

Application Details	
Application Reference Number:	14/21/0047
Application Type:	Full Application
Application Validation date:	17 December 2021
Description:	Application for outline planning permission with all matters reserved, except for access, comprising up to 1,450 dwellings, up to 4.91 hectares of land for strategic employment uses, up to 8 hectares of land for a through school, mixed use district centre including mobility hub, community facilities, green infrastructure, drainage works, and associated works, on land at Walford Cross, Monkton Heathfield.
Site Address:	LAND EAST OF THE A38, SOUTH OF WALFORD CROSS, MONKTON HEATHFIELD
Parish:	Creech St Michael PC and West Monkton PC
Conservation Area:	No
Somerset Levels and Moors RAMSAR Catchment Area:	Yes
AONB:	No
Case Officer:	Simon Fox, Major Projects Officer (Planning)
Agent:	One Eleven Property
Applicant:	REDROW HOMES/PERSIMMON HOMES SOUTH LTD

Update Report

- 1.1 Members will recall the above stated application was presented to the former Somerset West and Taunton Planning Committee on Thursday 15 September 2022 with a recommendation of refusal for 14 stated reasons, see Appendix 1.
- 1.2 After representations from the applicant the committee resolved to defer the application.
- 1.3 Reasons for the deferment given by the committee were:
 - i. That the application be deferred to allow opportunity for significant revisions to address the recommended reasons for refusal and in accordance with a timeline agreed through a Planning Performance Agreement and informed by the use of the Quality Review Panel.
 - ii. That had the application proceeded to determination at this stage, Planning Committee would have been minded to refuse permission in accordance with the recommended reasons for refusal. If sufficient progress is not made within 6 months towards a revised scheme officers in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair have delegated authority to refuse the application.
- 1.4 Reports were brought back to the SWT/Area West Planning Committees in March 2023 and October 2023 to update Members regarding progress in

addressing the reasons for refusal and other matters which had emerged, see Appendix 2.

- 1.5 At each update the Committee resolved to not enact part ii) of the original resolution to refuse the application because in the view of Officers significant progress had been made but maintaining the option to delegate a refusal in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair should progress not continue in the way required by the LPA.
- 1.6 This report seeks, 20 months after the original resolution, to further update Planning Committee Members. By their nature large sites take time given their complexity, and in this case we have frontloaded a significant amount of work that would otherwise be undertaken post resolution to inform the s106. This is for two reasons, so we can be clear with the committee and the community as to the agreed set of planning obligations and secondly to ensure those planning obligations are affordable and deliverable with development viability as big a problem now to reconcile as it was post the 2008 economic crash.
- 1.7 Members may recall the site has been named Langaller Park for marketing purposes.
- 1.8 A notable milestone was reached in January 2024 when the applicants resubmitted a substantially amended scheme. This has resulted in the Hybrid part of the proposal being omitted and this now comprising an outline consent with all matters reserved except access.
- 1.9 The Council undertook further consultation on the amended scheme in February. During March and April those consultation responses have been assessed and further meetings with consultees undertaken (and are still being undertaken) to ensure all matters are addressed satisfactorily.
- 1.10 The overall sense from the recent consultation period is positive with many technical issues having been resolved or being on the cusp of being resolved.
- 1.11 Given the size of the site there are still several highways issues being assessed with meetings planned to reach an agreement. West Monkton PC has objected to the omission of the relief road for example.
- 1.12 This is the first of the allocated Urban Extensions, or part thereof (Comeytrove, Staplegrove, Monkton Heathfield) to be progressed as an outline to determination since the adoption of the Garden Town Vision. As such many policy initiatives are being tested at scale for the first time, mobility hubs being one such example and as such some of the detail is being worked up by the Council in parallel and this has caused delays. The Core Strategy dates back to 2011 and so the Council has had to refresh what policy criteria should still apply rather than slavishly just follow out of date requirements, which may be easier to progress matters but not result in the right outcome. The site will also accommodate a phosphate mitigation wetland on-site and a through-school (nursery/primary/secondary) and so these unusual aspects need thorough consideration.

- 1.13 With a 99% finalised masterplan and set of planning obligation requirements attention has turned to financial viability, i.e.: how does the site pay for everything asked for? The asks of a site like this are significant and the way in which the allocation was set out has not helped. This relates to the imbalance between infrastructure requirements between sites. The whole allocation is for 4500 homes and this site proposes 1450, so 33%, and yet it carries a significant quantum of infrastructure compared to others approved and other sites yet to come forward. This presents an equalisation issue and one of fairness between developers. This may mean that some obligations cannot be afforded on this site in lieu of say providing the circa 7.7ha school site, the district centre and certain highway works which are strategically required to serve the whole allocation.
- 1.14 Allied to the matter of s106 is CIL. Current estimates suggest this site will generate circa £16m of CIL, 25% of which will be paid to West Monkton PC and Creech St Michael PC due to the presence of Neighbourhood Plans. At present there is no indication that Somerset Council will utilise any of its CIL receipts to fund infrastructure at Langaller Park and thereby offset the necessity for in effect everything needed to be funded by s106 which raises the viability issue and the consequential reduction in what the site can deliver in terms of affordable housing, community facilities etc. The picture across Somerset is mixed with some CIL regimes exempting major sites so they are not double charged for certain infrastructure that CIL was supposed to finance by pooling funds more fairly from small schemes that wouldn't provide such infrastructure via s106.
- 1.15 This means it is imperative the circa £4m to be paid to the parishes remains available to provide some of the infrastructure necessary to make a successful Garden Community. This includes mechanisms whereby the parishes fund the construction of the Community Hall for example and discussions with the parishes continue.
- 1.16 Working this through will take more time and is a direct consequence of how Somerset Council now administers and allocates CIL.
- 1.17 By investing in that work now we will be able to present a comprehensive list of affordable planning obligations to the committee and shorten the time between committee and issuing a decision. This is because it will shorten the overall time for determination as legal agreements can take a significant period of time to agree post committee.
- 1.18 Whilst there are still matters to resolve the quality of the proposal has been much aided by the time given to discuss matters thoroughly and engage with consultees. All parties are working proactively to achieve the best outcome.
- 1.19 Subject to the resolution of outstanding issues and notably viability matters a Planning Committee is being targeted towards the late Autumn. The applicant has offered to join with the LPA to provide a Members Briefing in the lead up to the Planning Committee meeting should that be desired.

Recommendation

- 1.20 Officers seek agreement from the Planning Committee to continue working with the applicant towards a committee date of Autumn 2024. The original reasons for refusal largely would not be defensible by the Council given the amendments made to the application and the work in progress and it would be perverse to refuse now just because of the passage of time with both parties working closely and proactively with each other and the parishes.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Officer Report from September 2022

Appendix 2 - Officer update reports presented on Thursday 30 March 2023
and Tuesday 17 October 2023