

Thurmaston Liaison Group

5th September 2013 - 6.30pm

First meeting

Attendees

- Rt Hon Stephen Dorrell, MP
- Cllr R L Raven - Thurmaston Parish Council
- Mrs Lynne Stewart – Barkby Parish Council
- Cllr Paul Henry - Syston Parish Council
- Cllr Sue Buckenham – Queninborough Parish Council
- Mr Owen Bentley – BABTAG
- Mr Hetal Patel – Hamilton Residents Group
- Jon Kenny – CEG
- Richard Wain – Hawksmoor
- Nick Thompson – Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners
- Nick Baker- Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners
- Victoria Walker – Beattie Group

Other invitees (including apologies received)

- Rt Hon Keith Vaz, MP
- Cllr Seaton
- Cllr Lowe
- Cllr Harley
- Cllr Grimley
- Cllr Barkley
- Cllr Vardy
- Cllr Pacey
- Cllr Hampton
- Cllr Singh Sandhu
- Cllr Potter
- Cllr Patel
- Cllr Willmott
- Cllr Singh Clair
- Cllr Singh Batti
- Cllr Knaggs
- Sir Peter Soulsby, City Mayor
- Cllr Dave Houseman MBE CC
- Mr James Tickle
- Mr Darren Gartside

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Jon Kenny (JK), development director at CEG welcomed everyone to the liaison group and introduced the project team. He explained that, as part of the Charnwood Local Plan process, CEG has been working since 2008 on this project which is designed to meet the growing need for housing in Charnwood and Leicester.
- 1.2 Regional planning has been discussed since 2006 and there is a consensus from Charnwood and Leicester that this site is appropriate to meet some of the area's housing needs. The Plan is not finalised and will be discussed by Full Council in late October, before being submitted for examination, likely to be in spring 2014.
- 1.3 CEG has been supporting Charnwood through the process of preparing the Local Plan, demonstrating that the site is developable and achievable. Technical evidence has been prepared to submit to Charnwood as part of its decision-making process. A document was distributed to attendees outlining some of the technical work to date.

Ultimately, this work would culminate in the submission of a planning application. JK explained that this is a development of significant scale and it will result in change to the local area. There will be opportunities as well as impacts as a result of that change. CEG has sought to engage with the community throughout this process through meetings, brochures and presentations.

- 1.4 The liaison group will enable regular engagement with community representatives to better understand concerns, provide information, answer questions and, most importantly, to take on board feedback. JK highlighted his awareness that there will be differences of opinion around this table, but, if the planning application is submitted and if it is approved, we want to ensure there is a process in place to ensure people are heard, issues are identified and tackled and information can be fed back into the community.
- 1.5 It would be a long-term process to implement the scheme and the aim is to ensure that there is a way in which views can be heard and we have a forum to address issues. We will use the meetings to discuss topics which are of particular concern or interest and will bring specific consultants to the table to debate, discuss and listen, as well as answering questions on topics such as transport, masterplanning and design, the provision of facilities and green infrastructure.
- 1.6 Minutes will be produced and circulated and we are happy to upload these onto the website once approved at the subsequent meeting.

2. Protocols

- 2.1 VW circulated a suggested protocol for the liaison group and asked for comments, changes and approval from attendees. The protocols included:

Liaison Group Aims and Objectives:

- To provide open lines of communication with the community
- To enable CEG to keep representatives of the community up to date with its research and activity

- To enable CEG to understand community concerns as well as to receive feedback and ideas regarding the proposals as they progress
- To enable attendees to bring to the table questions from the wider community and for the consultant team to answer questions
- For attendees to feedback information from the meetings to their parishioners

Liaison Group Structure:

- It is anticipated the group will meet monthly, depending on requirements
- The agenda will be circulated in advance
- Attendees are requested to contact V W with any questions, or agenda items, they would like to raise at the meeting, one week in advance
- Minutes will be drafted and circulated to the group attendees
- Any amendments to the minutes can be raised and agreed at the subsequent meeting

Principles

The liaison group will run in accordance with the following principles:

- Diversity – communications will be jargon-free, in appropriate formats and will be accessible to all
- Equality of opportunity – we will give equal opportunity to all
- Respect – we will promote the spirit of mutual openness and will give swift and clear feedback

Protocols for the Meeting

All attendees to read the minutes in advance of the meeting and to notify VW of any matters arising in advance.

All members will be provided with copies of the minutes in advance of meetings. These should be read in advance of the meeting so that the team does not need to repeat discussions held at previous meetings.

A time limit of two hours will be set for each liaison group meeting, with the opportunity to increase this by a further 15 minutes if the need arises at the discretion of the Chair.

The meeting will accept and adhere to normal debating protocols.

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2.2 All attendees agreed to follow the above protocols

3. Concept Plan

3.1 Nick Thompson (NT) ran through a presentation which explained the progress in terms of the masterplanning process to date. This covered:

3.2 Sustainability

- The development site is on the edge of the City and can look to Leicester for 'high level' services, facilities and employment provision
- It was queried why development isn't disbursed throughout Charnwood. It was explained that a dispersal strategy for housing would still result in the same number of homes and issues but would not deliver the investment into highways, services, facilities and infrastructure
- The aim is to create vibrant centres which relate well to the wider countryside
- There would be high environmental standards in terms of built environment and sustainable drainage
- The proposals will stimulate investment and benefit the local economy

3.3. Key objectives

- Quality of place - respecting the identity of the local countryside
- Protect and manage biodiversity and green living
- Address transport and movement – ensure a safe environment
- High quality housing to meet a range of needs in distinctive neighbourhoods

3.4 Constraints and Opportunities

A plan was shown and NT described how the masterplanning process has evolved to determine, for example, where green space should go and the elements within or around the site that inform the design.

3.5 Character appraisal

This outlines the research into street patterns and densities in key neighbourhoods around Charnwood and Leicester. The aim of this study is to learn how the local areas work, what works well and where lessons can be learnt to inform the design of the SUE.

NT explained the work undertaken to date, to understand the vernacular and legibility of the street scene, neighbourhoods, design, mix and density throughout the surrounding area.

3.6 Topography

NT explained how the land rises to the east and dips down into Barkby and where the urban edge sits to the south and west. He explained how we can achieve a softer edge, to the east and north, blending with the wider countryside with green routes coming into the urban area. The site was masterplanned with this green framework in mind.

3.7 Parameter Plans

NT explained parameter plans, which show:

- The extent of built environment limits
- Plans setting out rules about heights of buildings, to create interest and variety but also to minimise any visual effects in sensitive areas – setting firm maximum limits
- All access points, vehicular, foot and cycle opportunities
- Key view points, e.g. spire of Barkby to ensure these views remain when the site is developed
- The situation of the local centre and other facilities - in a location where they are most accessible for current and future residents
- Green corridors – linkages of open and green space, routes through from the City and each of the villages into the open, recreation and green spaces.

3.8 NT explained that these rules set out the parameters within which the design team could work. Then using these, and the objectives, the masterplan was 'layered up'.

3.9 The masterplan includes:

- Pedestrian route, using the bridge, across the railway line into Thurmaston and a link at the end of Colby Road.
- The green wedge which will link the city to the site
- Focal point at the south, which gives a sense of arrival into the SUE
- The High Street, with a 20mph limit
- Local centre for 'top-up' shopping and other local services and a district centre
- A primary school in each of the neighbourhoods
- A reserve site for a secondary school, should this be required
- The green corridors, which run to the centre of the site
- Sports pitches, community orchards and other green uses softening the edges – aiming to avoid a 'hard/abrupt' urban edge. Buildings will just peek through the landscaping
- Ponds will have an ecological and recreational value, as well as providing a sustainable drainage solution to manage run off from the site.

4. Any other business

4.1 Lynne Stewart (LS) asked: where are the existing bridleways.

NT: explained that these are shown on the plans and we are retaining them as well as providing more footpath links through green routes throughout the site.

4.2 Owen Bentley (OB) queried if Charnwood making a decision on the principle without seeing a planning application or Transport Assessment?

JK explained that the Transport Assessments are on-going. We haven't yet submitted a planning application; we hope to do so in order to support Charnwood's Local Plan process. The Council's plan will go in front of an Inspector. CEG aims to have an application submitted before then so the Inspector can be confident that this is deliverable, available and viable

The Council will take a decision at the end of October on the whole Local Plan, not just this site. The Council has undertaken its own assessment to allocate this site in the Local Plan.

- 4.3 OB clarified that the TA will be the most important document and this needs to be submitted before Councillors make a decision, is this possible?

NT explained that Councillors are not making a decision on a planning application, but on the principle as to whether policy should consider a planning application on this site. The policy will set out a number of tests. For example it may say we think this could be a good location but you will have to do x, y and z before we can approve or reject an application. Then those principles will have to be adhered to as part of the future planning application.

There is nothing to stop a Council setting out a policy, and to stipulate certain things within this policy, but they would still have to be satisfied with the application as well before it could be approved. JK noted the work to date by CBC/County to assess the principle and suitability of the allocation.

- 4.4 Hetal Patel (HP) highlighted that Hamilton is concerned about the proposal cutting through the country park. The roundabout access was planned many years ago. We want more information about this connection. We understand you will only build this road as the development progresses. If you do the first phase and don't start the second phase, then this traffic will still go through Barkby, Hamilton and Queninborough

JK explained that infrastructure has to come in line with development. We have to prove there is existing capacity on the roads which can be used for a certain number of homes before new infrastructure is delivered. The new infrastructure, whether this is schools, healthcare or highways investment will then come hand in glove with the housing as the site evolves. The delivery of it at certain phases would be legally bound.

- 4.5 Sue Buckenham (SB) How will you design in resilience to climate change? If you increase traffic through our roads how can you achieve this objective?

JK explained that facilities and amenities will be provided on site to reduce the need for car journeys. There will also be easy accessibility to high quality public transport in order to provide a real alternative to using the car and we will promote strong cycling and footpath options. There will be travel planners on the project working with new residents to help them effectively plan the most green travel options possible. We will provide primary schools to ensure there is opportunity to walk to school. If they only choice is to get into your car then this wouldn't be possible, but we are trying to provide choice and, importantly, create opportunities for other forms of travel in the future.

- 4.6 SB: highlighted that despite the provision of bus routes, cycle tracks and footpaths, there is an overwhelming tendency to still use cars. In addition, as bus companies are private businesses if there was no profit margin, the buses simply wouldn't run, or at best, they would run intermittently. How therefore can the societal change necessary to encourage people away from cars be made?

JK: This is a very important point. It is not for us to lecture people, but it is for us to promote the best, highest quality options and alternatives to make the change more acceptable and attractive. By setting up a framework with the right routes, designing it carefully, making

investment into green transport solutions rather than ignoring the opportunity which exists in the future for more use of alternative means of travel. The SUE will be here for generations and we need to try to allow for and support changes in travel habits. The change may be a generation away. It has been shown on other developments to make a difference. The on-site travel planners will also work with residents to ensure the best choices are made from day one to promote best practice.

- 4.7 Lynne Stewart (LS) said that the experience in Beaumont Leas is that their cycle paths have not worked. There is a lot of out commuting. Similarly in Hamilton, the school is on the main road and there is no drop-off point for people to drop children off for school.

JK: These are good points which we want to explore in more detail and propose a future meeting devoted to transport and access. There are examples of new developments where the green transport initiatives have been very effective and we will learn from those. Schools and public transport would be delivered from day one so you actually educate the people who move into the new houses from the outset rather than introducing it too late, once people have picked up bad habits. There will be a full-time employee on the site with the role of educating and helping residents with green transport options. They will help people with their personal travel planning.

- 4.8 SB: Will there be any guarantees regarding public transport provision? They are run by private companies.

JK: Yes the development subsidises the service. This will be agreed via a S106 legal agreement. There is a need to look at better public transport provision in all of the villages.

- 4.9 The Rt Hon Stephen Dorrell MP (SD) queried if it is acceptable to have a plan approved by Charnwood without a planning application and a Transport Assessment (TA)? Disagree that it shouldn't be ready until the Inspector reviews it.

JK: The Council has carried out its own highways work and CEG has provided supplementary information. The Council needs to be satisfied with its own work and research in order to set a policy which says that if a planning application comes forwards, it will consider it subject to certain requirements.

It was stated that by an attendee at the meeting that the Council should clarify its thinking on the access points before it makes a decision. It is the council's role to clarify this.

- 4.10 LS: The SUE is to support the needs of Leicester City. In order to prevent the proposed distributor road becoming a new link road/bypass will there be improvements to the existing roads?

JK: It will be designed as a local road not a bypass, with appropriate speed limits/design. CEG is confident the design of this road will not encourage this use as a Bypass. NT highlighted an example in Islington where road barriers have been removed and a 20 mph speed limit effectively designs in lower speeds rather than needing to use speed humps. We would look at these types of measures within the scheme.

JK explained: It is the existing junctions not the links between the junctions which are the issue on the existing highway. By improving junctions, the roads will flow better. The S106 would include payments to the Highways Authority to ensure that these key junctions are improved.

- 4.11 OB asked: what is the current position on the 13ha of proposed industrial land. A planning application has been submitted for residential on this site. We understand that, without a Plan, it is more difficult for the council to fight these submissions

JK responded: We have seen this application has been submitted. We believe it is contrary to policy and the Council's Plan and we are considering our response to it. Encouraging piecemeal development is contrary to the strategy but yes there is a risk in the absence of a Local Plan.

- 4.12 OB: Is there a Plan B if this does go ahead?

JK: We have spent a lot of time considering the most appropriate mix and layout and we think we have found the best solutions we don't think a Plan B would work effectively. What has been designed provides the most comprehensive and strategic option to deliver a sustainable proposal.

- 4.13 LS: The employment site will cause problems for those near it, they may prefer this?

JK: We are working up detailed proposals for the Duck Pond area to ensure that we respond to these concerns. The employment space is not a heavy industrial site. It is small-scale and high-quality offices and hybrid space for local businesses. It will not be used for dirty or noisy uses. It will be effectively managed. A large buffer is also proposed beyond the railway line and between the properties and the site to ensure that it is in keeping with the area and they work effectively in this location.

- 4.14 OB: Will this new application be heard before the Council's decision?

KJ: It is unlikely as it usually takes 13 weeks to consider a planning application. It is likely the council will want more detailed design briefs for specific areas, such as the Duck Pond.

- 4.15 LS stated: The Core Strategy plan stops at the Duck Pond and you have taken this further north. This is a rural area and we are not happy with employment in this area.

JK: It is likely there would be a planning brief from the Council. These would be small scale, quality offices and employment space. They would be of a high quality. The planning brief would set the scale of the buildings and nature and uses of the buildings. To make it a sustainable scheme we have to provide the opportunity for people to actually live and work within the same community. This is not the strategic employment site, as that is proposed elsewhere in Charnwood. It is small scale, local facilities of good quality, small scale space. It is not massive warehousing with HGV movements that will not work here. It would also be very effectively managed to ensure the uses are appropriate for the location in terms of existing and future residents.

- 4.16 HP asked: How will the scheme be designed to be environmentally friendly?

Drainage and water strategy will incorporate sustainable urban drainage schemes. Engineers have to size these to deal with current rainfall with a 20 per cent future increase factored in. We are not particularly affected by flooding but it will be designed to tackle potential future changes. The engineers will design holding ponds which collect the run off and this is only let out when the system it is flowing into can cope with it. The attenuation ponds have to be big enough to hold the excess rainfall. Swales and drains will also collect water throughout the site.

- 4.17 LS asked: On an early plan you are showing a flood plain, but your masterplan does not show this flood plain, why?

JK: In 2008/09 this was the floodplain the EA showed. There has been further modelling undertaken and the EA's new flood mapping, which will come out imminently, shows that this flood plain has reduced drastically in this location.

However, there have been some surface water issues locally. These have been caused by blocked drains, not flooding of watercourses. It is proposed that we have a future meeting when the hydrological team can talk through the extensive work they have done and can also listen to the local concerns and knowledge within this room so we can look at this in more detail.

The majority of the former flooded areas are north of the road and are not included within the proposal. A balancing pond is also proposed in this area to collect surface water.

- 4.18 SB asked: What discussions have been undertaken with Severn Trent regarding the availability of water for the longer term?

JK: Severn Trent has assured us they can provide potable water for the proposal. We are also proposing rainwater recycling schemes.

- 4.19 OB queried: Having read all of the comments which went into Charnwood, some housebuilders have criticised this plan as non-deliverable due to its scale. They were arguing that smaller development would cause fewer problems and be delivered faster. What is your opinion?

JK: There is some self-interest in those comments, but we have been asked whether it is better to spread all of the houses with each village taking a few hundred homes. What you will get is the same issues, same number of people and same number of cars but these schemes will not provide the investment into infrastructure – they will not deliver new roads, new schools, a new health centre and shopping facilities on site for example.

If you don't look at the most sustainable comprehensive solutions adjacent to where people work, such as Leicester, you can actually face more problems with fewer solutions. There are very significant housing requirements in this area and the most appropriate place for housing is in the city or on the edge of it. All of the work we've undertaken shows that this proposal is deliverable and viable.

- 4.20 LS stated: According to your plan, there is a road proposed through the duck pond area and you don't have control over some of this land. One of the landowners does not want to sell this land as he likes his view.

JK: If there is a particular objection to the route then we can look at this. The route of the road was discussed and it was understood it skirted this land rather than running through it but it was agreed CEG would undertake further investigation and report back at a future meeting. .

- 4.21 SD: The basic geography of the areas of land means that the 'tongue' to the south east is the most intrusive. How important is this to the economics of the scheme. Is it subsidising the rest or is it two separate proposals?

JK: It is not subsidising the scheme. The masterplan strategically looks at how this site can deliver the housing numbers required by CBC. We have planned and designed to meet the required number of homes as well as responding to constraints and the physical elements of the site. We are suggesting distinct neighbourhoods so they have integrity and interest in their own right. They will each come with their own facilities and infrastructure.

The scheme is designed to respect the topography and the wider setting. The highest point is between the north of our site and south of Barkby Thorpe. The development edge stops at the hill so that the views are of open space and not a row of housing (as these will sit beyond the ridge.)

It is a design-led solution not an economic solution. It allows distinct neighbourhoods to come forward but all meeting in the central area where there is a district centre and cricket pitch to act as a welcoming focal point.

- 4.22 OB: Is the bit on the east to meet the housing numbers and employment space?

NT: One of the things we did at an early stage was to define the edge of development, the extent to which it should fit within the topography and landscape to be least intrusive and allow a soft edge to be designed which respects the surrounding countryside. If you reduce the number of people you cannot provide as many facilities, which means people are more likely to get into the car to reach facilities.

Overall, the footprint is 150 acres less than when we first started the process in order to achieve the right balance. The split is about 50 per cent development 50 per cent open space.

- 4.23 OB: The Deserted Medieval Village – how are you protecting this?

NT: We have spoken to English Heritage about this. There are other developments which are closer to this which have been approved. We are doing far more to maintain and protect this. For example, there is a belt of trees and we have picked this up with the design and have proposed the green space to the south east and are proposing more planting in this area and provide open space to contain development. The eastern edge is lower density and a softer edge as a result.

4.24 OB: The topography at the northern edge, from the Medieval Village, will look up towards the site. If you look to the west, the trees may provide screening but they can't screen the whole development.

We are trying to incorporate the groups of landscaping trees and working with a landscape architect to have layers of planting so that the buildings sit within the mature landscaping and are screened.

4.25 LS: Will you retain mature trees? Will the trees along the bridleway remain?

NT: They provide fantastic value and we have spent a long time looking at the mature trees and specimen trees and how they can form a valuable part of the proposal.

There is a double hedgerow and some trees. We felt this was a great start for our north/south footpath and cycleway and have incorporated this within the plans.

4.26 LS: The large green area, will this be farmland or green space?

NT: Our ideal would be to have layers of transition from private gardens to open space, with some recreation space, to allotments and orchards and into agriculture. We want to still continue this within our management plan if possible.

4.27 OB: Will there be a management trust for the site?

JK: We are having a meeting regarding this next week and the trust/custodianship of this space will be progressed. We aim to talk to groups and stakeholders who might be interested in getting involved in this. It will need funding and we understand that service charges in Hamilton have not necessarily worked very well, particularly if land is not maintained to a good standard. We are very aware of this, if people get value for money they are happy to contribute. This has to be well managed in a way that works for all parties. It is some way ahead but we are working through the ideas at the moment.

4.28 It was queried how big the traveller's site would be

JK: Approximately one acre. We have asked if this is justified and whether it should be incorporated in the SUE (It is within the Council's Policy at the moment).

4.29 HP: What is happening to parish boundaries?

JK: We are not sure. We have heard there have been discussions. We would like to be involved in this. We believe it should form part of the discussions about how management/trust options might work. It was raised at the exhibitions and we have made Charnwood aware of this. We are not yet sure if it is part of a planning application but it is an issue local government will need to resolve.

4.30 HP: What is the timetable for the school delivery?

JK: The first primary school would be delivered within the first 570 homes. Hamilton has a concern that its schools are closest to the first phase of the development. As school rolls ebb and flow year by year, so we have to look at this in line with current school rolls. If additional

capacity is needed at a local school to ensure they can take more children we make that financial investment to enlarge the school. However, if we need to get on and build a school we would therefore do that and this would add value to the development as well as it is attractive for occupiers.

The first phase is closest to Thurmaston rather than Hamilton, but the same principles would apply if the school is needed very early, it is delivered then. Education is a very critical point. Commercially, a new school makes a new development far more attractive. But an empty school would detract. It is definitely not something we take lightly and we have to be advised by the education authority as well as they are the ultimate decision maker in this regard. We are talking to local schools as well.

There will be a matrix in the S106 agreement to ensure that the financial investment goes into the right place from day one, so where existing capacity can be used (whether that is roads, buses or education for example) it should be so, that way funds can be prioritised by spending to improve the most vital issues (which again may be roads, education or the new bus service). All of this detail would be agreed at the planning application stage and legally bound by a S106 agreement.

- 4.31 OB stated: Some basic increases in traffic surveys have been undertaken by BABTAG and this has shown an extra eighty cars plus per minute on top of the existing traffic during the rush hour. This is based on the RAC figures.

JK: We will look at transport figures and discuss at a future meeting.

5. Key themes for future meetings

- 5.1 It was agreed that the key topics for future meetings should include:

- Drainage/hydrology
- Transport
- Infrastructure provision
- Green infrastructure/management of the site

- 5.2 It was agreed VW would liaise with the relevant consultants in these fields to line up availability and set the programme for future meetings. VW to also circulate relevant documentation for those meetings one week in advance so attendees have an opportunity to review and prepare points/questions for the agenda (these should also be supplied to VW in advance).

6. Date of next meeting

It was agreed the next meeting would commence at **6pm on Thursday 3rd October 2013**. It would be held at The Old School, 736 Melton Road, Thurmaston, LE4 8BD.