

**Goods Yard Meeting, Bishop's Stortford 01.07.2014**  
**East Herts Council Offices, Wallfields, Hertford**  
**14:30 – 16:30**

Martin Paine (MP)	East Herts Council – Planning Policy
Isabelle Haddow (IH)	East Herts Council – Planning Policy
Sue Jackson (SJ)	Hertfordshire County Council – Transport Modelling
Paul Chappell (PC)	Hertfordshire County Council – Highways
Ben Caspani (BC)	Hertfordshire County Council – Transport Modelling
Nick Green (NG)	Savills, representing Solum
Diana Thomson (DT)	Savills, representing Solum
Gillian Scarth (GS)	Solum Regeneration
Rob Townsend (RT)	Network Rail
Michael Crooks (MC)	Second London Wall – Project Manager

**Meeting Notes**

1. MP welcomed all to the meeting.

**Progress Update Site Availability**

2. GS explained that Solum was hoping to bring forward an application in the near future, and therefore requested that the proposal in the District Plan for development of the Goods Yard in the period 2021-2026 should be brought forward to the period 2016-2021 i.e. within the first five years of the plan.
3. Although earlier proposals, including one by Barratts in 2008 had failed to progress to application stage, it was felt that the market had rebounded strongly and there was now a desire by Solum (a partnership between Network Rail and Kier Property) as the designated developer to progress to a planning application as soon as possible.
4. MC explained that he had been brought on board as a project manager for the planning application, and was progressing work on a number of technical studies including a contaminated land study.
5. RT confirmed that Solum Regeneration, as a partnership between Network Rail and Kier Property, remained Network Rail's agreed development partner and that submissions from Brookgate through the District Plan consultation should not be taken as undermining that commitment to joint working with Solum as preferred partner.
6. RT explained that it was hoped that within the next few months an agreement would be signed with DBSchenker, the long-term lease holder, to surrender their lease and enable development to proceed. RT/GS were currently trying

to get a better understanding of the viability picture in order to conclude an appropriate agreement with DBSchenker.

7. RT continued that agreement had been reached with the relevant rail freight operators that the land no longer had any foreseeable use as a freight site, and accordingly it should not be designated for strategic rail freight. Therefore, this was not considered to be an obstacle to development.
8. However, RT continued that the operations division of Network Rail had an ongoing requirement to use the railway sidings at the southern end of the site for seasonal stabling of track maintenance equipment together with more general maintenance usage. Therefore it was proposed to remove this area from the red line of the site and restrict the development area to the central and northern sections only.

### **Transport and Access**

9. SJ and PC explained that given the limited capacity of the town centre road network and the Hockerill junction in particular, the transport authority was likely to have significant concerns about any proposals which would rely on primary access through the northern end of the site. The transport authority viewed southern access for the majority of the development as essential to maintaining town centre traffic flow unless it can be demonstrated that northern access can be made to work. Solum confirmed that they have instructed a transport consultant and that they were undertaking a review.
10. The Hockerill Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) was discussed. SJ commented that traffic emissions were the main determinant of air quality. GS/NG suggested that future residents on the site would be commuters and therefore would not increase the level of traffic. SJ responded that there would be more people accessing the site in general, adding to overall traffic. MP asked whether this would provide a reason to reduce the amount of on-site parking and promote the scheme as a 'green' development. GS pointed out that this would be difficult in terms of viability as the site would compete with greenfield sites in the area offering better parking.
11. The Bishop's Stortford Transport Strategy (2006) was discussed, including the proposals for a Link Road through the site in order to relieve congestion at Hockerill. SJ explained that her briefing note on the Link Road indicated that work to date indicated no conclusive evidence on the need for a Link Road. This work would be needed before it could be demonstrated that the link Road was not needed.
12. There was some discussion of the cumulative impacts of development proposals in the town, including proposals for development South of Bishop's Stortford (draft Policy BISH7). Mayer Brown had been appointed as transport

consultants for Solum and were also representing Countryside Properties South of Bishop's Stortford, and at ASR5 to the north. MP hoped that Mayer Brown would be well placed to advise on the cumulative impacts. There were a number of transport models for the town which could assist in this respect.

13. GS outlined the benefits of an improved passenger transport interchange adjacent to the railway station could be delivered by the development.
14. MP indicated that earlier discussions with Greater Anglia had indicated a lack of appetite for a Park and Ride solution, given the potential risk of station users diverting to other stations rather than accept the inconvenience of a transfer. NG/GS agreed that Park and Ride could risk eroding station usage.
15. MP stated that it was hoped that it would be possible to secure funding for the widening of Station Road Bridge, which would ensure more attractive and safe access for pedestrians and cyclists alongside vehicular traffic. This would be likely to be a package of funding sources but could be something that might be sought through a Section 106 agreement or a wider CIL charge, subject to viability.

### **The Development Strategy**

16. MP outlined the proposed development strategy contained within the Preferred Options District Plan. The level of Objectively Assessed Need for housing was too high to accommodate on the few remaining town centre and brownfield sites. Therefore the overall development strategy was to locate residential development to the periphery of the towns and seek opportunities to enhance the town centre capacity.
17. In Bishop's Stortford, expansion of town centre uses, including at the Causeway/Old River Lane and at the Goods Yard, was seen as essential in order to anchor the proposed urban extensions. The northern part of the Goods Yard, providing links between the station and the existing town centre, was a key part of this strategy, and was reflected in the town centre boundary.
18. The current draft District Plan identifies the Goods Yard site as having the potential to deliver 200 new homes (BISH3). Solum submitted representations during the Council's consultation period which set out that more housing should be directed towards the site in line with key national planning policy directives (i.e. to "boost significantly the supply of housing"). Solum recommended an amendment to draft Policy BISH3 which would increase the number of new homes to be brought forward on the site to 450.

## **Design and Layout**

19. GS explained that Solum was hoping to appoint an architect in approximately August and they would be looking at scheme design over the summer. Design and layout was closely related to the mix and viability of development.
20. MP stated that the 2011 Development Brief referred to small amounts of family housing, one of the main concerns being to avoid high-rise residential blocks directly fronting the river, resulting in a 'canyon' effect. NG acknowledged that this view has been expressed from a design perspective, but said he felt that Green field housing sites being promoted through the plan could provide significant levels of family housing in Bishop's Stortford, which might lessen the justification for family housing at the site in terms of meeting a particular housing need.
21. There was some discussion of the public realm, public squares and spaces and importance of connections, including from the station into the town centre and across the pedestrian bridge to the Southmill Trading Estate and Rhodes Centre.
22. MP explained that the trees within the southern section of the site could be seen as contributing significantly to the amenity value of the river corridor, particularly in light of the semi-industrial character of the area. It was hoped that the trees could be worked into an overall design.

## **Development Mix and Site Viability**

23. It was discussed that viability was at the heart of delivery of the site, and that it was essential for the development to make sense in terms of viability if any development was to go ahead. The mix of development on the site was a key driver of viability, and it was important that aspirations for the site should be understood in this context.
24. MP questioned Savills response to the District Plan consultation, which suggested that provision should be made for 450 dwellings on the Goods Yard. There were concerns that this could represent over-development of the site. MP explained that an initial proposal of 60 homes had been discussed with NG at an earlier stage in order to reflect the aspirations in the Development Brief. Savills had responded with a suggestion that 200-300 dwellings would be required for viability. The draft District Plan proposed 200 dwellings as a compromise between the Brief and the recognition of the viability concerns expressed by Savills.
25. NG reminded officers that the saved Local Plan (2007) Policy BIS11 allocation for the Bishop's Stortford Goods Yard site (along with the former John Dyde Training College site, Anchor Street), identifies the site as having the capacity to deliver a minimum of 700 residential units.

26. GS/NG suggested that the level and type of residential development would be looked at over the summer, taking account of the viability appraisals and other design considerations. At this stage no firm proposals were on the table but it was hoped to be able to provide something in the near future.
27. There was some discussion of the viability aspects of the Link Road, including the impact on site viability, both from the direct costs of the development paying for the road, and the indirect costs of sacrificing development value to the road.
28. GS explained that a multi-storey car park would be needed to ensure provision at current levels whilst developing the remainder of the site. The number of proposed spaces had not yet been decided. SG explained that construction costs of the car park would be a cost to the development, and that revenue from ticket sales would accrue to Greater Anglia as the Train Operating Company, rather than to either Network Rail or Solum. GS stated that the scheme would need to be developed in phases and that the viability of these phases was paramount.
29. GS suggested that the provision of a 'significant amount of B1 office space' as suggested in the draft plan was unlikely to be realistic, unless there was a pre-let to a tenant with strong covenant .
30. MP questioned whether large-scale retail would be appropriate, given transport and parking concerns. NG suggested that supermarket chains would be more interested in smaller format local stores rather than a large scale store with associated car parking. MP suggested that this would probably be more in keeping with the overall aspirations for the site.
31. A diagram by Les Pinnell dated 18<sup>th</sup> March 2011 for the Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation was discussed. GS commented that the proposals for a car park over the railway line were likely to be uneconomic given construction costs. NG suggested that hotels tended to have very particular requirements and often seek high-rise units, which may not complement the aspirations for the site.
32. MP explained that the Council was undertaking a Delivery Study and that a request for information had been issued to all site promoters (landowners and developers) to submit information by the end of July. All the information would be posted to the website and would be available to the Council's consultants. A high-level viability study would form part of the Delivery Study, including an assessment of some sites, although it was not decided which ones yet. The Council would need transparency in the information submitted in order to be able to make decisions and to defend the plan at Examination in Public. GS stated that currently very little information was available as the architect had not been appointed.

33. MP asked whether the Goods Yard could be a suitable location for a District Heating system. NG suggested that in the absence of a local heat load (such as a swimming pool or other energy source) and potential customers signed up it would be quite difficult to see a fully-fledged District Heating system in operation.

### Neighbourhood Planning

34. GS commented that she had been asked to participate in a group led by the town Council on the production of a neighbourhood plan.
35. MP explained that there were two Neighbourhood Plans led by the Town Council. The first one covered Silverleys and Meads Wards and mainly focused on the Areas of Special Restraint to the north of the town. The draft document had already been through consultation and was reaching an advanced stage. The second Neighbourhood Plan area will cover the remainder of the town, covering Bishop's Stortford, Central Ward (including the Goods Yard Site), South Ward, and part of Thorley Parish. It was understood that as yet this was still at an early stage.

**The meeting closed at 16:30**

### Actions

Task Owner	Para	Action
PC	15	Speak to David Burt about Station Road Bridge widening proposals and circulate update on latest information.
GS/NG	12	To liaise with Mayer Brown to look at the cumulative impacts of traffic flow and the need for a Link Road, and any necessary modelling work.
GS/NG	32	Provide information to the Council suitable for use in the Delivery Study by the end of August, as per the request to all site promoters.