

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 September 2017

PRESENT – Councillors Carson (in the Chair), Coultas, L Hughes and KE Kelly. (4)

APOLOGIES – Councillors, Donoghue, Lyonette, MR Nicholson, Tostevin and Wright. (5)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor H Scott. (1)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Williams, Director, Economic Growth; Jenny Dixon, Estates Officer; Dawn Taylor, Principal Officer (Trading Standards and Animal Health) and Lead Officer; and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

P19. BLACKWELL GRANGE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT BRIEF FOR SITES HE1, HE1A, HE2 AND HE3 – The Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) detailing the outcome of the consultation process for the Blackwell Grange Planning and Development Brief for Sites He1, He1a, He2 and He3 and seeking views of this Scrutiny Committee, in relation to possible responses to the comments made, in amending the draft Planning and Development Brief before submission to Cabinet.

The submitted report stated that the Planning and Development Brief (the Brief) was prepared in the context of existing Planning policies and followed a four week consultation, ending on 25 June 2017, on the Council's proposals for the restoration of the Parkland and residential development on the Sites.

Reference was made to meetings with Historic England to address its concerns which resulted in an amended Brief and Landscape and Restoration Plan. The Brief was prepared following an evidenced based approach and thorough analysis of the area and included a topographical survey, drainage philosophy report, tree surveys, environmental searches and highways access points options. A multi-disciplinary officer team developed the Brief in consultation with statutory bodies and the Blackwell Residents Forum (BRF). Residents were also consulted during May and June.

Scrutiny Committee was advised that the Brief, once adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document, would be a material consideration on planning applications and guide the disposal of Council land. Committee acknowledged that due planning process is still required on all detailed applications including consultation with all appropriate stakeholders.

Particular reference was made to site He2 which was the only site not in Council ownership but was currently held under a long lease from the Council by the owners of Blackwell Grange Hotel.

Details were provided of several implementation options available in respect of the Parkland Landscape and Restoration Plan with estimated costs of £300k to £400k. Upkeep and maintenance of the Parkland would be through an annual residents levy.

Scrutiny noted that a Tree Survey had identified approximately 30 trees that needed to be felled as they were in a dangerous state of repair and that those trees would be replaced.

A member of the public addressed the Scrutiny Committee and raised several concerns and comments including the decision by Historic England not to designate the parkland as Registered Park and Garden; existence of some old brick drains under the land believed to be from 1805 for a planned lake; scope of a desktop exercise by potential developers to determine if there were any archaeology issues; use of the word 'anecdotal' relating to localised ponding on the site as this was evidenced with photographs and was detailed on the Environment Agency website; and query as to how a SUDS pond would take water away from site He3 as it was uphill.

Further concerns included the retention of the remaining willow tree to suck up water; and the need to identify a maximum number of units for sites He1a and He2 as this would potentially have an impact in car parking; the construction of age specific accommodation; retention and preservation of the existing Haha; need to outline the area of development land in site He3; and explanation of plot ratio not exceeding 25 per cent.

Officers advised that it was not appropriate to put a maximum number of units on sites He1a and He2 because of the nature and various types of development i.e. might include high quality houses, mews cottages or apartments.

It was also stated that whilst providing a safe route to school consideration should be given to wildlife in the area and in that regard it was advised that an ecologist had been consulted on all plans; and the use of the correct materials to provide boundary fencing of a suitable height.

Councillor H Scott, Ward Member, also addressed the Scrutiny Committee raising several concerns and comments including the possibility of obtaining historic information from the Golf Club's Grounds men relating to flooding in the area; and possibility of bungalows or mews cottages being provided on He1a and He2.

Particular concerns were raised in relation to access and highways and the preference, if there was a necessity to breach a wall in Blackwell Lane, that it be where an earlier breach had been made and subsequently bricked up. It was also stated that consideration needed to be given to the number of Plots on He1 and He3 as extra vehicles would require access to Carmel Road South (as detailed in Appendix 8 of the submitted report) very close to both another access onto the road and Blands Corner Roundabout. Committee was assured that the Highways Engineers had been consulted throughout the process and were aware of all the issues.

Discussion ensued on the potential traffic issues at Blackwell Lane; the provision of an up-to-date Transport Assessment to accompany subsequent planning applications; retention of the Tree Scape of Darlington; movement between the sites; and the possibility of widening access to the Clubhouse Site as raised by residents.

Officers advised that Highways issues would be considered carefully through the planning process and that a full Transport Assessment had been undertaken and approved by Highways England that took into account the development proposals.

The Director of Economic Growth confirmed that the next step was to submit a report to Cabinet, in October, seeking adoption of the framework and agreement to dispose of the land following which the marketing process for disposal would commence.

RESOLVED – (a) That the outcome of public consultations be noted.

(b) That the Planning Brief be amended as appropriate to include the comments made at this meeting.

(c) That the submission of the Brief to Cabinet, for approval, be supported.
