

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 4 July 2016
Report of: Planning Policy Section Head
Title: Watford Junction Development Brief / Masterplan

1.0 Summary

1.1 Watford Junction is identified as a key development opportunity in the town. Despite an older planning brief, nothing to date has been delivered. With the Metropolitan Line Extension commencing services to Watford Junction in 2020 and growing developer interest coupled with a requirement for Network Rail to improve station capacity, the Council appointed consultants to prepare a Masterplan and viability assessment of the proposal.

1.2 The consultants, working with the key stakeholders, have prepared a draft development brief/ masterplan which would deliver a new sustainable urban quarter for Watford and a new pedestrian crossing over the railway lines, future proofing the stations passenger capacity.

1.3 It is proposed that the draft Development Brief /Masterplan is taken to public consultation during the summer.

2.0 Decision Required

2.1 That Cabinet agrees that the draft Watford junction Development Brief/ Masterplan can progress to consultation.

2.2 That Cabinet agree that editorial, formatting and minor changes to the Development Brief/Masterplan can be agreed by the Portfolio Holder and Head of Service ahead of consultation.

2.3 That Cabinet agrees to officers continuing discussions with landowners and stakeholders in relation to the emerging scheme.

2.4 That Cabinet notes the proposals reflect a long term plan that would see the development take place over a 20 year period, through to 2036

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3.0 **Detailed Report**

3.1 Watford Junction is identified as Special Policy Area 2 in the Local Plan Part 1 Core Strategy. Despite being identified as one of the Council's key development sites since 2004, no new major development has been achieved on this 14ha site.

3.2 It was considered in 2015 that the 2004 Watford Junction Planning Brief produced by Colin Buchanan needed a revisit. This coincided with new market interest in the site due to a significant upturn in the residential market. The Metropolitan Line Extension will be commencing services to Watford Junction in 2020. To help work up a new Development Brief/Masterplan BDP were employed by the Council to develop the design parameters for the work and Peter Brett Associates to consider the strategic financial viability of the proposed scheme.

3.3 To help inform this project a series of workshops have been held with members, key landowners, the rail companies, developers, Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership since December 2015. We are now at the stage where officers would like to take this Development Brief/Masterplan out to consultation with the local community.

The Development Brief/Masterplan

3.4 The Development Brief/Masterplan has been developed using engagement with key stakeholders and cabinet and ward members. To date there has been no engagement with the public – because of the interplay between the timescale for developing the brief and the local elections. Overall the steer from members was that a higher density of development on the site may be acceptable if this was necessary to enable the delivery of required infrastructure such as schools.

3.5 The emerging vision for the site states that; 'Watford Junction will become a vibrant mixed use neighbourhood and gateway to Watford, which complements the existing character and function of the surrounding area and seamlessly connects with the commercial centres of Clarendon Road and St Albans Road and existing residential neighbourhoods. This new neighbourhood will provide for the community of Watford and help raise the profile of the town and develop its position in the regional context. A new and improved train station and public pedestrian concourse will improve movement across the site and promote the use of public transport. The station will provide the focus for a new commercial centre, including office space, and outstanding opportunities for shopping and leisure. The commercial centre will be supported by a number of residential neighbourhoods, which stitch into

surrounding areas and provide valuable community services. Watford Junction will benefit from an environment of distinction, where buildings are appropriate to their context, integrated within a high quality public realm including streets and public spaces, and support a range of activities. The important features will be secured in an enhanced Watford Junction, defined by its strong identity as a place to live, enjoy, do business, travel and invest.'

3.6 The emerging Masterplan shows the creation of a new urban quarter to the north and east of the station. It will be transformational. It would consist of 2,777 new homes over the 20 year period, 2 new schools, underground and multi-storey car parking for 3,771 vehicles, 74,000 sqm of employment floorspace including a new hotel, offices, supporting retail, community uses, and a new pedestrian bridge extending from the station across the platforms and railway tracks landing close to the existing Balmoral Estate. The draft information is contained in Appendix A.

3.7 Watford's Skyline SPD identified the land around the station as suitable for taller buildings.

The Bridge

3.8 The proposed pedestrian bridge would be a wide structure, similar in scale to the Reading Station scheme. (See Fig 1 below) and would include a range of coffee shops, sandwich outlets and specialist shops to meet passenger needs. The station would link to the individual platforms and would both address current and future passenger capacity issues in the in the station.

3.9 A precise design solution and cost for the bridge still needs to be worked up. However part of this cost (£10-15M) could be met by Network Rail as part of their capacity upgrades they have to undertake by 2022 to cater for the forecast growth in passengers using rail, TFL lines and the implications of more travellers using the station as a transfer point during HS2 construction works at Euston.

3.10 To assist in funding this bridge, opportunities are being explored with the LEP as part of their Growth Deal and Central Government as part of the national transport development hub recently announced by No10.

Figure 1 Reading Station



Offices and Commercial Development

- 3.11 Extending to the north of the railway lines, across what is now the surface car park will be a commercial quarter comprising of offices, health centre, neighbourhood retailing and a hotel. This would be linked by a series of green walkways with only limited vehicle access at surface level. A good example of this type of scheme today would be Kings Cross (Fig 2).

Figure 2 Kings Cross office development



Residential and Schools

- 3.12 2,771 new homes mainly in flatted schemes would be developed to the north and to the east of the site across the railway lines. Both sides of the railway lines would have their own primary schools.
- 3.13 In terms of tenure this is still to be worked up. However the scale of the scheme, according to PBA, would result in a largely policy compliant scheme in terms of affordable housing provision. It should be noted though that following the introduction of the Government's Starter Homes policy, 20% of the housing would need to be starter homes leaving only up to 15% for other forms of affordable housing provision.

- 3.14 Mews type schemes are proposed on the edges of the Masterplan area including at Bedford Street in Nascot Conservation Area and to the north of the site.
- 3.15 Currently consideration is also being made for student accommodation in the scheme.
- 3.16 Two new schools are proposed. These are likely to be two form entry primary schools. These may be unlike previous schools built in Hertfordshire and could be integrated into the lower floors of tall residential buildings with multi-deck play areas. Such schools are rare in the UK but are likely to become more common as demand for places continues to grow. Fig 3 shows the Kings Cross primary school.

Figure 3 Kings Cross Academy



Open and amenity space

- 3.17 Open space provision is going to be provided through a range of linear spaces and two open spaces. Further amenity space would be provided through roof gardens and balconies.

Car Parking

- 3.18 One of the fundamental constraints on the site is the level of car parking required to meet the station needs, 1,000 plus spaces. Given the scale of development the current proposal would provide 3,771 spaces contained underground and in two multi-storey car parks which are attached to either end of the bridge.
- 3.19 The proposed parking would be around 0.4 units per residential unit. A developers' group in February confirmed that this would be acceptable in market terms. In planning terms as the site is located in one of the most sustainable transport accessible locations in Watford it could be argued that 0 parking would be acceptable.

Considerations

- 3.20 Currently the local plan identifies SPA2 for 1,500 new homes and 2,500 to 3,500 new jobs. This emerging Development Brief/Masterplan is bolder in scale. However although part of the site could start to materialise within the next 5 years, the whole emerging scheme will take 20 plus years to come to fruition given the complexity of existing leases in the existing industrial lands and the future of the railway sidings. This would extend into the Local Plan Review period which will run through to 2036.
- 3.21 A scheme of this scale has a £1billion plus price tag and will require involvement with the Housing and Communities Agency, Department for Communities and Local Government, Department for Transport and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills. Work has already begun on unlocking national funding to support the scheme.
- 3.22 Highway traffic flows and capacities are a key consideration with any scheme in this location. Currently only one route is used in and out of the car park – using the tunnel adjacent to the station. However the proposed scheme sees a further two routes in and out of the site including through Colonial Way and another through Penn Road (Currently through the retail park). Hertfordshire County Council is currently undertaking a strategic transport model study using the Comet model. The first results due in the summer will include Watford. Further detailed work will be needed using Paramics modelling.
- 3.23 The aggregates rail batching plant use is currently protected in national policy and the local plan. Ideally we would ultimately like this to be relocated to a more appropriate location. In the short term it would help supply the material necessary to build the scheme. There are examples of residential schemes close to such facilities including in Greenwich Peninsula. Retention would reduce the total quantum of housing that could be delivered by approximately 200 units. Officers are currently trying to make contact with the new owners although the site is owned by a third party.
- 3.24 The operational railway land has a range of activities including sidings and depot facilities. Whilst we have been informed that the sidings will not be required for Crossrail 2, they may be required for HS2 or other freight operations. Officers are working with the rail companies to understand what is actually needed and for how long.
- 3.25 The Abbey Flyer is retained within the scheme as a heavy rail service. However conversion of the route into a tram/ guided bus option could contribute to the creation of a new boulevard along the route.

- 3.26 The children's nursery adjacent to the Abbey Flyer line will need to be re-provided within the scheme and additional facilities provided to meet the need.
- 3.27 With Watford's population likely to continue to grow there is a need to increase housing supply locally. Intensifying Watford Junction would provide the housing and jobs Watford needs, in a location which could cope with the demands such a scheme would generate. This would help retain the character of other areas of the town.
- 3.28 At this stage phasing has only been considered at the very strategic level. The first housing element is likely to come forward in the next 2-5 years. The Bridge would need to be in place by 2023. Other aspects still need to be worked through but overall this would be a twenty year scheme.
- 3.29 Whilst WBC has no land holdings in SPA2, WBC's role at this stage is as project leader, enabler and navigator, thereby showing the way, encouraging investment and keeping partners focused on achieving the highest possible quality in a timely way.
- 3.30 The station forecourts on either side of the proposed pedestrian bridge will require improved bus and taxi interchange facilities. This will need to be progressed with Hertfordshire County Council, the bus and taxi operators, Network Rail, the rail franchisee responsible for running the station, currently London Midland, and station user groups.

Consultation

- 3.31 Once the Development Brief/ Masterplan is completed, it is proposed to take it out to public consultation in mid-August for a six week period closing in late September. This will coincide with the Local Plan 2 Publication and SPA6 Ascot Road Croxley View Development Brief proposed consultations. This would provide the opportunity for local communities and other stakeholders to have their say.
- 3.32 Consultation relating to the Watford Junction Development Brief/Masterplan will reflect the approach set out in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. In line with this approach we will make the document available online and at the Town Hall and at local libraries, along with a statement of representations procedure detailing how to respond. We will notify everyone on our consultee list and place an advert in the local press. The consultation will be available online in our consultation software. In addition we will work with the Communications team during the consultation. We may also arrange some public meetings including consultants working on some of the related projects/evidence.

- 3.33 Once the document has completed consultation, a revised version will be taken to Cabinet for adoption. Once approved it will be used to facilitate the redevelopment of Watford Junction and inform the planning decision process.

4.0 Implications

4.1 Financial

- 4.1.1 The Head of Finance notes that there are no financial implications identified in the report and therefore it is taken that any costs would be contained within previously agreed budgets.

4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 The Legal & Democratic Services Section Head comments that there are no legal issues at this stage and that the final proposed Development Brief/ Masterplan will need to be approved by Cabinet.

4.3 Equalities

- 4.3.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Watford Junction Special Policy Area in Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy 2006-31 and the emerging Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies.

4.4 Potential Risks

- 4.4.1 There are no risks associated with this report at this time. A further report will be brought to Cabinet in the future.

4.5 Staffing

- 4.5.1 Preparing and publishing a consultation takes time and resources. Sufficient staff should be retained and available in the policy team and supporting teams such as Communications to deliver an appropriate level of consultation and engagement.

4.6 Accommodation

- 4.6.1 Meeting venues may be required for public meetings. In line with the equalities duty and commitment in the Statement of Community Involvement, any such venue should be fully accessible.

4.7 Community Safety

- 4.7.1 The emerging Local Plan 2 includes a specific policy YLC9 on Community Safety. Any future planning applications in Watford Junction would need to take this into consideration.

4.8 Sustainability

- 4.8.1 The proposed draft Development Brief/Masterplan seeks to deliver a sustainable neighbourhood. The Watford Junction Special Policy Area has already been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal at the Core Strategy Stage. Further work will be undertaken on specific site development considerations if required.

Appendices

Appendix Draft Watford Junction Development Brief (printed separately)

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report

File Reference

SP1.2.2.2