Conservation and Urban Design Advice

Reference: 3/24/1255/OUT
Planning case officer: David Lamb
Site address: Land South Of A507, West Of A10 Buntingford
Date of consultation: 11/07/2024
Date of response: 02/12/2024
Heritage considerations: None

Recommendations:

☒ Objection
☐ No objection
☒ Further information and/or amendments required

Observations:

This is an Outline planning application for development of employment land (flexible use B2, B8, E(c) and E(g)), informal open space, associated works and infrastructure including a new access from A507, with all matters reserved except for access.

Having assessed the information submitted as part of this application, we have the following comments :

Masterplanning

1. Masterplanning process

The proposed development, given its scale, is a 'significant development'. As required under Policy DES1 any significant developments should undergo a collaborative masterplanning process prior to a planning application being submitted. Such a masterplanning process should result in a collaboratively prepared masterplan framework and design coding information to define the vision for the site. While the applicant has undergone some degree of consultation, it does not appear that a policy compliant fully collaborative process with all relevant parties has been undertaken.

Sustainable travel

2. Public transport – The scheme proposes a major development on the fringe of Buntingford. There are no railway lines serving Buntingford, and the nearest existing bus route stops are to the east of the A10. While some potential proposals

for public transport connections have been indicated including new bus stops on both sides of Baldock Road (A507) to west of A10, details of these are not yet confirmed at this stage. The transport assessment on para 5.4.3 states that *"Conversations with Arriva Group are currently taking place and more details on the public transport improvements will be provided in due course*." Useage of such public transport connections will be reliant on the confirmed details of such proposal, frequency of the bus service and areas the bus service connects to. We also note the Highways team's concerns on the proposed bus access which states *"Existing bus stops are slightly beyond what HCC would recommend at 500-600m walk, however with the delay crossing the A507 and A10 this is considered too substantial to encourage sustainable travel by bus. However, the applicant is providing bus stops outside their site which could address this. Unfortunately, the TA does not give details of how they would be served and HCC's PTU department considers that with the aforementioned access problems they will not be served."*
At this stage, in the absence of any confirmation and details, we are concerned about poor public transport links to the site and the excessive reliance thereby on cars.

3. A mobility hub is proposed as part of the proposed residential led scheme to the north of the A507, however this is part of a separate planning application and reliant on the developer implementing the scheme. As such the proposals for public transport connections are not confirmed at this stage, and our concerns on excessive reliance on cars remains.

4. Pedestrian/cycle access: The scheme includes segregated paths along Baldock Road to the west of A10 for pedestrian/cycle access to the site. However, the further improvements to the connections within Buntingford that are required to complete the scheme and deliver improvements to the full extent of the pedestrian links (proposals listed in para 5.5.6 of the Transport Assessement) *are noted to be "indicative design and subject to further conversation with HCC".*
HCC in their comments on Highways aspects have said that *"HCC has concerns about the details and deliverability of the proposed route within Buntingford. The route will be needed in entirety to unlock the site sustainably in line with the Policies promoted in HCC's Local Transport Plan (LTP) 4, May 2018."*
It is concluded therefore that the pedestrian/cycle access proposals are preliminary at this stage and will need further discussions with Highways. Once this is undertaken, confirmed details should be provided as part of this application for further assessment.

5. Additionally, the proposed pedestrian/cycle access provides a link to the centre of Buntingford, but it is not clear if it offers the best links to all of Buntingford. As an example, a resident living in the south of Buntingford will have to walk/cycle northwards to Baldock road and then east along the proposed

routes to access the proposed employment. This may not be the most direct route to the site from the South of Buntingford. For more direct links to the north of Buntingford, some further connections are proposed as part of the residential led scheme to the north of the A507, however again this is part of a separate planning applicant and is reliant on the developer implementing the scheme. Overall, a movement assessment study and map is required to understand pedestrian/cyclist movement and desire lines from key residential areas within walking/cycling distance. The assessment should identify any problem areas along such routes and this should lead to the full scale of off-site improvements to ensure better pedestrian/cyclist links to the site.

6. Overall, in the absence of fully resolved and confirmed sustainable travel links, the concern remains that this is a fundamentally unsustainable development that relies on private car journeys from/to Buntingford and nearby towns.

7. The proposed development as indicated in the illustrative masterplan is set away from the A507. The heights of buildings along this northern section is not clarified at this stage and extent size of hedges/ proposed landscaping is unclear. It is strongly recommended that the frontage along the A507 should allow for good visibility and overlooking of the new pedestrian/cycle segregated paths along the A507. With the lack of information in this application it cannot be confirmed if the new pedestrian/cyclist paths along the A507 (west of the A10) will offer safe and well overlooked routes for people to use.

The further information and/or amendments requested above should be provided to the planning case officer within a timescale that would allow for the case to be determined within its deadline. The planning case officer should assess the request above and set a suitable timescale for this further submission. If the further information and/or amendments requested are not delivered or deliverable within this timescale, then this application should be withdrawn by the applicant. If it is not withdrawn, it should be determined on the basis of our objection as set out above.