

**LAND AT BUNTINGFORD WEST, BUNTINGFORD – VISTRY HOMES
NOTES OF PLANNING MEETING – 7TH NOVEMBER 2023**

In attendance:	Jonathan Porter	Vistry Homes	JP
	Neil Button	East Herts District Council	NB
	Amit Patel	East Herts District Council	AP
	Leena Shah	East Herts District Council	LS
	Hannah Weston (online)	East Herts District Council	HW
	Keith Nye	FPCR	KN
	Jon Etchells	Jon Etchells Consulting	JE
	Hannah Albans	DLP	HA
	Duncan Murdoch	Moult Walker	DM

Venue: East Herts District Council, Wallfields, Hertford.

Ref.	Action	Target
1.	<p><u>Introductions</u> - NB is the Development Management Team Leader, AP and HW are both Principal Planning Officers and LS is the Conservation & Urban Design Officer.</p> <p>HA referred to LS's objection dated 18th October and DLP's reply sent 6th November. The main agenda discussion is on these urban design comments and KN and JE are attending to support the scheme on parameter plans, DAS and LVIA matters.</p>	
2.	<p><u>New Councillors</u> – NB referred to the change in administration (Green Party have the majority with others) and advised a series of planning training meetings with Councillors is underway to coach members of the 5YHLS impact and the NPPF triggered tilted balance.</p>	
3.	<p><u>Masterplanning Process</u> – LS has requested Vistry undertake a masterplanning process as Policy DES1. HA referred to the meeting held with East Herts 24th May 2023 when East Herts made the same request but it was noted and agreed at that meeting this policy is intended for sites identified for development in the 2018 District Plan which would result in the masterplan being endorsed by committee before an application is made. East Herts said at that meeting it would not be the case in this instance which would not lead to committee endorsement. East Herts also said at that meeting there was also doubt over whether stakeholders would engage in the process.</p> <p>JP referenced the earlier 2022 request for East Herts to engage in a pre-app and masterplanning consultation in 2022 which was declined. HA noted Vistry then used an independent Design Review Panel process (as the Herts DRP service would not engage without the attendance of the Council) and online consultation followed. As such, Vistry have not followed the masterplanning process under Policy DES1.</p> <p>LS requested sight of the Design Review Panel process; HA referenced this as included in both the 2022 and 2023 application documents and forms part of the Planning Statement. LS can reference this in these documents.</p> <p>NB noted that it is not worthwhile engaging in a masterplanning process given the planning application is now 'live' and the short term result. NB thought this</p>	



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	<p>masterplanning could be carried out as part of a future District Plan review of new proposed housing sites (to be identified by the call for sites). It was therefore acknowledged this is not for this planning application.</p>		
4.	<p><u>Sustainable Travel</u> – HA referred to LS’s comment that Buntingford has no railway station. The HCC Highways consultation response (no objection) requests financial contributions towards bus services and off-site connectivity improvements. This is under review. LS mentioned the need for evidence of connectivity to services, transport options and public transport improvements. KN highlighted the linkages from the site to the town centre and local facilities. NB expressed concern on the linkages and reliance on car travel. This is speculative development, not a District Plan allocation.</p> <p>KN referred to the three main points of connectivity and numerous routes which were walked and reviewed with the DRP and highlighted segregated cycle routes. The need is to change people’s habits by a modal shift. The new A10 access was discussed, query longer car trips to the town centre but conversely easier to walk due to the bus only link through Luynes Rise.</p> <p>KN referenced the 10-minute walking distances and further details are in the WSP transport assessment and WSP response to Active Travel England (ATE). LS would like to understand actual walking distances as opposed to using the isochrones.</p> <p>NB referred to the need for a hierarchy of entrance points.</p> <p>NB queried out commuting in the town. DM referred to the employment assessment forming part of the application which includes a review of work and commuting patterns in the town from the census and other data. HA to resend to the Council for information.</p>	HA	10 Nov
5.	<p><u>Local Centre Location</u> – AP queried linkages to the proposed local centre from the north and queried if a more central location for the local centre is required? JP referred to several options reviewed for the 2022 hybrid planning application and KN tabled the options plans and explained the thought process behind the current location (albeit outline application).</p> <p>KN clarified the footpath route through the local centre open square, not the parking area.</p> <p>NB queried the likely facilities in the local centre; JP advised this could include work-from-home café/hub, local convenience shop, fast food, hairdresser etc.</p>		
6.	<p><u>Sustainable Travel Improvements & Active Travel</u> – AP tabled the latest consultation response from ATE, this has not yet been reviewed but further information is requested. HA noted that HCC Highways are not objecting on transport matters and queried East Herts’s position if there is a conflict between the two consultees. The Council were unsure at this stage who would trump who in the hierarchy. HCC Highways require dedicated routes through the site and accessibility. LS queried connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists to the town centre, schools and other facilities. HA referred to both the DAS, access plans and WSP’s work showing these links and routes.</p>		



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	<p>LS queried which of these routes are the key ones. DM highlighted the multitude of routes to different areas in the town, schools, town centre, foodstore etc. The destination may change the best route.</p> <p>NB queried the addition of an access circulation parameter plan for outside the site. Again, HA referred to the WSP response to ATE but this can be reviewed. This could include walking distances and link together FPCR's and WSP's work.</p>	<p>JP HA KN</p>	
7.	<p><u>Education</u> – LS queried school capacity in the town. HA referred to the County Council's request for education financial contributions towards school expansion at the existing locations. The new Buntingford First School was referenced. HA confirmed Vistry's consultant EFM have analysed the S106 requests and capacity is acceptable.</p>		
8.	<p><u>Urban Grain & Density</u> – KN referred to the three different character areas envisaged (subject to detailed design).</p> <p>LS wants to see a better transition from the built edge to open space and then the countryside beyond; the character of the edge of town. AP referred to the same query on the 2022 hybrid application to a transition from edge of town and the amount of built form. AP feels too much urban form is coming out of the scheme, more transition is needed. AP requires a more dense development by the existing built edge and then lower density towards the A10.</p> <p>JE expressed the view the A10 already constrains the site together with the dense trees to each side; otherwise JE would agree. The scheme's built form is not bleeding out of the town as there is an existing well defined containment. A classic bypass outer edge as Bishop's Stortford and Royston. JP agreed this is how development in Buntingford has occurred; growing outwards to meet roads.</p> <p>HA highlighted the need for noise containment by built form directly adjacent to the A10.</p> <p>NB referred to a strong objection for the Council's landscape officer (verbal as yet and to be confirmed in writing). NB thought this could be solved by a tier of density to straddle blocks, not a straight line as the parameter plans.</p> <p>HA highlighted this is an outline application.</p> <p>NB needs to see the parameter plans loosen density here and still address noise containment. LS queried matching density to existing housing. NB queried sensitive development zones.</p> <p>KN queried if the density shown is acceptable to the southern area, around the local centre. LS agreed to the area by the employment and roundabout and local centre. AP agreed to higher density in the southern area and it was accepted that this area is different in character to the northern area.</p> <p>KN tabled a plan showing the open spaces areas, the red coloured areas are overprovision based on the standard requirement. There is extensive overprovision.</p> <p>The Council would like us to go further in responding to the 2022 reasons for refusal and would like a comprehensive response to each reason to show how the dial has moved.</p>		



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9.	<p><u>Proximity to Waste Water Treatment Works</u> – LS questioned the setting of the employment area to the waste water treatment works (WWTW) from a place making point of view and specifically how future occupiers living in the space would feel. HA referred to the air quality assessment, open space buffer and existing good screening. DM referred to the existing and recently built business units directly adjacent, together with the 65+24 homes now built as Aspenden Road. AP advised future occupiers need a sense of place if live/working near the WWTW. JP is confused by this point given the Council’s EHO did not object to the 2022 hybrid scheme. This is a design point for reserved matters. LS accepted this is a minor point and LS will further review. LS requested extra narrative to increase screening to WWTW, pride of place is the issue. JE and KN tabled photos showing the considerable extent of screening.</p> <p>LS queried what those living in properties which potentially look out to the WWTW near the roundabout would see if they looked out and JE advised that this area is already well screened with trees and the attenuation feature would prevent this being a useable space by people. LS asked whether there could be narrative on the masterplan with additional tree planting shown along the edges with the WWTW.</p>		
10.	<p><u>Green Infrastructure</u> – LS said this links to density, urban grain and character. The need is to balance landscape and built form. KN referred to having widened corridors from the 2002 scheme due to the hedges as requested by East Herts and tabled sections from the DAS showing widths of between 27 - 42 metres excluding access roads so these are large scale spaces. These have increased from 10 metres which were discussed with the DRP. LS is looking to loosen the grain with more usable landscape space.</p> <p>AP questioned what is the perception when looking from the existing built edge out across the site towards the tree lined A10? As you go along the PROW into the countryside what is this view? KN advised the existing tree belt to both sides of the A10 in the A10 itself will block the view. JE thought you would have a perception of a different urban area. The PROW currently passes through an enclosed narrow width in the existing housing estate and will then open out into this wide landscaped open space.</p> <p>AP queried if there is a sketch in the LVIA for the three access viewpoints into the site from the existing built edge. JE advised the need is for views of the development not views looking out of the existing built area. KN noted the DAS work is only 2D in this respect. AP needs to understand what the perception is coming from Buntingford into the development. JE advised this is just looking at a slope with no wider views beyond the trees to the A10. JP will review this matter further.</p>	JP	10 Nov
11.	<p><u>Garden Depths</u> – KN confirmed the back garden distances were reviewed as part of the design of the 2022 scheme. AP and LS queried if the houses along the existing built edge are reversed so that these front on to the end of the back gardens of the current houses with an open frontage to the rear fences. KN said this was also looked at an option in 2022 and previously and it was felt that this would cause more objection from the neighbouring residents as the the front of the houses would potentially look directly into their back gardens and there could be issues over overlooking and loss of privacy. The ground levels are higher in some areas along this boundary compared to the existing houses. KN referred to the application red line along this edge and explained that this is offset by 3 metres from the rear boundary of the existing properties. This is due to a variety of minor</p>		



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	<p>encroachments, varied boundaries, openings and gates. It just simplifies the whole of this edge. There is then an additional 3m offset within out site providing a 6-metre landscape buffer along this edge.</p> <p>It would be the intention that this is managed by a management company and there would be restricted access for the public (concerns were raised about potential for crime). NB suggested this could be a wildlife/biodiversity corridor.</p>		
12.	<p><u>Low Carbon Renewable Development</u> – LS raised concerns that the measures within the energy statement would need to be committed to. HA advised that this could be committed to through planning condition and could request the details to be submitted as part of the reserved matters application.</p> <p>AP advised there are issues on other schemes from noise from air source heat pumps and again this can be dealt with by a planning condition.</p>		
13.	<p><u>Consultation Responses</u> – The updated highways and transport consultation response have been received from the County Council together with a further response from Active Travel England which requests additional information.</p> <p>DM referred to the LLFA request for extra information and advised that WSP are working on this extra submission which is due by 10th November and will be submitted as soon as possible.</p> <p>There is no response yet from the NHS ICB and other consultees including the Landscape Officer (written), Environmental Health on odour, ecology etc.</p>		
14.	<p><u>GP Surgery</u> – DM provided a brief summary of discussions with the surgery and the NHS since 2014 and more recently the Town Council’s survey and consultation event to discuss a new surgery as part of a new 200 home Taylor Wimpey development. Both DM and JP have had an online meeting with Councillor Woollcoombe and it seems the Vistry scheme which allows provision for employment including a new surgery has been overlooked and the surgery are no longer interested in Buntingford West. Councillor Woollcoombe has now carried out a separate options appraisal which seems to be more realistic to those sites which were considered by the surgery on their own. This now includes Buntingford West and a variety of other options including trying to stay at their current premises. DM referred to a request from Councillor Woollcoombe for the land required for a surgery to be offered for no value (on an unserviced arrangement) as this will match what Taylor Wimpey are offering. DM confirmed the landowners are in agreement to enter into such discussions if the Council are minded to grant planning and an appeal is not required.</p> <p>NB wants the best location and proximity to the town centre for any new surgery.</p>		
15.	<p><u>Pre-School Nursery</u> – AP has had discussions with the education team at the County Council who have indicated there is a strong demand for an age 0-2 nursery in the town and have asked whether a childcare provider could be accommodated as part of the scheme. JP advised the employment area is for a variety of uses and this could be included on commercial terms. Further contact will be made.</p>	DM	10 Nov
16.	<p><u>Section 106 Agreement</u> – HA referred to the various contribution requests and highlighted there are overlaps between requests from East Herts S106 Officer and</p>	HA	10 Nov



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	<p>the Town Council. HA has prepared a schedule of comments and will issue this to AP.</p> <p>AP requested draft heads of terms for the Section 106 agreement and HA noted these were included with the planning application submission albeit they need to be updated. AP requested solicitors details.</p>	HA DM	10 Nov
17.	<p><u>Annual Monitoring Report (5YHLS)</u> – NB advised this is due for publication by the end of November and is currently being worked on at the moment to include the new method of calculation.</p>		
18.	<p><u>Call for Sites</u> – NB said the exact date is not yet known.</p>		
19.	<p><u>Competing Sites</u> – DM referred to the the shortfall in 5YHLS and questioned whether an “easy fix” is required by the Council to partially fill this gap (currently 760 homes) given the likelihood of numerous sites coming forward particularly in Buntingford (only town not in the Green Belt) on the same basis as occurred in 2014 - 2017.</p> <p>DM referred to the expected Taylor Wimpey planning application due for 200 homes in November and the current ongoing Wheatley Homes application for 68 homes together with the newly proposed development parcel to the northwest of the town as the promoter is meeting with the Town Council and neighbouring Parish Councils. This development pressure will only increase.</p> <p>NB advised the Council are not so concerned about 5YHLS trajectory and delivery. DM noted Redrow are slowing development at East Stevenage due to the housing market downturn.</p>		
20.	<p><u>Timescale</u> – JP referred to the meeting in May 2023 with the Council at which Vistry were quite open that the planning strategy and planning advice received is for this Buntingford West scheme to come forward by way of appeal at the earliest opportunity. This remains the case given the 5YHLS. DM highlighted the need to be first in the queue particularly having regard to Taylor Wimpey who have a much worse and inferior development site in terms of location and landscape impact. Taylor Wimpey are likely to be aggressive in terms of planning promotion.</p> <p>NB said the council need a reasonable amount of time to review sustainability particularly the cycle and pedestrian routes and town centre connections. The council needs to understand the request for off-site improvements by the County Council and the programme for this delivery by way of Section 278 agreements.</p> <p>JP referred to the comment by AP that an “initial” extension of time is requested to the end of January and JP is concerned that this will be further extended and then roll on for several months.</p> <p>NB said the “dial has moved” on this application given the County Council ‘no objection’ on highways and transport grounds. NB said the council need a reasonable chance to consider the application in this light.</p> <p>NB referred to the possibility of a March 2024 committee hearing.</p>		



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	NB said it is too early to say whether Officers would recommend approval at this stage given the need to better understand density, sustainability, transport/highway and Section 106 matters.		
21.	<p><u>2022 Refusal Reasons</u> – To secure any resolution to grant, NB needs to see an officer’s report to committee that addresses the 2022 reasons for refusal. HA referred to the planning statement which covers the refusal. AP requires more work on this item. NB needs a narrative to take to members.</p> <p>NB is asking Vistry to review density areas, the location of the local centre and the whole sustainability issue.</p>		

Distribution: Vistry Group
Part Design Team

