

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	1 October 2018
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Accelerating Delivery of Housing at Blackfriars, Battle

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the Council leads on the creation of a masterplan for the whole site for Blackfriars, including the submission of relevant planning applications; and
 - 2) Cabinet approve the approach outlined in the report to progress the Blackfriars Housing site; and
 - 3) delegated authority be granted to the Executive Director with a budget of up to £1m to complete the necessary Masterplan, surveys, acquisitions, works, and applications where necessary, for facilitating the delivery of the site, inclusive of neighbourhood road.
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Head of Service: Ben Hook

Lead Cabinet Members: Councillor Mrs Hughes

Introduction

1. The Blackfriars site in Battle has been identified in the Council's local planning documents and Corporate Plan as a site for residential development for many years. The site is approximately 16 hectares (40 acres) in size, and Rother District Council owns just over 50% of the land (highlighted in green). Three other parcels of land are in separate, private ownerships (see Appendix 1).
2. Past attempts to develop the site as a whole have been unsuccessful, principally due to lack of agreement over the value of the land, complex ground conditions, and the need for costly road infrastructure.
3. In February 2018, the Council was informed that it had provisionally been awarded £3.25m by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as part of Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF).
4. This funding has been allocated towards the development of the required neighbourhood road infrastructure, opening up the site, and accelerating the delivery of housing. In order to access this funding Homes England, who is managing the delivery of the fund, has requested that the scheme be progressed to a stage that will provide greater certainty of delivery.
5. The Cabinet report, approved in January 2015, recommended selling the site under an options agreement (Minute CB14/55 refers). However agreement could not be reached with the other landowners. In light of the HIF funding award this changes the position and the Council is now required to take the lead on facilitating pre-development work, including the delivery of the road infrastructure if the site is to be progressed.

Progress So Far

6. A Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed between the four landowners, committing to the development of the neighbourhood road and agreeing to allow access across land, avoiding ransoming, to ensure the delivery of the site as a whole.
7. The Council has undertaken a range of ecology surveys across the site, including an Environmental Impact Assessment. A Transport Assessment and preliminary design work has also been completed to determine possible access options for the whole site.

The Way Forward

8. To ensure the release of funding from Homes England it is important that the Council demonstrates progress towards a full planning application being submitted for the neighbourhood road. It is currently anticipated that a full planning application will be ready for submission in early 2019.
9. A master planning exercise needs to be undertaken in order to work up a holistic site solution, including the delivery of new road infrastructure within the site. This will demonstrate how the neighbourhood road, and the different parcels of land relate to each other, and how the site can deliver the necessary requirements of its allocation in the Local Plan.
10. A masterplan which acknowledges and informs residential development on the site will de-risk the site, providing necessary certainty to all landowners, including the Council, to deliver their respective housing schemes.
11. It is also necessary to undertake a number of other works to progress the project, including possible acquisition of land and provide greater certainty of delivery to Homes England. In order to bring this forward it is anticipated that a budget of £1m may be required to undertake:
 - a. Masterplan
 - b. Additional ecology work
 - c. Ground investigation
 - d. Surface water drainage design
 - e. Flood risk assessments
 - f. Levels strategy
 - g. Arboriculture survey and strategy
 - h. Archeological investigation
 - i. Legal fees
 - j. Acquisition of land
 - k. Planning application
12. Following completion of this work a detailed design will be produced for the neighborhood road. This expenditure will be offset against the HIF monies once approved and released.
13. As part of this work a range of housing delivery options will be explored by officers with a further report and recommendations in due course.

Conclusion

14. Members are requested to approve the approach outlined in the report to progress the Blackfriars Housing site and grant delegated authority to the Executive Director with a budget of up to £1m to complete the necessary Masterplan, surveys, acquisitions, works, and applications where necessary, for the delivery of the neighbourhood road. Thereafter, a further report will follow to bring forward the housing.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

Cabinet should note that the £3.25m HIF money has only been provisionally allocated at this stage and could be withdrawn by Homes England. The proposed work would be necessary for this development regardless of the funding opportunity. Should the funding not be awarded the cost of this work will be recouped through either the disposal of the Rother District Council landholding, with an increased value due to planning permission, or through the delivery and sale of housing on the site.