



# LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL

## Policy and Finance Committee

---

**Date:** 21 September 2020

**Title:** Neighbourhood Plan

**Purpose of the Report:** To review the Town Council's position in respects of the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan as agreed by Committee and Council in September 2019.

**Contact Officer:** Mark Saccoccio – Town Clerk

---

<b>Corporate Objective/s</b>		Town Council 5 Year Plan: To recognise and embrace the growth of our community and to seek to influence the local authority and partners to ensure adequate infrastructure provision.
<b>Implications:</b>		
<b>Financial</b>	√	Within the existing budget no contingency has been made for its production and therefore funding would be required to be drawn down from reserves
<b>Human Resources</b>	√	The creation of a neighbourhood plan would require additional resources for which there is presently no budget
<b>Operational/Service delivery</b>		
<b>Procedural/Legal</b>		
<b>Risk/Health and Safety</b>		

### 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To recommend to Council that through the Partnership Committee the Town Council continues working collaboratively with Central Bedfordshire Council (as the plan making authority) in the review of the Development Brief for the site known as Land South of the High Street, Leighton Buzzard.
- 1.2 That the merits or otherwise in the creation of a neighbourhood plan for the Town Centre and its hinterland be considered in 12 months-time on the

**grounds that almost 7 months have been lost due to the covid-19 pandemic and the potential changes to planning legislation.**

- 1.3 Once endorsed, that material consideration be afforded to the Partnership Project List by the Partnership Committee when considering any development proposals that come forward within the parish or its hinterland.**
- 1.4 That the Town Clerk writes to Central Bedfordshire Council (Development Management) to express the Town Council's on-going need to continue to be involved in the identification of appropriate projects which qualify for S106 spend by providing development management and economic regeneration colleagues with the Partnership Project List once endorsed by Council.**

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The land known as South of the High Street is the subject of a Development Brief prepared by Central Bedfordshire Council in its plan making capacity. The brief was adopted by Central Bedfordshire Council as technical guidance for development management purposes on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2012. To date, there appears to have been little market/commercial interest in bringing forward a comprehensive scheme which accords with the development principles as set out within the development brief. It should be made clear that the Town Council has no legal interest in the site and is therefore not a party to any expressions of interest that may come forward. As the plan making authority and having the greatest land holding interest in the site, it is Central Bedfordshire Council which leads the project.
- 2.2 In 2019, the Town Council began considering what support it could provide to bring the site forward. One mechanism given careful consideration was the creation of a neighbourhood plan that as a land use plan would review the land uses as set out within the development brief and arrive at a scheme considered more representative of current thinking.
- 2.3 At its meeting held 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019, a planning consultant gave a presentation to the Policy and Finance Committee on the principles of neighbourhood plans and offered an opinion in respects of the appropriateness or otherwise in creating one for the said land parcel. Following careful deliberation, the Committee resolved that:

“The Town Council contact Central Bedfordshire Council to request that a workshop take place to discuss other potential options and to work collaboratively to progress appropriate development on land south of the High Street, including potential revision of the development brief and consideration of the future high street fund, and that the question of developing a neighbourhood plan be reviewed again in a year's time”.

2.4 At its meeting held 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019, Council resolved that:

“The Town Council would work collaboratively with other stakeholders to progress appropriate development of land South of the High Street with a review to take place in a year’s time.”

2.5 As a strategically important town centre site and in the common interests of the community it serves, the Town Council has legitimacy in seeking ways to encourage a comprehensive development to come forward as soon as practicable. Objective 15 of the Town Council’s 5 Year Plan makes clear “to continue to liaise with the local authority on matters for which it is responsible and which affects residents of the parish”. Clearly the site is of local interest and therefore every reasonable endeavour should be made to deliver a scheme that would complement town centre uses and increase footfall.

2.6 Through the Partnership Committee, the Town Council has made representations to Central Bedfordshire Council to encourage a review of the Development Brief. To this end, Central Bedfordshire Council held a drop-in session in February 2020 that allowed the public and various interest groups to express an opinion on their future aspirations for the site (see attached).

2.7 The most recent Partnership Committee meeting held 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020 provided opportunity for the public to offer opinion on aspirations for the site. The ideas put forward included civic uses such as a public hall, museum and spaces that would allow for the performing arts to rehearse for example. The Partnership Committee welcomed the ideas and hoped that as part of the review that careful consideration be afforded to these suggestions.

#### Where Now?

2.8 On the grounds of prematurity, an argument could be made that it is not necessarily appropriate to consider the Town Council leading a neighbourhood plan at this stage given that almost 7 months have been lost due to the pandemic. Furthermore, potential changes as set out within the emerging Planning White Paper may well have a fundamental impact upon land use(s) and the way monies from development(s) are received and spent. On these points, there is legitimacy in a further review in 12 months-time.

2.9 In its plan making capacity (Central Bedfordshire Council), the review of the development brief is gaining momentum with Partnership Committee awaiting the outcomes from the public drop-in session held in February. It is hoped that at the next Partnership Committee meeting to be held 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020, more detail can be offered in terms of the review and next steps.

2.10 Contextually, the Town Council has been preparing for growth having created its Big Plan and Big Plan II documents. Both documents set out a series of aspirations to support the on-going creation of sustainable communities through the delivery of infrastructure provision. It is anticipated that in order to realise said projects, funding would come from varying sources and where appropriate, S106 funding also. Although the documents in themselves are over 10 years old, the aspirations hold true (please see report from Feb 2020 drop-in session as further

evidence) and for this reason, have been included as a partnership project list which will be presented to Council on 28<sup>th</sup> September for endorsement. Objective 13 of the Town Council's 5 Year Plan makes clear "to continue to lobby Central Bedfordshire Council for improved and timely infrastructure" and therefore material consideration be afforded to the said Partnership Project List.

- 2.11 Once endorsed, the Partnership Project List will be presented to the next appropriate Partnership Committee meeting with a recommendation that material consideration be afforded to it and the projects embedded therein when discussing development proposals within the parish. By way of the Planning and Transport Committee, the Partnership Project List be given to development management and economic regeneration colleagues at Central Bedfordshire Council with the expectation that when funding opportunity arises, that consideration be afforded to the said projects. In addition, that due regard be given to it as part of the review of the town centre development brief sites such as land south.
- 2.12 On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020, Members were joined by Central Bedfordshire colleagues who provided an update on the land east development (strategic growth to the east of the parish). From the presentation, Central Bedfordshire colleagues made clear that they welcome parish involvement in directing certain elements of S106 spend derived from the development process for wider community infrastructure projects. To this end, it is recommended that the Town Clerk write to the principal authority to make this very point and invite early involvement when considered appropriate to do so. This position would also extend to any S106 underspend and reconsideration of projects to which S106 monies have been ringfenced.

### **3.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 3.1 As the plan making authority and primary land holder, there is justification for Central Bedfordshire Council to lead on the review. In accordance with recommendation 1.2 of this report, should Members be minded, that the Town Council should re-consider this position in 12 months-time.
- 3.2 By supporting Central Bedfordshire Council, there is every expectation that the Town Council will be able to monitor progress and challenge emerging aspirations for the site known as Land South of the High Street through the Partnership Committee.
- 3.3 In terms of S106 and the use thereof of monies secured for wider community benefit outside of the development site, the Town Council through the Town Clerk will contact Central Bedfordshire Council to re-confirm its need to be involved in project prioritisation. This is to include any S106 underspend that may come available in the event that a project is found undeliverable. The Partnership Project List and the findings from the February drop-in session will be used to inform any future discussions.

**End.**

