners and the development industry to reduce flood risk and improve water quality in rivers and the Basingstoke Canal by including Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems. Other means of improving water quality and reducing flood risk could be by creating green/ blue streets via rain gardens and surface water tree pits, which were also strongly supported. Many residents flagged issues on the impact people tarmacking front gardens and stated that the measures put forward should be a minimum. There was reference to flooding of the Canal in heavy rainfall and the need to plan and work with water/ utilities companies to effectively manage drainage systems.

How those issues will be addressed

The response shows welcome support to the approach the Council will continue to take in managing flood risk in the town centre, in its approach to SUDs requirements (for both major and minor development) and ways to create green/ blue streets. One project aimed at alleviating flooding is the Horsell Common SANG project (outside but within close proximity of the centre) which began in June 2022 and is well underway. This creates three holding ponds with a combined capacity of over 16 million litres of surface water from the Rive Ditch system. The aim of the project is to increase capacity of the drainage system and alleviate local flooding. It also introduces new wetland ecosystems to enhance the biodiversity and access to Green Infrastructure.

With regard to a joined up approach to flood risk and surface water management, the Council continues to work in partnership with Surrey County Council, the Environment Agency and water companies, and other Boroughs and Districts. The Council is also part of the Basingstoke Canal Authority Joint Advisory group that looks after the maintenance and management of the Basingstoke Canal.

2.j General Infrastructure

What stakeholders said:

Mr Grilli (local resident): *The objectives are very laudable, but how can we ensure they are actually realised, and don't get cut out of schemes as costs rise? And if they get built, can we ensure the running costs can be met?*

Mr Foster (local resident): *"A coherent, "joined up" plan which takes account of all the interconnected requirements / demands over the long term. To date the focus is too narrow (project related) and short term"*

Summary of key issues

This is a contentious area which received a moderate level of response, with over 60 responses from the general public and a number from neighbouring authorities, Surrey County Council and other infrastructure providers, such as Affinity Water. A survey question asked about the key elements of infrastructure needed to support development in the town centre, and responses highlighted capacity issues and need for new provision for schools and early years, GPs and healthcare. Responses also raised the need for improved transport and roads, and frequent, reliable public transport and sewage systems to deal with increased demand.

Responses called for a more joined up approach to planning for infrastructure, and more detail about how and where infrastructure will be delivered. Comments from infrastructure providers highlighted the need for early engagement on development likely to impact networks (e.g. water), with specific advice given to ensure future demand is met.

How those issues will be addressed

While the Masterplan summarises infrastructure capacity and need going forward, the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) is the document that provides the detail. It demonstrates that adequate and appropriate infrastructure can be identified to support the delivery of development included in the Local Plan.

The IDP was updated in February 2022 and is a live document which will be continually revised by working with infrastructure partners and utility providers. The IDP covers GP, health care provision, flooding, water and waste water and reviews the capacity of existing infrastructure and the impact of future development on that infrastructure. It also details the mechanisms in place to ensure that additional infrastructure necessary to support new development is provided over the Plan period. This includes the scale of the new infrastructure to be provided, by whom, how, at what cost and to what timescales.

2.k Transport

What stakeholders said:

Mrs Mullins *"It's not clear to me how the disabled and those with mobility problems are being helped to safely access the town centre and its facilities. Promoting walking and cycling is a laudable aim but it won't be feasible for some parts of the population. "*

Mr B *"more bike infrastructure that is separated from road traffic (e.g. cars, buses). I understand that the council is working towards a more bikeable town as it benefits local population's health and has low impact on the climate, however the bike lane on the street north of the station is very intimidating - buses are an integral part of providing transport to people across town without cars (for the lack of a tram or alternative network) but the width of the street seems like the bike lane was an afterthought."*

Summary of key issues

This chapter received a very high level of response, with well over 130 responses. Key issues highlighted centre around road use, congestion and traffic, need for better public transport including a more frequent and affordable bus service. There was a lot of focus on bike usage, including a need to increase e-bike infrastructure and need for bicycle storage in development, concern around cyclist and pedestrian safety, access and permeability (particularly between Victoria Way and the Town Centre, the Canal and centre and across the railway line). Better crossing points, continuity and joining up of cycle and pedestrian paths was highlighted.

Parking was also highlighted, in terms of a lack of availability and access to disabled parking spaces, loss of parking due to new development and cost of parking (the latter is covered in the Economy section). Surrey County Council flagged a new Local Transport Plan, adopted in July 2022, which sets an ambitious approach to decarbonising the transport system, with four main pillars for investment which include Local Cycling & Walking Plans (LCWIPs), Liveable Neighbourhoods (LNs) incorporating low traffic solutions and public realm improvements, bus plans, and electric vehicle infrastructure. Further to this, expansion of car clubs in the town centre was also raised by SCC.

A key consultation question asked 'Do you think that the replacement of the Victoria Arch, on Victoria Way, provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to improve traffic and rail infrastructure in the area?'. The response was very mixed, with 56% agreeing, 22% disagreeing and 22% not being sure.

How those issues will be addressed

The Masterplan includes details of the Woking Integrated Transport Project, Sustainable Transport Package and Local Cycling and Walking Plan together have achieved and will continue to create a safer and better connected environment. The Woking Sustainable Transport Package is a further project (LEP funded) which aims to address gaps in the cycle and bus network and improve attractiveness of sustainable travel. Options for the Victoria Arch scheme are currently being

reviewed, and have potential to manage traffic and congestion while improving pedestrian and cycle routes under the railway bridge. The latest updates on this would be included going forward.

The issue about availability and access to disabled car parking spaces will be explored further with the Council Parking Services team. We are aware of a good level of provision in Victoria Place, and shop mobility is in place in the shopping centre.

2.1 Site specific issues

Summary of key issues

A developer put forward proposals for the whole of the block that includes the Royal Mail sorting office (UA32) and some of the residential landowners in this block also wrote in to support redevelopment. The developer of the Coal Yard site (UA33) also wrote in with proposals for an amended design and site boundary. Two representations were received from developers interested in parts of allocations UA4 and UA11, where the Site Specific Guidance showed no development on their part of the allocation. In addition to making general comments, each of these criticised the elements of the Site Specific Guidance and Tall Buildings Framework which would limit development on their site. These representations, as well as those from developers interested in Crown Place (part of UA15) and the BHS site (HIF9) also criticised the consideration of heritage issues in relation to their site. Representations were also received from developers/landowners on the Former Goldsworth Arms site (UA8), Land North and South of Goldsworth Road (UA11/UA13), Rat & Parrot site (part of UA15), the Police Station (HIF4) and land at Chobham Road (W1).

Members of the public also expressed views on specific sites, in particular sites close to their homes and in particular where there had been a previous planning application, including the Crown Place site (part of UA15) and the Premier House/Church Gate site (HIF13), where issues of amenity, privacy and microclimate were raised. Several people took an interest in sites UA4 and UA6 (High Street/Commercial Way), some for reasons of townscape and some wanting to support the Lighthouse community venue. There were a couple of suggestions that taller buildings could be allowed on those sites, and a few others the same of 1-7 Victoria Way (part of UA11), the BHS site (HIF9), the Police Station site (HIF4; although more people supported the retention of this building), and the Technology House site (Block GW5). On the other hand, it was suggested that the heights on the former Cap Gemini building (Block VWN1) and the northern end of site W1 should be reduced. Several people questioned the railway carpark sites UA31 and W2 and where the parking would be re-provided, while others lobbied for the redevelopment of the aggregates yard as a whole.

How those issues will be addressed

The place of the Site Specific Guidance will need to be reviewed following the Counsel opinion.