

# Former St Felix School Site, Newmarket: development brief

<b>Report number:</b>	<b>CAB/WS/22/036</b>	
<b>Report to and date:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	19 July 2022
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**Decisions Plan:** The decision made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan.

**Wards impacted:** All Newmarket wards (East, North and West)

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the development brief for the former St Felix school site, Newmarket, as contained in Appendix A to Report number: CAB/WS/22/036, be adopted as informal planning guidance.

## **1. Context to this report**

- 1.1 At the meeting on 15 March 2022, Cabinet agreed that the draft St Felix Development Brief could go out for a six week public consultation. This took place between 30 March and 11 May 2022.
- 1.2 The site is allocated in the Site Allocations Local Plan (SALP) 2019 under Policy SA6(d) which was adopted in September 2019. This site is known in the SALP document as the Former St Felix Middle School site. The site extends to 4.5 hectares and comprises the footprint of the former school, outbuildings, sports pitches, courts and playing fields. The site is allocated in its entirety although the suggested capacity (50 dwellings) reflects the retention of the open space and existing tennis courts.
- 1.3 Policy SA6(d) requires the following:
- Strategic landscaping and open space.
  - The submission of sufficient information assessing the transport impact of each proposal (including cumulative impacts where appropriate) on horse movements in the town, together with impacts on other users of the highway.
  - provision for the retention of the existing tennis courts and open space for public use and provide access and connectivity to this facility and open space from George Lambton playing fields.
  - protection and enhancement of the amenity and biodiversity of the Yellow Brick Road blue/green corridor and access route.
  - An assessment of the transport impact of the development on horse movements in the town, together with impacts on other users of the highway to determine:
    - i. determine whether the proposal results in material adverse impacts and
    - ii. where necessary, to identify any measures necessary to mitigate the individual (and, where appropriate, cumulative) transport impacts of development (which may include contributions to upgrading horse crossings and measures to raise awareness of the special circumstances and highway safety issues in Newmarket where appropriate).
- 1.4 Following a series of pre-application meetings with officers and internal consultees, a development brief has been prepared by the landowner, Suffolk County Council.

## 2. Proposals within this report

- 2.1 Suffolk County Council (SCC) as landowners of the St Felix site have prepared a development brief that seeks to provide planning and design guidance for the development of the former St. Felix Middle School, which is allocated in the West Suffolk Site Allocations Local Plan (SALP) for residential development (Policy SA6d).
- 2.2 The development brief provides a design framework aligned with the adopted Local Plan and the Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan and will guide the preparation and determination of future planning applications for this site. The document is intended to guide the effective delivery of SALP Policy SA6d.
- 2.3 The draft development brief is comprised of two parts. Part 1 provides guidance relating to the proposals seeking to deliver the Local Plan policy requirements for the site.

In summary it:

- Considers the policy context and the existing characteristics of the site
  - Presents the site's opportunities and constraints
  - Explains the extent of consultation and how it aligns with the final design
  - Provides a design framework for the future development of the site
  - Provides an indicative strategy for delivery including phasing and guidance for planning obligations.
- 2.4 Part 2 illustrates the opportunity for optional future sports facilities – this falls outside of the policy requirements and does not form part of the brief to be adopted for planning guidance.

**Following on from the public consultation members are now being asked to adopt the development brief as informal planning guidance.**

Through discussions with officers and a design assessment of the existing built form and character of the area, as well as opportunities for enhancing the public realm and accessibility, the development brief comprises the following key elements:

- Delivery of 45 dwellings (4 percent 1-bed, 16 percent 2-bed, 18 percent 3-bed and 7 percent 4-bed)
- 30 percent affordable housing
- Mixture of housing types including detached, semi-detached, apartments, mews and terraced
- Open space across 50 percent of the site
- Relocation and upgrading of existing tennis courts to a location that is more aligned with the policy objectives for this site, and to better

accommodate land required for access, parking, amenity buffers and run off areas to serve the courts

- Pedestrian links to George Lambton Playing Fields
- Retention of the majority of trees on the site
- Creation of attractive spaces between existing tree belts
- Pedestrian connections to Fordham Road and improved connection to the Yellow Brick Road
- Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs) in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Electric vehicle charging points to all dwellings.

- 2.5 Once approved and adopted as informal planning guidance, the development brief will constitute a material consideration in the determination of future planning applications but should also be read in conjunction with the policies of the adopted West Suffolk Local Plan.

### **3. Alternative options that have been considered**

- 3.1 Although the development brief is broadly consistent with the adopted Local Plan allocation for the development of the site, the relocation of the tennis courts itself is not in accordance with Local Plan Policy SA6(d) The reasons for this are explained at section 1:5.1 of the development brief. Officers agree with SCC that locating the tennis courts on the boundary with George Lambton playing fields enables better connectivity between the two recreational spaces, complimenting each other and providing a more integrated wider recreation space, allows for better management and maintenance of the open space/courts, provides a better relationship between the tennis courts and existing/proposed dwellings, and enables a more gentle density of housing on the developed area of the site.
- 3.2 Provided that the relocated tennis courts result in an improved facility then officers agree that there is merit in this approach. Any future planning permission on the site will include a legal agreement to ensure the delivery of the tennis courts.
- 3.3 An alternative option for the development of this site would be to retain the tennis courts in their current location. Without additional land being developed within the existing open space area, it is likely that the number of dwellings deliverable on site would be significantly reduced and the opportunity to locate tennis courts close to George Lambton Playing Fields missed.
- 3.4 Should members ultimately resolve to adopt the development brief as planning guidance, that decision would not preclude alternative development options being considered in the future, should circumstances on site or the development plan policy context significantly change.

## **4. Consultation and engagement undertaken**

- 4.1 SCC held a six-week public consultation exercise that commenced on the 30 March and ran to 11 May 2022. The consultation was held in a virtual capacity, and in order to raise awareness of the virtual exhibition, and maximise the accessibility of the event, a number of publicity measures were employed including:
- A public service announcement in the Newmarket Journal
  - Approximately 10,000 leaflets being distributed to the local residents of Newmarket
  - The exhibition material displayed in the foyer of Memorial Hall, Newmarket, at the request of Newmarket Town Council
  - A newspaper article, published by Suffolk News, providing contextual background of the public consultation
  - A summary of the details surrounding the public consultation being placed on the official website of Suffolk County Council
- 4.2 From the 10,000 leaflets sent out to local residents a total of 47 consultation responses were received. The dedicated website set up as part of the consultation was also viewed 364 times. Comments were received from the public, local residents, Newmarket Town Council and the Jockey Club.
- 4.3 Public feedback from the consultation can be briefly summarised as follows:
- Mixed reaction to the principle of residential development
  - Some desire for increased of open space provision from the site and reduced housing
  - Suggestions of increased residential density over a smaller developed footprint to optimise open space provision for the site
  - Some concern about its potential impact on traffic generation and impact on the Horse Racing Industry, and suggestion of greater connectivity for walking and cycling required
  - Suggestion that the design guidance is not robust enough to achieve the core objectives of the Brief
- 4.4 As part of the development brief production and consultation process, SCC have provided a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). Amongst other things, this sets out the consultation responses received and SCC's response to them. The SCI is attached as Appendix D to the report.
- 4.5 Newmarket Town Council raised a number of concerns as follows:
- inappropriate to construct dwellings on a site that can be used by the public for recreational purposes
  - uncertainty as to whether all opportunities for integrating the site with the surrounding foot/cycle network has been explored (in particular, to the George Lambton Playing Fields)

- preference is for the site to be used in its entirety as a community sports facility (as mentioned in Para 7.2 of the Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan). Also, it is believed that housing needs can be achieved through other available sites such as Hatchfield Farm
- preference is for the site to be used in its entirety as a community sports facility. Moreover, the view is expressed that there has been inadequate consultation with sports clubs within Newmarket regarding their actual preferences for a future sports hall on the site
- it is felt that there has not been any consultation regarding the need for Newmarket to have sporting facilities on this site. In particular, it is felt that the proposed design ‘almost eliminates sports facilities from the St. Felix site’

4.6 The Jockey Club also commented as follows:

- the emphasis on the protection of the Horse Racing Industry in the Development Brief is welcomed
- the creation of publicly accessible open space should be prioritised over the delivery of residential development
- the potential delivery of a new sports hall is welcomed
- measures incorporated within the development brief to increase the network for non-vehicular transport modes is appreciated. However, it is not felt that this is sufficient to meet the core objectives of protecting the HRA
- a greater proportion of the site could be made available for expanding sport amenity provision.
- not all relevant opportunities and constraints for the site have been identified by the Development Brief. More specifically, it is considered that there is potential to minimise the developable area of the site to allow its majority to be used for public open space (whilst still optimising housing density)
- the tennis courts should be retained in their current location as re-locating them would utilise space that could be better served with additional pitches or other sport provision opportunities
- The design guidance is not considered robust enough to achieve the core objectives of the Development Brief

4.7 In response to the above feedback, SCC have provided further detailed comments as set out in section 4 of the SCI (see appendix 4). Officers generally concur with this response as set out below.

### **Principle of Residential Development**

4.8

The site is allocated within the Site Allocations Local Plan (2019) and the adoption of a development brief is not now an opportunity to re-assess matters of principle, particularly in respect of housing provision. The site is making an important contribution towards the Council's five-year housing land supply as well as the contribution towards enhanced sports provision (in terms of the upgraded tennis courts).

### **Open Space**

4.9

Whilst the whole site could in theory be given over to open space and/or sports facilities, this would go against policy allocation SA6(d). It would also represent a missed opportunity to develop a part brownfield site. To not do this would also go against the requirements of the NPPF in making the most efficient use of previously developed land. It must also be remembered that new areas of public access to open space will be provided alongside enhanced tennis court provision.

### **Density**

4.10

Whilst it is considered that the optimum balance between developed and non-developed parts of the site has been struck with 45 dwellings being within the range anticipated by the Local Plan (indicative capacity of 50 dwellings), the exact density of development on the site will be considered at the planning application stage.

### **Connectivity**

4.11

It is considered that appropriate connections to all existing footpaths/cycleways including the Yellow Brick Road have been achieved along with opportunities to connect to George Lambton Playing fields.

### **Transport and highways**

4.12

Whilst no concerns are envisaged in terms of highway impact based on a development of 50 dwellings, a future planning application will be accompanied by a transport assessment, which will assess the likely extent of transport implications and the impact on the HRI. A travel plan, which will identify the measures required to address these transport implications along with measures to secure sustainable modes of travel such as opportunities for increased walking, cycling and public transport usage is likely to form part of any planning application.

### **Design**

4.13

Officers are content that the development brief provides clarity that appropriate design standards in accordance with development plan policies and the NPPF can be achieved within any future development scheme, (including rear privacy distances, garden sizes, vehicle and cycle parking

and refuse standards). These matters will be finalised through the planning application process.

### **Impact on the Horse Racing Industry (HRI)**

- 4.14 The comments of the Jockey Club are noted, however the full impact on the HRI will ultimately be assessed by the Highways Authority and Officers at the planning application stage, and any future provision of evidence of harm from the HRI will be appropriately considered. A future planning application will be supported by a Horse Racing Industry Impact Assessment report to assess any mitigatory measures required to minimise any harm that may arise from development upon the HRI.

### **Relocation of the tennis courts**

- 4.15 The development brief reviews two options for the locations of the tennis courts, the first in its current location and the alternative is to relocate the courts west of their current location. Officers agree with SCC that locating the tennis courts on the boundary with George Lambton playing fields enables better connectivity between the two recreational spaces, complimenting each other and providing a more integrated wider recreation space, allows for better management and maintenance of the open space/courts, provides a better relationship between the tennis courts and existing/proposed dwellings, and enables a more gentle density of housing on the developed area of the site.

### **Changes to the development brief taking into account consultation responses**

- 4.16 The following key changes have been made to the development brief post consultation:

#### **Connectivity**

- 4.17 Figure 25 of development brief has been updated to highlight the proposed pedestrian and cycle connections with George Lambton Playing Fields to demonstrate more purposefully the intention to integrate the new publicly accessible open space at the site with George Lambton Playing Fields pursuant to the objective of creating an integrated sports and leisure hub. In addition, connectivity with the Yellow Brick Road is demonstrated pursuant to the objective of maximising the opportunities for walking and cycling between the site and the town centre.

#### **Affordable Housing**

- 4.18 Additional clarification has been provided within the development brief that a policy compliant level of affordable housing is anticipated in line with expectations of Policy CS9 of the Core Strategy.



#### 4.19 **Design Standards**

Whilst detailed design is reserved for the planning application stage, clarity has been provided within the development brief to confirm that WSC design standards are to be achieved within any future development scheme, such as rear privacy distances, garden sizes, vehicle and cycle parking and refuse standards. These are matters to be worked through the planning application process.

### **5. Conclusion**

5.1 Officers consider that the development brief before Cabinet for approval has satisfactorily demonstrated that the required elements of Policy SA6(d) can be achieved through a high-quality design approach.

5.2 Adoption of the development brief will be a key stage in bringing this allocated site forward for development resulting in a high quality and sustainable development to Newmarket.

### **6. Recommendation**

6.1 **That Cabinet approves the St Felix Development Brief as informal planning guidance.**

Part 2 of the development brief refers to a future sports facility on the open space and will not form part of any informal planning guidance approved by Cabinet.

### **7. Risks associated with the proposals**

7.1 There is a risk that failure to adopt the draft development brief could inhibit the Council's ability to deliver homes and a high-quality development.

7.2 The adoption of the draft development brief will mean that the development brief becomes informal planning guidance and a material consideration in the determination of any future planning applications, including reserved matter submissions.

### **8. Implications arising from the proposals**

8.1 **Financial**  
There are no potential adverse financial or resource impacts resulting from the adoption of the draft development brief. Minor costs associated with the adoption of the document can be sourced from existing budgets.

8.2 Legal Compliance

There are no legal implications arising from the recommended adoption of the draft development brief as informal planning guidance. An adopted Development Brief would enable the Local Planning Authority to proceed in determining detailed planning application(s) for the site. If approved, the Development Brief would have the status of informal planning guidance and would be a material consideration to be taken into account in determining any subsequent planning application(s) for the site.

## **9. Appendices referenced in this report**

- 9.1 Appendix A - Development brief document for the former St Felix school site, Newmarket.
- 9.2 Appendix B – Illustrative layout
- 9.3 Appendix C – Colour coded layout
- 9.4 Appendix D – Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

## **10. Background documents associated with this report**

- 10.1 Site Allocations Local Plan (SALP) 2019 Development Plan Document:  
[Final-SALP-September-2019.pdf \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](#)  
[Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan:](#)  
[Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](#)