

**REPORT TO:** CABINET

**DATE:** 16 JUNE 2022

**TITLE:** WYCH ELM DEVELOPMENT BRIEF – APPROVAL FOR CONSULTATION

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER:** COUNCILLOR DAN SWORDS, DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR REGENERATION

**LEAD OFFICER:** ANDREW BRAMIDGE, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC GROWTH AND REGENERATION (01279) 446410

**CONTRIBUTING OFFICER:** VICKY FORGIONE, PRINCIPAL PLANNING OFFICER (01279) 446878

**This is a Key Decision**  
**It is on the Forward Plan as Decision Number I013954**  
**Call In Procedures may apply**  
**This decision will affect Little Parndon and Hare Street Ward.**

**RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:**

- A** Approves the Draft Wych Elm Development Brief, as set out in Appendix A to the report, to enable it to be published for the purposes of consultation
- B** Delegates authority to the Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, to make and approve any minor or inconsequential amendments to the Draft Wych Elm Development Brief arising from the statutory consultation

**REASON FOR DECISION**

- A** To approve the Draft Wych Elm Development Brief for consultation for a period of four weeks in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement.
- B** To help officers shape the final version of the brief by understanding the views of both statutory bodies and the public.

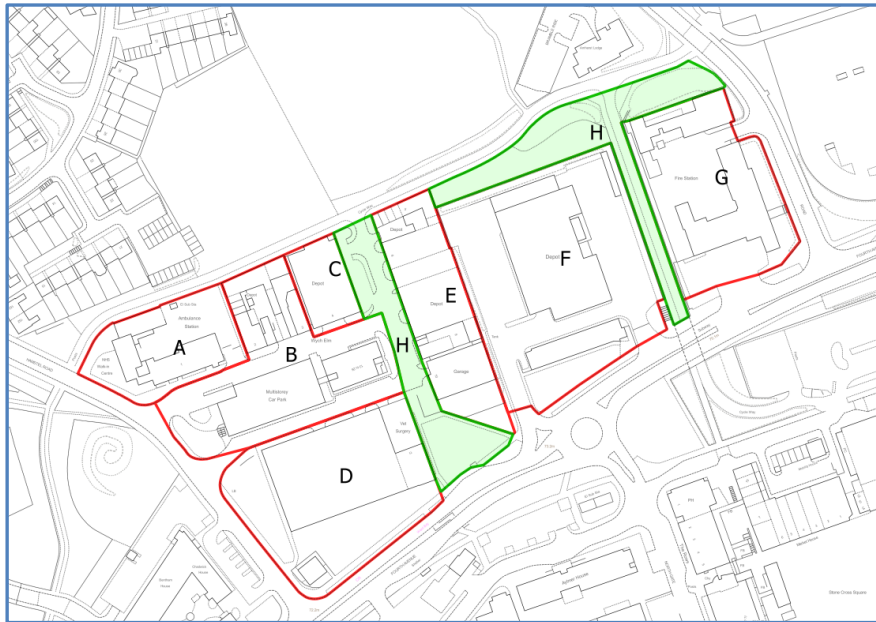
## BACKGROUND

1. The Town Centre Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document (TCMF SPD) was adopted in March 2022. The document includes masterplan drawings and frameworks for individual opportunity areas, guidance brought over from the Regulation 19 Area Action Plan (AAP) and detailed public realm strategies for the town centre.
2. The TCMF SPD identified eight separate opportunity areas where more guidance was provided. This included the Wych Elm area, or Opportunity Area 2. Wych Elm is situated at the northern most part of the town centre close to the existing Princess Alexandra Hospital (PAH) site to the west, Sainsbury's to the north-east and Rectory Wood to the north. It is bounded by Fourth Avenue to the south which disconnects the site from the rest of the town centre but is accessible via a pedestrian/cycle subway.
3. The Wych Elm area was identified in the TCMF SPD for approximately 370 homes, 7,700sqm of workspace floorspace, 2,000sqm of community floorspace and 3,000sqm of flexible retail and business uses. A new strategic green space which will link Rectory Wood to the town centre and improvements to the subway through better lighting, public art, and playable elements is also illustrated in the TCMF SPD for Wych Elm. More specifically the TCMF SPD states that development proposals at Wych Elm must:
  - a) Provide a high-quality public realm with active frontages which address Fourth Avenue;
  - b) Facilitate the transformation of Fourth Avenue into a boulevard character with a coordinated approach to planting and pedestrian crossings;
  - c) Improve walking and cycling connections to surrounding neighbourhoods, Rectory Wood to the north and towards the town centre; and
  - d) Respond and incorporate the strategic green space into their masterplan in terms of pedestrian and cycle connectivity, the creation of new landscaping and green spaces, and through the design of buildings and public realm.
4. There has already been interest in redeveloping and re-using parts of the Wych Elm area. Wych Elm house is currently being built out for 122 residential units and there has also been interest in redeveloping nearby commercial units for residential use. Representations to the TCMF SPD from the Herts and West Essex Integrated Care System suggest there may be a requirement for some form of healthcare hub close to the town centre when PAH relocate. There were also discussions during the preparation of the Town Centre AAP of a possible need for primary school provision in a town centre location due to the potential housing growth identified.
5. Furthermore, there have also been a number of issues identified at Wych Elm which need tackling/improvement including its disconnect with other parts of the

town centre to the south, it's poor legibility and accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists, it's lack of green space and its overall appearance from key viewpoints including at Fourth Avenue and from the foot/cycle path to the north. To help tackle the issues identified above and to ensure that the Wych Elm area comes forward comprehensively in accordance with the principles laid out in the TCMF SPD, it was agreed that a more detailed development brief should be prepared.

## **ISSUES/PROPOSALS**

6. The draft development brief sets out a vision and set of objectives for Wych Elm. They are detailed on Page 10 of Appendix A but in summary the Wych Elm area will become a place where residents and visitors will want to shop, relax, eat, socialise and play. It will be redeveloped for a mix of uses including new homes and active day-time services including civic and community facilities. The town centre south of Fourth Avenue will continue to act as the main shopping and leisure destination. The area will be attractive and pleasant for all members of the community, be accessible, safe and well-connected to the rest of the town centre.
7. The draft development brief has divided the Wych Elm area into separate land parcels as set out in Map 1 below. This does not mean that the parcels must come forward independently from each other and a comprehensive approach to the delivery of the area will be sought. The development brief sets out a strategy for each land parcel setting out details in respect of:
  - a) Appropriate land uses
  - b) Potential relocation of existing uses or incorporation of existing uses within a scheme
  - c) Appropriate building heights in each land parcel (taking account of surrounding and existing uses and the TCMF SPD)
  - d) Specific layout and design parameters
  - e) Approximate timescale for delivery
  - f) Indication of where a comprehensive scheme of several land parcels would be preferred



*Map 1: Land Parcels in the draft Wych Elm Development Brief*

8. The draft brief also provides further detailed guidance for the entire Wych Elm area in respect of tall buildings, landscaping, public realm and open space, climate mitigation and sustainability, cycle, pedestrian and vehicle movement and parking. This is consistent with the TCMF SPD and other Council documents including the Harlow Local Development Plan and Design Guide Addendum.

### **Land Parcel Strategy**

9. A summary of the strategy for each land parcel is provided below.

#### Land Parcel A

10. Land Parcel A is currently occupied by the Ambulance Station and NHS buildings. It has been identified for residential use and a potential healthcare hub. It is also possible for it to come forward comprehensively with Land Parcel B. It is important that this parcel provides well designed frontages along the foot/cycle path and good pedestrian and cycle access to PAH.

#### Land Parcel B

11. This parcel includes Council owned buildings such as Rainbow Services, Streets 2 Homes, the Wych Elm depot and the Multi-Storey Car Park. It also includes a private commercial block with several businesses. The brief sets out various options for the Multi-Storey Car Park including relocation within Wych Elm on a temporary basis (if required), possible relocation out of Wych Elm if a suitable site is identified or reconfiguration. Reconfiguration may include demolition and re-build of a new block which could together include car parking, commercial uses (possibly for the existing businesses) and residential units.
12. Any development in this area must consider the existing Wych Elm House site in respect of amenity, frontages along the foot/cycle path and delivery of the strategic green finger to the east.

### Land Parcel C

13. Land Parcel C has been identified for residential use with active ground floor uses such as retail/leisure. It must not prevent the delivery of the strategic green finger to the east and it must improve the frontage along the foot/cycle path. A taller building than that stipulated in the TCMF SPD may be suitable here.

### Land Parcel D

14. This parcel mostly consists of the Wych Elm House development which is currently being built out for 122 homes. The brief identifies a number of options for the neighbouring Veterinary Centre including retention of the Centre, development of a small residential development with possible workspace at ground floor, re-using the site for additional open space/public realm or relocation of other businesses to enable other land parcels to come forward e.g., Rainbow Services.

### Land Parcel E

15. There are several businesses at Land Parcel E including the Funeral Directors and Mr Unique. A comprehensive redevelopment of this site, as preferred by the draft brief and TCMF SPD, is predicated on the relocation of some if not all the existing uses. The parcel has been identified for a mix of residential homes, workspace, and flexible active ground floor uses (retail/leisure).
16. It is important that the development of this parcel does not prejudice the delivery of the strategic green finger and therefore vehicular access would likely come from either Fourth Avenue or through a shared access at Land Parcel F. A pedestrian/cycle link through this parcel to connect Parcels A to D with Parcels F is important for opening up the entire area of Wych Elm. The TCMF SPD sought a comprehensive approach to developing Parcels E and F and the draft brief also supports this as an option.

### Land Parcel F

17. Land Parcel F is currently occupied by the Arriva Bus Depot. The Parcel has been identified as a potential civic based area that could include community services and facilities such as the healthcare hub and school provision if considered necessary. The layout and orientation of these uses, particularly any education provision, will need to be carefully considered and it must be well connected for pedestrians and cyclists including an access point to the subway.

### Land Parcel G

18. This parcel is currently occupied by the Fire Station, and this may still be considered the best location for this use. There may be opportunities to redevelop land to the back of the Fire Station or reuse buildings on the site, but this needs further investigation with the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

## Land Parcels H

19. These two land parcels include the strategic green finger to the west and the subway to the east. They have been identified as important green links and will be delivered alongside private amenity space as part of development proposals and other public realm improvements. Not only will they improve the overall environment of Wych Elm they are also important pedestrian and cycle connections between neighbourhoods to the north of Wych Elm and the town centre. They will be secured and provided as part of a comprehensive approach to Wych Elm.

### **Next Steps**

20. Following Cabinet endorsement to consult, the Draft Wych Elm Development Brief will be published for consultation. The document is neither a Development Plan or Supplementary Planning Document and therefore it is not required to follow a statutory consultation or adoption process. However, it is considered good practice to follow a similar process to that which is undertaken for SPDs which includes:
  - a) Publishing the documents for a minimum 4-week consultation, specifying the date when responses should be received and identify the address to which responses should be sent
  - b) Make the document available at the principal office and other places within the area that the Council considers appropriate e.g., local libraries
  - c) Publish the document on the Council's website
  - d) Notify those on the Council's Planning Consultation database that the consultation has been published. Those with a specific interest in the redevelopment of Wych Elm will also be contacted including businesses and landowners who currently operate in that area.
21. Following the consultation period, the Council will consider all responses received and amend the draft development brief as appropriate, to produce a final version ready for adoption.
22. The finalised development brief will then be adopted either by the Council at a future Cabinet meeting or by the Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration where comments are considered minor and inconsequential. It will then become a material consideration in the determining of planning applications and will be hosted on the Council's website.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)**

As set out in the report.

**Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration**

### **Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)**

None specific at this time.

**Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance**

### **Housing**

As set out in the report.

**Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing**

### **Community Wellbeing**

None specific.

**Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment**

### **Governance (Includes HR)**

None specific.

**Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services**

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Wych Elm Draft Development Brief

## **Background Papers**

[Town Centre Masterplan Framework SPD](#)

[Harlow Local Development Plan](#)

[Design Guide Addendum](#)

[Regulation 19 Town Centre AAP](#)

## **Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

AAP – Area Action Plan

PAH – Princess Alexandra Hospital

TCMF SPD – Town Centre Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document