

Introduction

Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners were commissioned by Epping Forest District Council to undertake a masterplanning study for North Weald Bassett, to identify a vision for the settlement and to provide a clear framework for future development and investment. The study covers transport and movement considerations, provision of new homes, economic opportunities, shops and community services for the settlement, and the role of open space. This report sets out a vision and objectives for North Weald Bassett, masterplan options and involved stakeholder and community engagement. The study feeds into the Local Plan process for Epping Forest District Council.

Baseline analysis and community engagement

A review of statutory and supplementary policy context has been undertaken along with a review of the socio-economic considerations and priorities specific to North Weald Bassett. These inform an understanding of the growth expected for the local area and how this sets the conditions for the masterplanning study.

The urban design and heritage analysis identifies key features of North Weald Bassett's character and identity to be retained and complemented in the future, while a review of transport and utilities identifies infrastructure capacity and future requirements. A review of the local property market provides an economic context highlighting trends in housing and employment for the area and establishes key assumptions against which masterplanning options can be assessed. Epping Forest District Council's Call for Sites highlights the enthusiasm of landowners for development in the area, and that objective consideration of these sites is necessary in order to ensure future development will be delivered in a fair, appropriate and sustainable way. Local residents were given the opportunity to feed their knowledge and thoughts about North Weald Bassett into the study at a workshop early in the process. The general attitude towards development was found to be positive so long as this brings improvements to social and physical infrastructure.

Vision

The analysis and consultation undertaken during the study indicated that the settlement has potential for some growth that can help to more effectively support the local community in the future, but that this growth must be minded to preserve the existing assets of the settlement and bring about additional benefits for the community. The assets include, but are not limited to, the settlement's relationship with the surrounding green open space, stand-out historic buildings, a range of housing types which can support a mixed community and the heritage and current economic role of the North Weald Airfield. The vision is to protect these assets, attract investment to strengthen the existing commercial centre and establish North Weald Bassett as a sustainable place in its own right with an active community life.

Spatial Framework

A general framework has been identified which could help to augment and consolidate the structure of the settlement and provide for various growth scenarios. Areas suitable for residential, commercial, employment, leisure and community uses have all been identified. North Weald Bassett has a relatively coherent pattern of settlement based on incremental development to either side of the High Road. The linear shape of the settlement set within Metropolitan Green Belt ensures that all residents live within a few minutes' walk to open countryside. New development should respect, protect and augment the inherent character of the North Weald Bassett to preserve and enhance the benefits it brings to its residents.

The masterplan study articulates a set of development principles, agreed by community stakeholders, which aim to:

- Preserve the discrete 'village-like' character of North Weald Bassett
- Preserve and enhance settlement's relationship to the Greenbelt/countryside
- Consolidate the structure of the settlement to make it more 'walkable' and accessible

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- Increase the range and quantity of local shops, leisure and community facilities, both in an augmented centre, and in other convenient locations elsewhere
- Increase the range of types and quality of employment space within the settlement
- Enhance the context of North Weald Airfield to help stimulate additional uses and activities which benefit residents
- Improve the quality of local public transport links and mitigate present highways issues

Masterplan options

A number of masterplan options have been developed. Option 1 envisages up to 500 new dwellings being built in North Weald Bassett over the coming 20 years. Option 2 envisages between approximately 1,000 and 1,200 new dwellings and option 3 envisages between 1,500 and 1,600 new dwellings over the next 20 years. Broad spatial scenarios for new development exist, regardless of the level of growth. These consider whether new dwellings should be introduced to the south east of the existing settlement, covering land towards the Ongar Redoubt and including part of the existing golf course (Scenario A); or whether it is preferable for residential development to extend closer to the North Weald Airfield, up to Merlin Way (Scenario B). In addition to this, consideration is given to focusing new development on strengthening the existing commercial centre towards the southern end of the High Road, and the extent to which a secondary commercial centre at Tyler's Green is intensified.

The Masterplanning Study identifies suitable locations for commercial development, such as retail and leisure uses to support residential growth and other locations for employment generating uses, including those relating to airfield activity. The demand arising from a larger population at North Weald Bassett will help ensure the viability of these facilities and services. The Council's emerging Economic Development Strategy and studies relating to the future of the airfield will map and in greater detail the delivery of viable employment generating uses.

Residents were given further opportunity to comment on these options at an exhibition on the 28 June 2014. A summary of their feedback has been included in the report.

Viability and infrastructure considerations

The physical and community infrastructure requirements for new development at North Weald Bassett are identified and described in broad terms, related to the different spatial options.

A high level viability analysis has been undertaken to inform the masterplanning process and the assessment has indicated a viable development scenario. The results of the viability testing give an indication of the funding levels which might be available to invest in new social infrastructure in the settlement, including a new GP surgery premises, a new primary school and landscape open spaces and play spaces.

Delivery is envisaged over a long period of time and a number of phasing principles have been set out to ensure development integrates with existing development, and avoids disconnected and isolated pockets of residential development, and to ensure adequate services, facilities and infrastructure to support the new levels of housing proposed at each phase.