

**COMMUNITY AND PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
19TH MAY 2010**

Report of the Director of Loughborough Regeneration

ITEM 6 TOWN CENTRE MASTER PLAN

Purpose of Report

To provide an update report in respect of the Loughborough Eastern Gateway, the Inner Relief Road and the Baxter Gate Development.

Action Requested

The Committee consider the information detailed in the report and any actions required.

Policy Context

The Town Centre Masterplan was approved in 2007. Two Supplementary Planning Documents were also subsequently approved which comprised development briefs for the two major development sites in the Town Centre – the Baxter Gate Hospital/Aumberry Gap site and the Granby Street/Devonshire Square site. The Inner relief Road is a fundamental element of the Council's town centre strategy as expressed in the Borough of Charnwood Local Plan and the Town Centre Masterplan. It is to be constructed by Leicestershire County Council with funding allocated through its Local Transport Plan.

The Loughborough Eastern Gateway scheme is the Council's priority Regeneration project. It is proposed in the Local Plan, included as an element of the Town Centre Masterplan and referred to in both the Corporate Plan and in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Background

At its meeting held on 20th January 2010, the Committee referred to the Town Centre Master Plan as part of its work programme and requested an update report in respect of the Loughborough Eastern Gateway, the Inner Relief Road and the Baxter Gate Development.

a) Loughborough Eastern Gateway

Good progress has been made on the scheme since it was last considered by the Committee. Planning permission for the new link road and housing was granted in April 2009. All of the land required for the development has now been acquired from Network Rail and DB Schenker (formerly English Welsh and Scottish Railways). The Council's powers of compulsory purchase were used to acquire the land but all objections were successfully negotiated away which meant that the CPO Inquiry was very brief and the Orders were confirmed very quickly.

All of the funding has been approved, including a substantial grant from the Homes and Communities Agency. In addition a significant grant from emda has also been received to add to the funds provided by the Borough and County Councils. The final element of the grant from the New Growth Point Fund is due to be received shortly.

Leicestershire County Council has selected a preferred contractor to construct the link road under its Midlands Framework arrangements. The road contract is due to start on site on 5th July. The housing will be constructed by William Davis Ltd on behalf of Nottingham Community Housing Association and construction is due to start on 1st June. The housing is expected to be completed in about 15 months and the link road in about 12 months.

Members will know that the other element of the Eastern Gateway project is the improvements in front of the station. A detailed scheme has now been agreed with Network Rail and East Midlands Trains following detailed discussions with all the various transport users. A detailed planning application will be submitted this month which will include a new access to the station, a doubling of the car parking provision, new transport interchange arrangements for buses, taxis, cyclists and pedestrians and new public realm areas. Network Rail has agreed to fund the majority of the new scheme with some funding contributions coming from the Borough Council and the Leicester and Leicestershire Leadership Board. It has also been agreed that the Borough Council will act as Sponsor for the scheme with the assistance of Prospect Leicestershire who agreed to meet the up-front costs of procuring the design works and submitting the planning application. The intention is that the station improvement works will be carried out by the same contractor who is constructing the road, thereby ensuring that the works are completed at the same time as the road.

Network Rail has also brought forward its projects to lengthen platforms 1 and 2 and to carry out a refurbishment of the station buildings including the removal of the old footbridge and its replacement by a new bridge with lifts. These works will be completed before March 2012.

Members will also recall that William Davis Ltd were in negotiations with Network Rail to acquire land at the station for a hotel and a small retail unit. Those negotiations have progressed and the planning application for the station improvement works will include outline proposals for these two elements. Subject to securing users for the hotel and retail unit these developments could also be constructed within the same time frame as the station improvements.

The final element of the scheme is the closure of Ratcliffe Road and Burder Street to through traffic and the introduction of a Residents Preference Parking Scheme. The Stopping Up Orders for the road closures were approved at the same time as the Compulsory Purchase Orders and will be implemented on completion of the link road. The County Council has commenced the consultation with local residents on the parking scheme with the intention that it should be implemented immediately following the road closures.

Plans of the development proposals will be displayed at the meeting.

b) The Inner Relief Road

As mentioned above, the Inner Relief Road is a key component of the Borough Council's Town Centre Strategy. It allows the closure to through traffic of the old A6 from Derby Square to Baxter Gate which in turn allows for the extension of pedestrian preference between these two points. This will allow the two halves of the town centre to function as one with greatly improved pedestrian movement between the Market Place area and the Rushes as well the Baxter Gate area.

The Inner Relief Road is a County Council Project and is included in the Local Transport Plan.

The public inquiry associated with the Compulsory Purchase Order for the Inner Relief Road was held in October 2009 and the decision letter is still awaited from the Secretary of State for Transport.

A favourable decision would clear the way for the County Council to submit a request for approval to proceed to the next key stage of the scheme (including the inner relief road), i.e. Conditional Approval and detail design.

However, the Department for Transport have informed the County Council that firm departmental budgets from 2011/12 will only be known after the Government has carried out a comprehensive spending review later this year and currently any applications for Conditional Approval will be put on hold.

In view of this and uncertainties about wider Government spending over coming months, it seems at present that the start of works (originally scheduled for Spring 2011) may be delayed.

Government officers have said that hopefully they will be able to provide an update in a couple of month's time when the position is clearer.

c) The Baxter Gate development

The development of the former Baxter Gate Hospital site is a major concern for the Council. It is included in the Local Plan and the Town Centre Masterplan as a major Opportunity Site for development and redevelopment. It is part of a wider site comprising the former Hospital itself, the remaining PCT owned land including the Walk-In Centre and the Aumberry Gap site. All three elements are covered by a Supplementary Planning Document which sets out the design and development principles for the site.

Members will recall that two very similar planning applications for a student housing development on the old hospital site were refused planning permission and that these two decisions were supported by Inspectors at subsequent planning inquiries. The reasons for these decisions were largely to do with the fact that the proposals

failed to meet the objectives of the Supplementary Planning Document in terms of mixed use, active frontage and public realm links as required by the Masterplan.

In March 2009 Cabinet approved efforts to secure a more comprehensive approach to the whole of the Masterplan site and to try to bring together the respective owners of the different land areas involved. Since then, Council officer have made efforts bring the owners together. A meeting was held in July 2009 with Domain Baxter Gate Ltd and the PCT with Prospect Leicestershire in attendance. It is understood that further discussions have taken place since then between the two owners and that a number of options are under discussion. However, no proposals have yet been put forward for consideration.

In the meantime, increasing concern has been expressed about the deteriorating condition of the properties on Baxter Gate, particularly the former Hospital Building and the adjacent Listed Building. There are also other properties on Baxter Gate giving cause for concern. Following Cabinet consideration of the matter in March this year further contact was made with the owners asking for an urgent meeting so that an internal inspection of the properties can be undertaken to establish whether any further works are necessary to make the buildings safe and secure. Such a meeting has yet to be arranged.

Options Available with Reasons

There are two basic options available for the Committee.

- a) To accept the report and note the progress on the schemes and the actions being taken
- b) To make recommendations to Cabinet for further actions in respect of any of the projects

Financial and Legal Implications

There are no legal or financial implications.

Risk Management

There are no specific risks associated with this decision.

Background Papers: None

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