

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 10TH MARCH 2021

SUBJECT OF REPORT: WYNDHAM WAY STUDY (PORTISHEAD) AREA

TOWN OR PARISH: PORTISHEAD

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: ALEX HEARN

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. For members to consider and support the partnership approach for the preparation of the Wyndham Way Study Area Stage 1 report
- II. To consider the policy and commercial issues presented by the exercise
- III. To consider and support the overall intended Stage 2 process for the preparation of a Development Framework

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

The council has been working collaboratively with Portishead Town Council, Aberdeen Standard Investments and local business representatives to consider the challenges and opportunities of a reservoir of brownfield land adjacent to the forthcoming MetroWest station and to prepare for a future masterplanning exercise.

The Stage 1 fact finding exercise gathered technical evidence, public views and precedent studies to help the Steering Group shape a vision and set of principles. The Steering Group has now 'signed off' this stage and documentation will be published.

It is now intended that a Stage 2 development framework is prepared through further and deeper engagement that can act as guidance for future planning applications and inform the preparation of the new North Somerset Local Plan.

2. POLICY

The commitments to actively engage with local communities and to prepare a new Local Plan is set out in the council's Corporate Plan.

The National Planning Policy Framework and the council's current Development Plan both support the mixed-use development of accessible brownfield land that is close to public transport or where there are planned improvements in place.

It is therefore important that a plan is developed to consider the implications of future phased development proposals for a mix of uses to support good policy and decision making in the face of increasing government expectations for residential development and growing developer interest in the area.

3. DETAILS

Context and purpose

The number of homes Portishead grew by circa 60% between 2001 and 2019 with major developments at the Marina and Port Marine. The rate of change has caused concern in relation to infrastructure capacity and delivery, most notably in relation to the long-promised Portishead Rail and the impact this has had on congestion and localised residential parking.

A 2017 outline planning application for a retail and leisure-led but mixed-use development at Old Mill Road light industrial estate submitted by Aberdeen Standard Investments generated significant local objection. Reasons for this can be summarised as the principle of more development and impact upon local business tenants of ASI. NSC officers also expressed concern about the quality of the scheme, particularly the extent to which it properly connected with the local context.

The impending delivery of Portishead Rail through the MetroWest programme and its impact on value and future of a significant area of brownfield land in the Wyndham Way area means that it is important to prepare guidance that can support the preparation of better-quality development proposals by the market and better-coordinated decision making by the local planning authority.

With these contextual issues in mind, in late 2019 NSC officers facilitated exploratory discussions between Portishead Town Council and Aberdeen Standard Investments to explore the potential of a partnership to take a fresh look at the opportunity across the whole Wyndham Way area (not just Old Mill Road), engage locally and prepare a vision or framework for the future of the area.

It was also agreed that Aberdeen Standard Investments would formally withdraw their planning application for the Old Mill Road area, which was done in September 2020.

The exercise would have to dovetail with the shift between two NSC local plans and engage with the Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan for the whole of Portishead.

It was agreed a partnership structure would be created led by a Steering Group. A new multi-disciplinary consultant team was to be procured and an process of early engagement be introduced to publish the intention of the collaborative process and listen to locally expressed views.

The Steering Group would oversee the preparation of a Stage 1 evidence base report supported by early but largely passive public engagement, a study area boundary, a vision and objectives and then principles and strategy for the area; followed by a Stage 2 that could include more propositional exercises supported by proactive local engagement.

Procurement and consultant team

A project brief for the Stage 1 work was agreed between Portishead Town Council, North Somerset Council and Aberdeen Standard Investments and a competitive procurement exercise was undertaken to appoint a lead consultant.

Architects and Urban Designers Allies and Morrison were appointed to lead on the preparation of workshop material and for content in the Stage 1 report, including convening the submission of technical work from other technical consultants to cover environmental considerations, movement and transport and development viability.

Engagement and communications specialists Social were appointed to develop the engagement and consultation strategy (including the creation of a project website) and planning and regeneration consultants Tulley Bunting advised Aberdeen Standard Investments.

Engagement and steering group

In September 2020, Portishead Town Council considered and endorsed a proposal to form a partnership with North Somerset Council and Aberdeen Standard Investments to oversee the project.

A Steering Group was formed consisted of representatives of the three founding partners, but also invited local business including representatives of commercial tenants within the Old Mill Road industrial estate. The three founding partners have agreed a Memorandum of Understanding to confirm the collaborative approach to the project.

A project website was created (www.wyndhamway.co.uk) which included a map-based tool to invite people to make comments about what they like and dislike about the study area, and to comment on the stated intent of the partnership to examine the potential future of the area. As of mid-February 2021, there were around 6000 visits to the website 187 comments lodged in the interactive map while social media posts reached more than 50,000 people.

The Steering Group held workshops to consider technical and non-technical evidence about social infrastructure, transport and movement; ecology, flooding and the climate emergency; and the principles of mixed-use development, particularly in relation to industrial space and residential development being located together.

The Stage 1 Report

The Steering Group endorsed the Stage 1 Report at a meeting on the 25th February 2021. The report is appended to this document and broadly consists of the following sections:

1. **The study area** – with a boundary that includes the brownfield land between the High Street and the Marina which largely comprises of big box retail, surface car parking, the planned new station, light industrial use and emerging residential development. The area also includes Parish Wharf Leisure Centre and Portishead Primary School as growth could have an impact on their capacity as facilities;
2. **Analysis** – the collation of technical and demographic evidence to inform the development of a Vision for the area that could be taken forward in a development framework
3. **A Vision, objectives and key development principles** for the study area – these has been developed around the theme of ‘Connection’ – informed by the benefits of the forthcoming rail connection but critically the role that the development of the study area can play in substantially improving walking and cycling across it to connect existing neighbourhoods in the town and to reduce the need to drive for local journeys

4. **A framework of principles to inform Stage 2** – including the continuation of a shared vision, engagement, deliverability and flexibility, a greener future and engaging with planning policy; and
5. **The route map for delivering the Stage 2 work** – including it being led by NSC but continuing to be supported by project partners and its potential to become part of the planning framework for North Somerset.

Stage 1 is not propositional but does establish principles for preparing a new vision for this part of Portishead which will inevitably generate interest in the policy and commercial implications of change. These would need to be considered in greater detail in Stage 2 of the project.

The principle of development – the study area land is brownfield and much of it is within the designated Portishead Town Centre. The overarching National Planning Policy Framework introduction of major new public transport infrastructure is expected to increase development activity in the area, while structural economic changes derived from the impact of COVID-19 means that there is strong likelihood of development in the next ten to fifteen years.

While planning clearly has a fundamental role to play in shaping and leading change, development happens because of investment decisions and deliverability and viability. Landowners change the use of their land when it makes financial sense to do so. How the planning system and financial and land interests successfully engage with each other is how good and balanced development outcomes are achieved.

Movement and transport – movement infrastructure in and around the study area currently prioritises car use and has resulted in some hostile places to walk and cycle. The area also consists of a significant number of free car parks. Change that encourages modal shift to public transport, walking and cycling often generates concern in places, even when driving for local journeys generates congestion.

Use and density – the sustainable location of the study area means that future development is likely to be mixed use (including the horizontal layering of uses) and provides an opportunity for space for industry, workspace, community space, new social infrastructure and town centre uses. The location would suit a range of development types, including town houses and medium and potentially higher density forms of development.

Infrastructure – Portishead's infrastructure provision for town centre facilities, school places, health services and sports and leisure facilities is considered to be broadly in line with other places in North Somerset. There is ongoing concern about access from the M5, congestion within the town and localised parking challenges, particularly in Port Marine.

Communities in places facing the prospect of growth and change rightly want to understand what infrastructure will be delivered, when, where and how. As with any growth or intensification through the planning process, the delivery of infrastructure will need to be programmed for timely delivery and will require funding and space from a multitude sources including developers, government departments, funding rounds and the local authority.

Climate emergency – some forms of development are considerably more sustainable than others. Those increase access to local facilities and services, public transport, reduce the need to travel by car (particularly for local journeys), introduce green and blue infrastructure and make the most efficient use of land through density can reduce their inherent impact in the environment. High levels of energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy can then reduce the on-going generation of carbon through use and occupation.

COVID-19 – the impacts of lockdowns and restrictions on activity have had profound impacts on the use of space and real estate, particularly on how and where many people work (and therefore commute) and how people shop. Commuting patterns have changed substantially with an increase in home working while the explosion in on line retail and use of local essential retail within walking distance has reduce the value of brick and mortar shops and increased the value of industrial land (due to the fulfilment and distribution of orders).

Next steps and timeframes

Portishead Town Council will formally consider the Stage 1 report at a meeting on the 17th March 2021. Depending on the outcome of the meeting, it is then intended that Stage 2 of the project is taken forward from Spring/Summer 2021 as follows:

- Preparation of the Stage 2 Development Framework will be based on the guiding principles set out in the Stage 1 work;
- Stage 2 will be led by North Somerset Council in its role as Local Planning Authority;
- The current Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Partners will be updated to include the Stage 2 process, with the Partners continuing their steering group role;
- The North Somerset Council as Local Planning Authority will work proactively and collaboratively with the Partners, including NSC in its role as landowner, Portishead Town Council and landowners including ASI;
- The Partners will work proactively and collaboratively to fund, resource and deliver Stage 2;
- The North Somerset Council as Local Planning Authority will prepare the brief, programme, governance structures, and determine the status of the Stage 2 process, in conjunction with the Partners;
- The Partners will review their WWSA landholdings and interests in the context of the principles set out in the Scoping Study to help inform the Development Framework; and
- The Partners will encourage the active participation in the Stage 2 process of other WWSA landowners, as appropriate.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Stage 1 of the project was funded by Aberdeen Standard Investments. The funding arrangements for Stage 2 are likely to include funding from Aberdeen Standard Investments and North Somerset Council, while other stakeholders who proactively engage in the process may be asked to contribute if it is deemed appropriate.

5. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

The document is not a planning policy instrument but has been developed with colleagues in planning and the proposals will be used to help inform the council emerging local plan and any new supplementary guidance.

As the Stage 2 exercise will be more propositional in content and process, the council will need to clearly distinguish its roles as the local planning authority, service provider and land owner.

6. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The Steering Group has sought to assemble organisations that represent a broad base of interests, experiences and perspectives through a diversity of gender and sex, age and ethnicity. The Stage 2 exercise will involve proactive public engagement that will seek to hear the views of a greater diversity of voices and will consider the best way to monitor participation.

The Stage 2 work will be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.

7. CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS

Alongside the new local plan, this work will play an important role in defining and delivering the Councils' response to the climate emergency, particularly in Portishead. It will set out the approach to climate change and environmental issues in terms of, for example, the location and form of development, renewable energy, minimising car use and maximising public transport and active travel, encouraging green infrastructure and biodiversity and flood risk.

AUTHOR

Alex Hearn

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1: Wyndham Way Study Area Stage 1 Report