

Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan (BFP AAP) note

Introduction

- 1 This note has been prepared in response to the recorded action from the Matter 4, Session 4 hearing of the St Helens Borough Local Plan Examination, as follows:

“Produce a short note on how the Local Plan, including the sites within it, fits with the Bold Forest Area Action Plan (aims and objectives).”

Background

- 2 The Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan (AAP) was adopted in July 2017. As part of the development plan for St. Helens, it is a statutory document which sets out the detailed policies and actions needed to develop and sustain the Bold Forest Park. It was prepared in the context of the St. Helens Core Strategy (adopted in 2012), which set out the key strategic principles for the development of the Borough. Specifically, Core Strategy Policy ‘CAS 5 Rural St. Helens’ identifies a strategy to encourage the positive use of the rural areas of St. Helens, which includes the development of Bold Forest Park.
- 3 Paragraph 1.2 in the Bold Forest Park AAP provides the status and purpose of the document. It states, the AAP will provide a framework for the development of the Forest Park and does not repeat policies contained within other documents which form the St. Helens Development Plan.
- 4 Since the adoption of the Core Strategy in 2012, the policy context has changed quite significantly with updates to National Planning Policy Framework and the introduction of the National Planning Practice Guidance, and subsequent updates. There has also been a number of changes in the housing and employment needs of the Borough. Whilst the Bold Forest Park AAP was prepared in the context of the adopted Core Strategy (2012), it also acknowledged and took account of the changing circumstances emerging at the time of preparation, as set out in paragraph 1.2.3 (LOC004):

“1.2.3 It is considered that land within the Forest Park will also need to contribute to meeting the Borough’s housing and employment needs. The level of this need and allocation of land to meet it will be determined through the Local Plan process and detailed in the new Local Plan.”
- 5 Therefore, the principal of locating development within the Bold Forest Park area is accepted within the AAP, and the proposals within the Local Plan Submission Draft are not contradictory in this respect. To the contrary, the

development of the proposed allocation sites within the Bold Forest Park will facilitate wider improvements to the environment in line with the aims and policies of the AAP.

- 6 The Local Plan Submission Draft (LPSD) has taken account of the AAP policies in setting out the spatial strategy and associated policies to guide development that will meet the vision, aims and objectives of the Plan over the Plan period. Likewise, the AAP explicitly anticipated that land within the Forest Park would need to contribute to meeting the Borough's housing and employment needs, which would be done through the Local Plan process. In this respect there is clear alignment between the Plans.
- 7 There are many references throughout the Local Plan Submission Draft (LPSD) to the Bold Forest Park and the associated Area Action Plan, for example, within the opening section, where it is clearly acknowledged as part of the development plan for the Borough (and clarity that none of the policies within it will be replaced by the adoption of the Local Plan). Further references to the AAP in the Local Plan will be provided below. Accordingly, it is clear that the AAP has been a major consideration in the development of the LPSD.

Spatial vision

- 8 Para 7.1 of the BFAAP sets out the vision for Bold Forest Park:

“By 2030 Bold Forest Park will be at the heart of a thriving diverse economy, providing a hub for family leisure and adventure sport. The natural environment and cultural environment will be rich and diverse. A network of open spaces and routes accessible to all connects the Forest Park to the wider countryside and links to our local communities.”

- 9 Policy BFP1 of the AAP provides the overarching policy approach to deliver the vision, aims and objectives and gives an overall picture of how development will be guided and how sustainable development will be delivered. Within this context, it is useful to note the inclusion of the following within Policy BFP1:

“...to meet the needs of the community by:

.....

- *Ensuring the Bold Forest Park area contributes to meeting the Borough's needs for housing, employment, open space, sport and recreation*

.....”

- 10 The spatial vision on page 12 of the LPSD incorporates the AAP vision by

recognizing that the network of green spaces and wider cultural and leisure offer, represented by a range of features including the Bold Forest Park, will be retained and strengthened. Furthermore, a number of policies in the Plan list the Bold Forest Park AAP as a 'Key Delivery Mechanism (Policies LPA02, LPA03, LPA09, LPC05, LPC06 and LPC10).

Spatial strategy, site selection and LPSD policies

- 11 The Plan positively seeks to meet the development needs of the Borough, and the presumption in favour of sustainable development is reflected throughout the Local Plan. The proposed site allocations in the Local Plan will play a key role in meeting the development needs of the Borough.
- 12 The Bold Forest AAP did not allocate development sites for housing or employment uses, but as set out above, it does acknowledge (in paragraph 1.2.3) the likely need for the Bold Forest Park area to contribute to meeting such needs, and expected the allocation of land to be done through the preparation of the Local Plan.
- 13 The Plan allocates a number of sites within the Bold Forest Park area, which can facilitate the delivery of landscape, accessibility and biodiversity improvements, as well as recreation and visitor facilities as set out in aims, objectives and policies in the Bold Forest Park AAP and Local Plan. At the same time, these allocations will contribute to the delivery of the identified Borough wide housing and employment needs. The Plan takes a balanced approach to ensure that the allocations are appropriately located and of a scale to contribute to the broader aspirations of the AAP.
- 14 The LPSD proposes to allocate housing sites 4HA (Bold Forest Garden Suburb for 2,988 dwellings) and 5HA (Land south of Gartons Lane and former St Theresa's Social Club for 569 dwellings) and employment site 1EA (Omega South Western Extension, 31.22ha to meet employment needs arising in Warrington) within the Bold Forest Park AAP area.
- 15 These proposed allocations comply with the Bold Forest Park AAP which recognises that the area could have a role to play in helping to meet the objectively assessed housing and employment needs of the Borough, but also provide the opportunity to deliver improvements within the Bold Forest Park in accordance with the aims of the AAP. In accordance with Policy LPA05.1, both the proposed housing site allocations (4HA and 5HA) are considered to be strategic housing sites, and will therefore require any planning application to be supported by a comprehensive masterplan covering the whole site, which will enable full consideration of how the development of these sites will support the wider ambitions for the Bold Forest Park.

16 The Site Selection Paper (SHBC012) details the approach to site selection in the Plan, explaining the process undertaken and how the evidence has informed the decisions made from a strategic perspective. Whilst the SHLAA and GBR have provided the main assessment of the sites, a broad range of evidence has fed into and supported this process. Such evidence has taken account of the Bold Forest Park and the associated Action Plan with clear references made, particularly in the Green Belt Review 2018 (SD020).

17 Specific references to the Bold Forest Park in relation to the decisions to allocate both sites 4HA and 5HA are made in Table 5.4 of the Green Belt Review 2018 (SD020), which provides a summary of the decisions to either discount, safeguard or allocate sites in the Plan, as follows:

4HA

“ ... The parcel is located within the area covered by the Bold Forest Area Action Plan, the framework and philosophies of which could be incorporated into any development.”

(page 107)

5HA

“ ... Development of the parcel could also be reasonably expected to provide funding to facilitate improvements to the Sutton Manor Nature Reserve and the visitor attraction provided by ‘The Dream’ sculpture, including improvements to utilities for the proposed visitor centre and a car park located in the Nature Reserve on the boundary of the parcel.”

(page 110)

18 In addition, the Stage 2B assessment for the parcel of land comprising site 5HA (SD021, page 156) found that *“Development of the site could help to better access the Bold Forest Park.”*

19 It is therefore clear that the evidence base informing the site selection process, as part of the wider spatial strategy, took account of the aims and objectives of the Bold Forest Park AAP. Indeed, the development of sites 4HA and 5HA are expected to make contributions (including financially) which will help deliver the Bold Forest Park AAP vision. The Appendix 5 site profiles in the LPSD for these two allocations reinforces this expectation.

20 The Appendix 5 site profiles in the LPSD provide site specific requirements for the proposed site allocations. Appendix 7 does likewise for the proposed safeguarded sites. These are in addition to the general policy requirements in the Plan applicable to all sites. As above, the Appendix 5 site profiles for 4HA and 5HA make specific references to the Bold Forest Park as follows:

4HA

- *“The development must be consistent with the vision, aims, objectives and policies of the Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan (BFPAAP).*
- *The development must provide a well landscaped setting including extensive green links through and around the site, and tree planting to reduce impact on the landscape and promote the objective of the BFPAAP to increase tree cover by 30% across the Bold Forest as a whole.*

....

- *The development must also provide a choice of foot, bridleway, and cycle routes through the site to facilitate access between homes, workplaces, recreational facilities, and other key services in the area. These must where necessary be segregated to ensure safety and include new provision in line with policy INF6 “Creating an Accessible Forest Park” of the Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan 2017.”*

(LPSD, SD001, pages 233-234)

5HA

“ ...

- *The development should integrate well into the Bold Forest Park setting and provide satisfactory pedestrian, bridleway and cycleway access into the Forest Park.*
- *The developer would be expected to fund the provision of a suitable access road to the car park area in the adjacent Bold Forest Park, as well as utility service connections.”*

(LPSD, SD001, page 235)

- 21 In relation to the tree planting requirement for site 4HA, it should be noted that Policy BFP1 of the Bold Forest Park AAP recognises that the enhancement of landscape character primarily by increasing tree cover in the Park can be done through “seeking additional and / or improved landscaping from new developments”. This highlights the alignment between the allocation of sites in the LPSD and the aims, objectives and policies in the AAP, particularly showing how development within the Park can deliver the Park enhancements sought through the AAP.
- 22 There are other policies in the Plan which aim to help deliver the Bold Forest Park AAP aims and objectives, such as Policy LPA02, section 8d) which is clear that the Local Plan specifically seeks to support the “delivery of landscape reclamation and improvement projects in locations such as the Bold Forest Park ...”, providing explicit recognition of its value as an asset.
- 23 Likewise, Policy LPC10 ‘Trees and Woodland’ supports the Bold Forest AAP in supporting an increase of tree cover across the Borough, including the in

Bold Forest Park. LPSD paragraph 7.18.4 in the Plan picks up on the partnership with the Mersey Forest, to deliver the vision to “get more from trees” reflecting a key ambition of the AAP to increase tree cover in the Park for recreational, ecological, landscape and amenity reasons.

- 24 Policy LPC06 of the Plan sets out how sites, habitats and species within a hierarchy of designated biodiversity and geological sites will be protected and managed. The Policy also guides how appropriate mitigation, replacement or other compensation measures should be identified which includes Local Wildlife Sites and a Local Nature Reserve within the Bold Forest Park AAP boundary.
- 25 Policy LPC07 seeks to protect and enhance the Greenway network, with potential associated improvements identified through site 4HA. The draft main modifications schedule (SHBC010) includes reference to this in the updated LPSD Appendix 5 site profile. Such improvements could be facilitated through development of site 4HA and would support the Bold Forest Park aim of improving the accessibility of the Park (see AAP policy BFP INF6 “Creating an Accessible Forest Park”).

Conclusion

- 26 It is clear that when the Bold Forest Park AAP was drafted, it was envisaged that some land within the Park area would be needed to meet identified development needs, and the AAP expected this to be determined through the new Local Plan, currently at Examination. Indeed, AAP Policy BFP SN1 ‘Meeting the Development Needs of the Borough in a Manner Appropriate to the Forest Park’ states:

“Development must:

- (a) Contribute positively to the development of Bold Forest Park;*
- (b) Not result in the loss of critical infrastructure elements of the Forest Park or prevent their implementation; and*
- (c) Housing or employment development should include measures to enhance connectivity between the urban area and the Forest Park.”*

- 27 The justification text for this policy goes on to explain that “Some development is positive as it contributes directly to the development of the components of the Bold Forest Park set out in this Plan, such as the Recreation Hubs.”
- 28 It is therefore the case that the LPSD strategy, policies and site allocations fully align with aims and objectives of the Bold Forest Park AAP. Further, the delivery of the proposed allocations will help facilitate the wider improvements in terms of landscape, biodiversity and recreation anticipated in the vision,

aims, objectives and policies of the Bold Forest Park AAP. Without such enabling development, the planned improvements to the Bold Forest Park would be more challenging to deliver, both financially and in terms of timing.

- 29 Beyond the opportunity of these sites to deliver improvements to the Park as already set out, these allocations have also been thoroughly assessed and tested through the Plan's evidence base, through both the Green Belt Review and the Sustainability Assessment, and have been found to be preferential. They are therefore considered to be appropriate site allocations as a whole, and to align well with the wider spatial strategy of the LPSD and the aims and objectives of the Bold Forest Park AAP. The wider policy framework in the LPSD, including the policies referred to in this note, also supports the delivery of the AAP aims and objectives.