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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement has been produced to outline and justify the approaches taken in order to engage the public in the proposals for the redevelopment of the Kimpton Road site, Luton, Luton.

1.2 As part of the new planning system and in line with emerging trends in policy making, public consultation in all its guises has risen up the political agenda and is now considered to be an inherent part of the planning process.

1.3 Government aspirations for wider public involvement in the planning system have been formalised in PPS 12 Local Development Frameworks (2005), which recommends a number of consultation techniques appropriate for production of both LDFs and major planning applications.

1.4 Southside and & City Developments Ltd. are formally submitting a hybrid outline planning application for the mixed use redevelopment of the former Vauxhall General Motors Kimpton Road site in Luton. As part of the ongoing preparation of the planning application and the masterplan for the site is accompanied by an Environmental Statement together with other formal and informal supporting documents which have required consultation over time and at various levels to allow the scheme to develop. The sensitivity of the proposals in commercial terms has meant that a range of community involvement at this stage has been limited to key community and business sector groups. Methods have been utilised by which to engage the public and interest groups in the scheme.

1.5 This report will outline the consultation strategy undertaken pre-application and describe how this informed the production of the masterplan and application. It will:

- describe the consultation process;
- include details of all consultation material, including exhibition material, leaflets, websites and other material;
- summarise meetings and community contact outlining the key issues and outcomes; and
- indicate how the application proposals have and will respond to the outcomes of the consultation process.

1.6 The report will then outline the strategy post-application in particular the involvement of the local community and community groups and in particular will summarise:

- details of community contact and strategy for dealing with responses;
- provide details of the interactive web-site.
2 PLANNING AGENDA

2.1 Following the publication of the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act as part of the emerging planning system, it has become increasingly apparent that the government intends community involvement to become an inherent part of future planning policy formation and decision making on planning applications.

2.2 It is now considered that to increase the transparency of the planning system and incorporate all interests within the decision making process, it is imperative that public consultation at all levels is undertaken. It is stressed that stakeholder involvement is required to inform the new planning system and efforts should be made to involve all interested parties, including previously disenfranchised groups/individuals.

2.2 Planning Policy Statement 12 – Local Development Frameworks (2005) outlines the new planning policy system, replacing the local plan system with LDFs, a suite of documents which will undergo regular review. A key document within the LDF is the Statement of Community Involvement, produced by the LPA, to describe how the local community and stakeholders will be engaged in the process of production of Local Development Documents and planning applications. The SCI will provide clear guidance on appropriate and acceptable methods of consultation.

2.3 Luton Borough Council are nearing adoption of their Local Plan and have not currently commenced production of their LDF. Consequently the SCI has not been written and was not available to guide the process of consultation involved in this application. In its absence, the guidance within PPS12 and best practice examples from other major applications has been utilised to inform the consultation strategy.

2.5 PPS12 provides generic advice as to which techniques are appropriate for community involvement in planning applications. It recommends that the following approaches may be relevant for consultation of major applications:

- public meetings;
- public exhibition;
- surgeries
- development briefs;
- workshops;
- planning for real exercises;
- citizen panels;
- consultation panel;
- towns/parish councils;
- media;
- website;
- Planning aid; and
- design panels.

2.6 Despite the lack of SCI and clear guidance on the consultation process required, the applicant realised the advantages of public involvement in the redevelopment of the Kimpton Road site, with the success of the scheme, in some way reliant upon the effectiveness of the consultation strategy.
3 CONSULTATION STRATEGY

3.1 A clear framework of consultation was developed at the commencement of the project in order to avoid an ad hoc series of non-related events. This was produced in conjunction with PR consultant Jardine Michelson which provided expert advice as to the most appropriate methods of involvement.

3.2 The following section will outline the methods of consultation undertaken.

STATUTORY CONSULTATION

3.3 Article 8 of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (as amended) sets out the statutory planning requirements for planning applications. This requires Local Planning Authorities to publicise applications, either by site notice or notification to neighbours. In this case, adjacent neighbours will be formally notified of the scheme and an advertisement placed in the local newspaper, thus adhering to the statutory requirements.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

3.4 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduces the requirement for each Local Planning Authority to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). Amongst other things, the SCI should set out how the community will be involved in planning applications. ‘The SCI should ensure the active, meaningful and continued involvement of local communities and stakeholders’ (ODPM, 2004).

3.5 Luton Borough Council has not yet produced an SCI therefore this document has been based on the guidance published by the ODPM.

This chapter sets out the methods that will be used to encourage engagement with the local communities and stakeholders prior to the submission of a hybrid outline planning application for development on the Kimpton Road site.

Pre-Application Discussions with Luton Borough Council

3.6 The objective of the pre-application discussions has been to confirm whether the principle of development is acceptable on the site, and to clarify the format, type and level of detail required enabling the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to determine the planning application. Within these meetings the LPA have encouraged engagement with the community and the community involvement will be, where possible undertaken through a partnership approach between the LPA, the applicant and any interested groups.

3.7 Pre-application discussions involving the LPA and the applicant have taken place on a regular basis, together they have selected the most appropriate methods for conducting community involvement, and these are as follows:

Resident’s Meetings and Exhibitions

3.8 The aim of the residents’ meetings and exhibitions is to engage with the local community and stakeholders and obtain their support for the development on the application site. This form of consultation will provide valuable feedback and will allow the community to shape the development into a form which they deem acceptable. The process will also provide an insight into the particular problems which may arise from the neighbouring users and the wider community.

3.9 Exhibitions and residents’ meetings will be held locally to the proposed development site and will take place over a number of days, at varying times to ensure that all sections of the community can participate. Extensive advertising for the exhibition in the form of a leaflet drop, press articles and radio advertising will be utilised to invite the public to attend both the exhibition and residents’ meetings (An example of these articles can be found in Appendix 1). With regards to the residents’ meetings a letter of invitation will be hand delivered to every household surrounding the development site.
3.10 There are numerous benefits associated with this type of community involvement, firstly, exhibitions and meetings provide a transparent opportunity for open pre-application discussions; secondly, it provides the opportunity for the community to comment on the evolving proposals, thirdly, the consultation taking place is genuine, informal and provides face to face contact between the applicant and the public which offers a high level of success, finally the process can be undertaken by the consultants and the LPA independently from the developer.

**Pre Existing Panels, Forums and Design Teams**

3.11 The Luton Borough Council Joint Forum comprises the developers, their agents and representatives from departments within the borough council as appropriate. The forum provides a medium through which the LPA can disseminate information and discuss the planning application. Through the consideration of a planning application the forum have assembled a design team which will secure a high quality development. Additional benefits of the forum include ensuring the continuing community involvement in the development process, securing a sustainable form of development and providing an overview of the publicity of development.

3.12 It is intended that this forum continues throughout the life of the development to provide a regular and informal forum for the resolution of issues as they may arise.

**Websites**

3.12 The applicant intends to create a website to inform the community and stakeholders of the proposals and their continuing development. This method will be a key tool in engaging the communities in the wider area. The website will be interactive and the community will be able to comment by email.

**Media**

3.13 The media will be utilised as to engage the wider community, local print, TV and radio stations will invited to a press conference in which the development proposals will be described and the exhibitions and meetings will be advertised.

3.14 Despite the lack of SCI and clear guidance on the consultation process required, the applicant has devised a clear strategy utilising the appropriate methods for public involvement in the redevelopment of the Kimpton Road site. The methods that have been chosen for public involvement successfully engage with the local community and stakeholders whilst offering the highest response rates.
4.1 ‘Planning Policy Statement 1 Creating Sustainable Communities’ (ODPM, 2005) outlines a set of operational principles for community involvement, these are listed below and accompanied with a brief assessment of the community involvement arrangements for the outline application on the Kimpton Road Site.

THE FORM AND CONTENT OF THE STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SHOULD BE APPROPRIATE TO THE LEVEL OF PLANNING.

4.2 A strategy of both formal and informal methods for community involvement have been adopted for pre and post planning application; informal consultations include the exhibition and residents’ meetings; formal consultation in the form of forum meetings and design team meetings with stakeholders. The applicant has ensured that the arrangements for community involvement are fit for their purpose and have been built upon a clear understanding of the needs of the community whilst safeguarding commercial sensitivity.

FRONT LOADING OF INVOLVEMENT.

4.3 The form and content of the community involvement arrangements provides opportunities for participation at the earliest stages of the planning application process. At this stage issues can be identified and debated with all community groups. The arrangements have been timetabled so that the community recognise that they have the potential to make a difference.

THE METHODS USED TO ENCOURAGE INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION SHOULD BE RELEVANT TO THEIR EXPERIENCE.

4.4 Consideration has been given to how the community and stakeholder groups are likely to get involved in the consultation process and produce the most effective feedback.

CLEARLY ARTICULATED OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUING INVOLVEMENT.

4.5 This stage of community involvement is part of a continuous programme of community engagement. Each stage will allow local communities to see how the ideas have moved forward.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY.

4.6 The process will be advertised through a variation of media which offers the widest coverage in order to increase the accessibility of those members of the community which are difficult to reach.

PLANNING FOR INVOLVEMENT.

4.7 As specified in paragraph 3.1, community involvement has been planned from the commencement of the planning application discussions. This has allowed timely involvement, whilst also allowing the applicant and the LPA to consider the appropriate methods for community involvement.
5.1 The applicant has taken an appropriate and responsible approach to the issue of community involvement, balancing the need for participation and information with the very real issues surrounding commercially based decisions that a development on such a scale inevitably raises.

5.2 The applicant proposes the continued involvement of the community at all levels in line with a strategy that accords fully with the government’s new agenda for consultation. That consultation strategy is designed to inform and ensure the development makes a positive contribution to Luton where the community feel the benefits of social and economic regeneration.