

SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Cabinet Member Managed Growth
Meeting date:	1 st September 2015
Subject/Report Title:	BLYTHE VALLEY PARK - VISION DOCUMENT
Report from:	Head of Economic Development and Regeneration
Report Author/Lead Contact Officer:	Gary Palmer, Planning & Transport Policy Manager
Wards affected:	<div style="display: flex; flex-wrap: wrap;"> <div style="width: 50%;"> <input type="checkbox"/> All Wards <input type="checkbox"/> Bickenhill <input type="checkbox"/> Castle Bromwich <input type="checkbox"/> Dorridge/Hockley Heath <input type="checkbox"/> Kingshurst/Fordbridge <input type="checkbox"/> Lyndon <input type="checkbox"/> Olton <input type="checkbox"/> Shirley South <input type="checkbox"/> Silhill <input type="checkbox"/> St Alphege </div> <div style="width: 50%;"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Blythe <input type="checkbox"/> Chelmsley Wood <input type="checkbox"/> Elmdon <input type="checkbox"/> Knowle <input type="checkbox"/> Meriden <input type="checkbox"/> Shirley East <input type="checkbox"/> Shirley West <input type="checkbox"/> Smith's Wood </div> </div>
Public/Private report:	Public
Exempt by virtue of Paragraph:	N/A
1. Purpose of Report	
1.1	To invite the Cabinet Member to review and endorse IM Properties' (IMP) Vision Document for Blythe Valley Park.
2. Decision(s) Recommended	
2.1	<p>Cabinet Member is asked to:</p> <p>(a) Note the contents of the Blythe Valley Park Vision Document, and</p> <p>(b) Endorse its contents as a vision shared by the Council for the future development of Blythe Valley Park.</p>

3. Background

Context

- 3.1 Blythe Valley Park (BVP) is a key economic asset within the Borough forming part of the M42 corridor and UK Central - a major economic driver and a key investment location both for Solihull and the wider region. Its strategic importance is highlighted in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) Strategic Spatial Framework.
- 3.2 BVP currently hosts sustainable buildings and high quality commercial development within a high quality setting. It has excellent access to the strategic highway network but suffers from poor bus access and infrequent services to adjacent areas, with limited bus services between settlements, perpetuating car travel.

Local Plan Vision

- 3.3 The specific vision is for BVP to become a mixed and sustainable community with exemplar development and supporting facilities. This recognises that many investors are seeking locations offering a wider range of facilities than originally envisaged for BVP. Inclusion of a residential element at BVP, as set out in the Local Plan, will help to support these ancillary and complementary uses. It will also contribute towards the Borough's local housing need, whilst retaining the area's intrinsic character of distinctive villages separated by open countryside. It will become a mixed and sustainable community and an aspirational place to live, work and play, amplified by exemplar standards of design, construction, and a distinctive sense of place. Improvements to local facilities, services and public transport will encourage more sustainable travel patterns and improve connectivity to surrounding communities.
- 3.4 The Local Plan enables the diversification of the range of uses at BVP from the original Regional Investment Site (RIS) concept to facilitate employment and create a more sustainable place, enabling high quality housing to meet the needs of BVP as a key economic asset. Housing development at BVP will make a significant contribution towards meeting the Borough's housing needs for market and affordable housing.

Policy

- 3.5 The Local Plan allocates approximately 64ha of land for mixed use development at BVP. Through the efficient use of land, the Council expects a substantial quantity of employment development to be brought forward within BVP (about 1.75 million sq.ft. overall). In addition, the plan includes proposals for residential development to take place at the park to support its vitality and viability. Housing will also help provide a sense of place and enable improved public transport facilities to villages in the area, links to the main urban area, pedestrian and cycle links and increase accessibility to communities.
- 3.6 The plan identifies 600 dwellings to be provided on approximately 12.5 ha. The residential component of the site will be released in phase 1 of the plan (up to 2018), but is recognised in the plan that it will actually be delivered over the first two phases of the plan (up to 2018 and 2018 to 2023).

Change in Ownership

- 3.7 IM Properties (IMP) completed the purchase of the site in December 2014 from the liquidators following the previous owners entering receivership. As the new owners of the park they are keen to bring forward developments at the park in accordance with the Local Plan aspirations.
- 3.8 At the decision making session on 6th July 2015, the Cabinet Member for Managed Growth noted that a Development Framework was being prepared by IM Properties and that it was to be submitted to the Council with an invitation that it be endorsed as non-statutory guidance. The submission and endorsement of a Development Framework would inform and provide a basis for a planning application to be prepared and submitted.

Vision Document

- 3.9 Rather than produce an overly prescriptive & detailed document, IMP have moved forward with producing a higher level vision document rather than a development framework. The purpose of the document is

“to stimulate interest in the evident development opportunities at BVP whilst simultaneously providing guidance on what form and nature development would be consistent with the objectives of IM Properties and SMBC. Its overarching purpose is to generate certainty over the approach needed to deliver a successful mixed use development.”

- 3.10 The Vision Document will be non-statutory and it will have no formal planning status, but it is anticipated that all parties will commit to it, endorse its content and use it as a means of guiding and encouraging on-going development.

- 3.11 The document is structured to provide the following:

- Strategic context
- Ambition
- The site and its potential
- Placemaking concepts
- Summary

Strategic context

- 3.12 This summarises the site's location, key economic drivers and planning context.

Ambition

- 3.13 To create:

“a distinct, vibrant and sustainable environment which builds on the existing established business park and grows this into a new sustainable mixed use neighbourhood for Solihull. The Parish Council aspires to achieve an integrated place that is an integral part of the Parish and not a separate entity.”

- 3.14 Precedents (both in the UK and Europe) have been identified as examples where similar aspirations have been realised. These are assessed to see what is relevant

to BVP and what lessons can be learnt (the latter needn't be restricted to the identified precedents and lessons can also be drawn from more local examples). The precedents are Kingshill, West Malling (Kent), Messestadt Riem (Munich) and Kista (Stockholm).

The site and its potential

3.15 This section sets out existing key elements that have been considered and taken into account in developing the vision, including:

- Local facilities.
- Transport & movement (local highway network; pedestrian & cycle connectivity; and public transport).
- Landscape context.
- Key site characteristics (existing buildings and occupiers; site landscape features; drainage and flood risk; and on site utilities)

Placemaking concepts

3.16 The principal concepts behind the vision are:

3.17 **“Living in the Valley”** – BVP will deliver quality new homes for Solihull and housing choice. Nestled within a tranquil riverside setting, the housing will provide a sense of community and village character within the Solihull landscape.

3.18 **“Working in the Park”** – Combining the best of strategic location and quality buildings, the Phase 1 development area has laid solid foundations for ‘working in the park’. New development in this area will complement and complete this established offer.

3.19 **“A Healthy Environment”** – Places to relax, play and enjoy. A series of green spaces will be connected by a comprehensive footpath network. They will be the link between homes and places of work. Physical health and activity will be encouraged through all aspects of everyday life.

3.20 **“The Blended Core”** – Where the [above] three elements meet, the focus for the most intensive mixing of land uses, building typologies, height and massing. It will be welcoming and appealing to residents, visitors and employees alike. The heart of Blythe Valley it will be the focus for facilities and urban amenities, a place where people interact, relax and gather.

3.21 These placemaking concepts have then been incorporated into a ‘vision concept drawing’ which has been formed by combining a series of layers comprised of landscape, connections, commercial, residential & blended core together. The result is a broad distribution of land uses with residential on the undeveloped western part of the park; commercial focussed on the undeveloped parts of phase 1 of the park; and a ‘blended core’ of mixed use developments towards the centre of the park. It is noted that new development should not only respect existing features but fully integrate with them – including links to the countryside park and surroundings.

Development Agreement

3.22 The Council also has a role to play due to its land interests in the site, as it benefits

from a charge on the land. A development agreement is in place and this requires that developments are bought forward in accordance with a masterplan. The Vision Document can also be considered by the Council (at a different cabinet decision session) under the terms of the development agreement.

Next Steps

3.23 A planning application will be submitted before the end of the year.

4. Evaluation of Alternative Option(s)

4.1 The Council essentially has two options at this stage:

- (a) To endorse the Vision Document, or
- (b) Not to endorse the Vision Document for some specified reason.

4.2 As a high level document it achieves a purpose of establishing a strategic vision as to what is being sought from the development envisaged in the Local Plan. It is pleasing to note that a high quality exemplar standard development is to be pursued - this could be further enhanced by setting out what sustainable standards will be met. The indicated broad distribution of land uses appears not only logical, but also enables a 'sense of place' to be created with a focus on the 'blended core'. The development of this part of the park takes on a particular significance if a true sense of place is to be created. Both in terms of constituting an exemplar development and the creation of a sense of place, the challenge will be in how this vision is translated into a planning application with sufficient safeguards to ensure its implementation matches the vision; ie creating the distinctive place envisaged. Nevertheless, at this stage the vision is one that is worthy of support.

4.3 Unsurprisingly, the Vision Document focuses on what can be achieved within the park itself (i.e., what IMP would have the opportunity to directly deliver). Although it notes an aspirational pedestrian/cycle link to Cheswick Green it could be more ambitious with providing a vision on greater integration/connectivity, recognising that its delivery may not be possible solely through the subsequent planning application.

4.4 In summary, the higher-level vision set out in the document is consistent with the aspirations set out in the Council's Local Plan and there are no fundamental reasons to suggest it should not be endorsed.

5. Reasons for Recommending Preferred Option

5.1 See above.

6. Scrutiny

6.1 None at this stage.

7. Implications

Delivery of the Council's Priorities

7.1 The options/proposals in this report will contribute to the delivery of the following Council Priorities:

- Managed Growth:

- Delivering UK Central
- Local Plan delivery
- Creating healthy & well designed places
- Solihull for Success
- Build Stronger Communities:
 - Providing the right kind of housing to meet local needs, support growth and prevent homelessness

Policy/Strategy Implications

- 7.2 The submission and endorsement of an appropriate Vision Document will facilitate the implementation of Local Plan policy.
- 7.3 Cheswick Green Parish has been declared as a Neighbourhood Area and the Parish Council are working on a Neighbourhood Plan (NP). The preparation of a Vision Document should help align the development aspirations at BVP with the emerging NP, especially in relation to connectivity.

Meeting the duty to involve

- 7.4 Consultation undertaken to date includes:
- Ward Member briefing of the emerging framework.
 - Parish Council briefings.
 - Tenants meetings to engage with existing occupiers on the Park.
 - A dedicated consultation web site that has been provided since July.
- 7.5 Turleys (on behalf of IMP) have produced a note of the consultation undertaken to date. This is attached as appendix B.
- 7.6 One of the key steps in the process has been a presentation to MADE (Midlands Architecture and the Developed Environment) on the emerging framework. MADE were supportive of the principle of development of the site and the general approach and ambition that has been shown so far. They noted that some key issues need to be resolved as designs are developed further such as: the transformation of the environment and infrastructure to be suitable for mixed use; connectivity within and beyond the site; the detailed design of the mixed core; and the processes of quality control and community engagement. These are detailed issues that will be expected to addressed in the planning application (e.g., through required the Design and Access Statement) rather than needing to be included in a high level vision document. An undertaking for on-going design review engagement with MADE would help reassure that the vision of creating a distinctive place will be taken forward into the planning application, and beyond to implementation.

Financial Implications

- 7.7 No direct financial implications.

Legal implications	
7.8	The endorsement of a non-statutory Vision Document can constitute a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.
Risk Implications	
7.9	None as a direct result of this report.
Statutory Equality Duty	
7.10	None as a direct result of this report.
Carbon Management/Environmental	
7.11	None as a direct result of this report.
Partner Organisations	
7.12	None as a direct result of this report.
Safeguarding/Corporate Parenting Implications	
7.13	None as a direct result of this report.
Customer Impact	
7.14	None as a direct result of this report.
Other implications	
7.15	None as a direct result of this report.
8.	List of Appendices Referred to
	A – A Sustainable Future for Blythe valley Park – Vision Document B – A note by Turleys on consultation undertaken to date.
9.	Background Papers Used to Compile this Report
9.1	None
10.	List of Other Relevant Documents
10.1	Solihull Local Plan – Shaping a Sustainable Future, December 2013.
10.2	Supplementary Planning Document ‘Meeting Housing Needs’ July 2014
10.3	Blythe Valley Park – Development Framework, Report to Cabinet Member for Managed Growth, 6 July 2015