

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR
TO THE STRATEGIC AND LOCAL PLANNING ADVISORY GROUP
23 JANUARY 2006

**The Strategic Housing Site West of Grove: the Role and Composition of the Grove
Development Forum**

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

- 1.1 In March 2004 the Council agreed to investigate setting up a group of local council representatives and other stakeholders, including local employers, as a vehicle for discussing and helping the delivery of the proposals for the development of the strategic housing site west of Grove. At the meeting of this Advisory Group in August 2005, members agreed that officers should give further consideration to this during the autumn so the forum would be ready to begin its work when the inspector's report on the local plan was received and the future of the strategic housing site was clearer. This report sets out draft principles for establishing a process of information dissemination, discussion and consultation with local people to involve them in the future planning of the strategic housing site west of Grove in accordance with the Council's decision.
- 1.2 The contact officers for this report are Grant Audley-Miller, Section Head (Environmental Planning and Conservation) 01235 540343 and Katie Barrett, Section Head (Planning Strategy) 01235 540339.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 *That the Strategic and Local Planning Advisory Group recommend the Executive to:*
- i) agree to establishing the Grove Development Forum as set out in paragraphs 5.1 – 5.9 of this report*
 - ii) delegate to the Chief Executive the appointment of an external facilitator to lead the forum, and to confirm the source of funding for this*
 - iii) agree the number of elected representatives from this and other Councils to be on the core group of the forum, and the representation from this authority.*

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

- 3.1 This report complies with the Council's vision statement and aims. It will be an important element in delivering a major proposal in the draft local plan 2011.

4.0 Key Tasks for 2006

- 4.1 The key tasks associated with the delivery of the strategic housing site west of Grove during 2006, assuming the inspector does not recommend its removal as an allocation from the Local Plan, are as follows:
- Council to consider the inspector's report and publish proposed modifications to the local plan for public consultation 23 March – 4 May
 - Members to consider the draft supplementary planning guidance (SPG) for the housing site west of Grove in the context of the Inspector's report, new information since the draft SPG was published in June 2004 and the comments received in response to publication of the June 2004 draft. Under the new regulations the SPG will be adopted as a supplementary planning document (SPD). Public consultation on a revised version of the SPD is currently planned for 23 March – 4 May (ie to coincide with the publication of the proposed local plan 2011 modifications)
 - Officer involvement in pre-application discussions with the developers and service

providers through a development team in accordance with the Council's protocol on the development team approach (see Appendix 1). The development team promotes a proactive rather than a reactive approach to assembling the information needed to determine major applications within the best value performance target date. The approach has been successfully used to smooth the processing and add value and quality to the outcome of major development sites, most notably at the Morland's Brewery, Penlon, Maltings and British Gas sites in Abingdon and Smith's yard in Wantage. The approach is particularly relevant now the Council has been named as a standard authority for determining major applications

- Development Control Committee to formally consider the planning applications. The developers have indicated they are likely to submit two applications in the first instance: an outline application for the whole site accompanied by strategies and statements covering such detailed matters as environmental impact, drainage and open space, education and community facilities, movement and design with which all detailed permissions must comply; and a detailed application for the link road from the airfield site to the A338 north of Grove. Officers have requested that the applications be submitted no earlier than 1 September 2006.

4.2 To avoid misunderstandings and misconceptions it will be important to ensure that the role of the Grove Development Forum is clearly defined in relation to both the programme of work and the structures and responsibilities of the organisations involved.

5.0 **The Role and Membership of the Grove Development Forum**

- 5.1 The principal role of the Grove Development Forum should be as an informal advisory group
- to keep representatives of the local community informed in a timely and transparent manner of developments relating to the proposals for the strategic housing site
 - to help facilitate and guide the delivery of the strategic housing site west of Grove so that the needs, concerns and aspirations of the local community can be taken into account in the preparation of
 - any draft proposed modifications to the local plan as they relate to Grove (principally policy H5)
 - the revised draft SPD for the strategic housing site
 - the evolving documents required to support the first and subsequent planning applications
 - to monitor and discuss the implementation of the development.
- 5.2 If the forum is an informal advisory group it will sit alongside the established structures of governance eg town, parish, district and county councils, but will not and should not replace them. This is consistent with the dictionary definition of 'forum' which is 'an assembly or meeting to discuss topics of public concern'. The aims of the forum should be to
- have discussion and debate and, where possible, reach consensus on the key features underpinning the form, nature and implementation of the development
 - advise on approaches for involving the community.

All views should be recorded and a note made of strong dissenting views. Subsequently the views of the forum would be taken into account by each council, the development team and the developers, but each organisation would retain responsibility for making its own decisions through its normal processes.

5.3 Within this framework it is considered that it would not be necessary for the forum to have formal voting arrangements as this has the potential to lead to confrontation and also to misunderstandings that the forum is a formal decision making body. The absence of voting would allow all views to be taken forward including minority views which may be important for the technical consideration of the proposals.

5.4 It is considered that the forum should consist of a core group of elected councillors from the

District and County Councils, Grove Parish Council, Wantage Town Council and East Challow and East Hanney Parish Councils. To ensure a manageable and constructive group this should not be too large and a group of no more than 12 members is suggested. The core group of the forum could then call in representatives from local community groups to discuss particular topics, such as open space and the use and location of community buildings for example. Officers from the County and District Council and representatives of the developers would also attend to give technical information and support as required. A key task of the forum would also be to consider, early in the process, when and how the wider public would also be consulted. **Members are asked to consider how many elected members from each council should be represented on the core group of the forum, and how many and who from this authority.** When becoming involved in the forum Members from this Council will need to have regard to the probity guidance set out by the LGA and contained in Appendix 3 to this report.

5.5 If the forum is to be seen as an advisory group independent of the formal functions of the councils involved, there would be significant merit in the meetings being chaired by external facilitators. Their role would be to lead the meetings, encourage open discussion and seek understanding and consensus. They would not have an opinion on the merits of the issues being discussed. Experienced facilitators are able to defuse conflict and achieve positive results. Indeed this was the case when the Council used Proteus to lead workshops on the strategic housing site at Grove in October 2003.

5.6 Officers suggest the scope and content of the first meetings could be as follows

First meeting, mid to late February to discuss

- i) the purpose, role, terms of reference and general matters about the functioning of the forum and its relationship to existing structures of the councils involved, local community groups and the public
- ii) the inspector's report and the District Council's draft proposed modifications related to the strategic housing site at Grove. (These would have first been considered by the Strategic and Local Planning Advisory Group but not published or approved by the Executive or Council)
- iii) Key issues being considered in the review of the draft SPD.

Second meeting, early April to

- i) report on the proposed modifications and discuss the draft SPD both of which will have been published for consultation
- ii) discuss any technical issues arising from the work of the Grove development team
- iii) note the issues arising on the evolving planning applications which will require discussion at subsequent meetings of the forum, and discuss which other groups and stakeholders should be invited to attend to inform those discussions.

5.7 It is important for the first meeting of the forum to be run effectively and to make clear the roles and responsibilities of the core member group. Officers consider that the best way to achieve this is to use an external facilitator at the outset. The District Council would administer the forum in terms of sending out notification of the meetings and distributing the notes of the meetings.

5.8 In terms of funding the external facilitator, officers consider that the first two meetings of the forum should be paid for by the Council. For subsequent meetings on the evolving applications, the facilitator should be paid for by the developers, however, this will need to be discussed and agreed with the developers. Ideally the same facilitator should be used for all meetings of the forum. Preliminary estimates indicate that the cost of a facilitator for the first two meetings would be around £3000. Three estimates are being obtained in writing. Funding for this would need to be confirmed by the Executive but a possible option would be to use Planning Delivery Grant money.

Grove Parish Council

- 5.9 Grove Parish Council has been asked for their views on establishing the forum and a letter from them is attached as Appendix 2. Some of the matters raised will be decided by the forum itself – such as the time of the meetings, whether the forum will be open to the public and the local groups to be involved. However, it is considered that the first meeting of the forum should be held in the evening and as it is principally to discuss the functioning of the forum it should not be open to the public. In terms of serving the forum it is considered that the administration of the meetings would be the responsibility of the District Council, but it would be helpful if the Parish Council could arrange suitable venues. Officers accept there will need to be a clear audit trail as to how the views of the forum have been taken into account in subsequent decisions.

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Background Papers: