

Title: Riverside House Development Brief - Update  
Lead Officer: Heather Johnson (07974 973626)  
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Cooke  
Wards of the District directly affected: Leamington Clarendon ward

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### **Summary**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to enable Cabinet to be informed of the outcomes of the public consultation on the draft Development Brief for the Riverside House site and of the proposed updates in response; and, to approve the updated Development Brief to enable options/proposals to be brought forward for the development of the site.

### **Recommendations**

- (1) That Cabinet notes the outcomes of the public consultation and the updated contents of the Development Brief for Riverside House.
  - (2) That Cabinet approves the updated Development Brief for Riverside House, attached at Appendix 1, and agrees that this will be used to guide future development on the site.
  - (3) That Cabinet receives a report for options on how a development at Riverside House may be brought forward, in the first quarter of 2022.
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## **2 Background**

- 2.1 On 8 July 2021, Cabinet approved the draft Development Brief for the Riverside House site for public consultation.
- 2.2 The draft Development Brief seeks to provide a clear and public expression of the Council's aspirations for the future of the Riverside House site, bringing the site forward for housing in accordance with its allocation in the Local Plan, and with other Local Plan policies such as affordable housing in the District.
- 2.3 The public consultation ran for a period of ten weeks over the summer: from 26 July to 1 October 2021. The consultation included sessions with several town centre groups, including the Town Council, Clean Air Leamington, Leamington BID, Leamington Chamber of Commerce and with members of the public, including nearby residents. Questions and answers from these sessions were added to the consultation webpage to help share key information more widely.
- 2.4 The consultation included an online survey requesting feedback on key points of the brief, including: the vision and objectives, the development principles, the sustainability principles, and overall feedback. The survey was also made available at The Royal Leamington Spa Town Hall and the Royal Pump Rooms for members of the public to review and provide feedback; and was publicised in local media.

2.5 The consultation closed on 1 October 2021. The draft Development Brief has now been updated to reflect some of the key points from the feedback received from these sources. The updated brief is attached at Appendix 1. The original brief is attached at Appendix 3 for reference.

## **2.6 Survey Results**

2.6.1 Overall, the survey results demonstrate that 67.35% of the public support the development on the site. 20.41% of those completing the survey support the development in its current form, as set out in the first draft of the brief, and 46.94% support the brief with some amendments.

2.6.2 Some of the key amendments suggested in the survey feedback include:

2.6.2.1 The need to emphasise the good quality and sustainability principles expected of the scheme

2.6.2.2 Keen that consideration is given to car share schemes or becoming a car free development

2.6.2.3 The need to retain green spaces and to retain as many of the trees on site as possible

2.6.3 32.65% of the public who completed the survey do not support the development on this site. Some of the reasons provided for this lack of support were that some members of the public do not wish there to be any building on the site at all. Others would prefer that the existing building is refurbished and re-used rather than demolition and rebuilding on the site.

## **2.7 Online Sessions - Feedback**

2.7.1 Overall, feedback from the online sessions has been positive and people have welcomed the opportunity to have a constructive dialogue around the future of the site. Questions asked during each of these sessions and the responses were captured for addition to the webpage and are attached in support of this paper at Appendix 3.

2.8 Key themes that have emerged throughout the consultation may be summarised as follows:

2.8.1 Strong support for the sustainability principles of development, with the view that it should lead the way for future developments in Leamington, setting new standards in the town.

2.8.2 Enthusiasm for the connectivity vision, linking the town centre to the river walk and green spaces, through an open access development. This is perceived as a clear benefit for the local community.

2.8.3 The inclusion of 40% affordable housing, in line with the Local Plan, was positively viewed by most people. Some respondents would have preferred more than 40% on the site.

- 2.9 The clear de-linking of the Riverside House site to the redevelopment of the Council's car park at Covent Garden was understood and this approach is supported.
- 2.10 There was a view that the vision set out in the brief should be strengthened further, to explain the exemplar design and quality development that the Council seeks in more detail and the brief has been updated to reflect this point.
- 2.11 Feedback at an early stage enabled a key plan (Plan 01) in the document to be clarified and updated.
- 2.12 Some challenge has been raised to the potential outlined massing on the site and whether the guidance provided in the brief is appropriate. However, outline information is needed in the brief to provide a guide for potential development. The brief is not a specification; it is there to provide key principles and guidance for interpretation and to enable innovative design to be brought forward for consideration.
- 2.13 A further challenge raised relates to the issue of the mature trees along the street at Milverton Hill and the wish to retain them. It is the view that a development on the site should be able to retain these trees to help to preserve the view in the neighbourhood, and it is our aim to do so.
- 2.14 Some challenge has been made in terms of retaining the existing building on the site instead of demolition and building. Whilst commendable from a sustainability perspective, in these circumstances, this option has been discounted. The building is, in its current form, unsuitable for residential use and would need considerable investment if it was to be converted. To achieve the positive planning outcomes for the site as set out in the brief, including delivering 40% affordable housing, a redevelopment of the site is the only viable option.
- 2.15 The opportunity for dialogue has been useful for the public and for the Council in refining the development brief further. Some members of the public have expressed interest in a further consultation stage, at the pre-planning application stage, so that designs can be visually understood and compared, with the opportunity to ask further questions. This is an opportunity that should be considered as part of the next steps
- 2.16 The development brief has been updated at Appendix 1. Finalising this Development Brief will enable further work to be undertaken by Officers, in order to bring forward potential options that will consider how the development may be brought forward.

### **3 Alternative Options available to Cabinet**

- 3.1 The Council could choose not to approve the updated draft Development Brief and instead rely on policies in the Warwick District Local Plan and in other adopted Supplementary Planning Documents. Whilst this approach would still enable the site to come forward in compliance with planning policy, it would not allow the Council to articulate its wider ambitions for the site and maximise the community benefits that the redevelopment of this site would bring. This alternative option has therefore been discounted.
- 3.2 It should be noted that by requiring that wider community benefits are delivered than that may usually be required on a site owned by another party, that it may impact on the eventual land receipt that the Council receives for the site or may even require a financial contribution in order to achieve them. The Council could choose to vary the Brief and the reduce the requirements on the site with the intention of driving up its land value but the steer from Cabinet has been to develop a brief that sets out the Council and wider community aspirations. This option has therefore been discounted.

### **4 Consultation and Member's comments**

- 4.1 Several comments have been received from Councillors, who have demonstrated support for the development brief.
- 4.2 The Town Council supports the content of the Development Brief in its current form.

### **5 Implications of the proposal**

#### **5.1 Legal/Human Rights Implications**

- 5.1.1 There are no human rights or legal implications associated with this proposal at this stage.

### **6 Financial**

- 6.1 The Council's aspirations are to deliver an exemplar scheme that delivers our Climate Change objectives and the provision of 40% affordable housing in line with the Local Plan allocation. Members need to be aware that in doing so, there will be an impact on value. Further information is contained within the Private and Confidential Appendix 4.
- 6.2 However, in doing nothing, the office accommodation costs to the Council are increasing annually. The re-development of the Riverside House site is anticipated to create revenue savings for the Council in terms of the Council having alternative accommodation. Within the Medium-Term Financial strategy savings of £250k per annum have been included from 2022/23, increasing to £475k per annum from 2023/24. These figures are for the General Fund only, implying further savings should be released for the Housing Revenue Account. If the capital receipt obtained is in line with the lower potential value put forward by Bruton Knowles, then achieving these savings will then depend on the Council having to borrow to fund any further development, so increasing the revenue costs in term of debt charges.

- 6.3 Members will recall the substantial savings proposals that have been included within the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy. If these savings are not achievable, members will need to agree where further savings may be made, or income generated so as to enable the Council to balance its Budget into the future.

## **7 Council Plan**

### **7.1 Fit for the Future (FFF)**

- 7.1.1 The Council's FFF Strategy is designed to deliver the Vision for the District of making it a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. To that end amongst other things the FFF Strategy contains several Key projects. This report shows the way forward for implementing a significant part of one of the Council's Key projects.
- 7.1.2 The FFF Strategy has 3 strands, People, Services and Money, and each has an external and internal element to it, the details of which can be found [on the Council's website](#). The table below illustrates the impact of this proposal if any in relation to the Council's FFF Strategy.

### **7.2 FFF Strands**

#### **7.2.1 External Impacts of Proposal**

**People - Health, Homes, Communities** - Re-development of the site will deliver new homes, including at least 40% affordable housing, in line with the Local Plan site allocation. It will deliver further connectivity for the community between the town centre, river walk and green park spaces.

**Services - Green, Clean, Safe** - The re-development of the site is to be delivered in a sustainable way and supports the Council's ambition of becoming a carbon neutral Council by 2025 and for total carbon emissions within Warwick District to be as close to zero as possible by 2030. The development will be net zero carbon in operation and it will be built to high quality standards. The car park will have appropriate levels of electric charging points, with the ability to add further in the future as requirements are likely to increase. The site will deliver improved connectivity between the town, river walk and public green spaces.

**Money- Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment** – Re-development of this site will provide housing which will contribute towards local jobs and the local economy. The employment currently provided on site will be re-provided in another location(s).

#### **7.2.2 Internal impact of the Proposal**

**People - Effective Staff** – The re-development of Riverside House supports different and flexible ways of working for Warwick District Council and delivers efficiencies in terms of service availability.

**Services - Maintain or Improve Services** - The re-development of the site supports the shift to the increase in pace of the digital agenda in terms of the Council's operations.

**Money - Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term** - The re-development of the Riverside House site will maximise the revenue opportunities for the site. It is estimated to deliver a minimum of annual revenue savings to the General Fund of circa **£475,000** for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and also remove significant overhanging capital costs required to maintain Riverside House.

### **7.3 Supporting Strategies**

7.3.1 Each strand of the FFF Strategy has several supporting strategies. The Local Plan is one of the key strategies impacting most FFF strands and the proposal to redevelop Riverside House is consistent with the relevant supporting strategy.

### **7.4 Environmental/Climate Change Implications**

7.4.1 The Development Brief sets out to deliver an exemplar design for development on the Riverside House site, taking account of the conservation area in which it is located. It aims to incorporate accessibility to green spaces and the river walk for the residents and the community, bringing green spaces closer for people and connecting the town.

7.4.2 The Council is committed to promoting the principles of sustainability throughout the design and build process. The proposed brief seeks to deliver a development that is as close as possible to net zero carbon in operation. Whilst it is likely that electrical energy systems involved will give rise to carbon emissions, this is expected to decrease, and it is anticipated that the design should avoid the need for future retrofitting of heating and energy efficiency. More widely, the layout and design requirements of the brief are consistent with the Councils climate change ambitions.

### **7.5 Analysis of the effects on Equality**

7.5.1 There are no equality impacts associated with the proposals in this report.

### **7.6 Data Protection**

7.6.1 There are no Data Protection implications associated with the proposals in this report.

### **7.7 Health and Wellbeing**

7.7.1 The Development Brief sets out to deliver an exemplar design for development on the Riverside House site. In doing so, it aims to incorporate accessibility to green spaces and the river walk for the residents and the community alike. This brings green spaces, including play areas for children, closer for people and connects the town closer together. This therefore impacts positively on health and wellbeing in the community.

## **8 Risk Assessment**

8.1 The key risk associated with the Development Brief is that the planning requirements for the site, as set out, are such that the development is not viable. However, this is not assessed as a high risk, as viability of delivery will be a reasonable factor for consideration when assessing future proposals.

8.2 Given that the Council is looking to bring forward the site, in compliance with all planning requirements, and with the aspiration of going beyond that which would currently be required of a third-party developer in response to the Climate Emergency there is a potential impact on value, with the possibility that the potential capital receipt for the Riverside House site may make it more difficult to deliver the savings identified in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. However, this must be balanced with the equal risk that comes with not moving out of Riverside House and so having to find the same level of savings from other sources.

## **9 Reasons for the Recommendation**

9.1 The Development Brief will be used to guide future development on the Riverside House site. It has been updated following the Public Consultation and is now ready for approval. Officers will then focus on the next steps of how the site may be brought forward for development.

### **Supporting documents:**

**Appendix 1:** Updated Draft Development Brief for the Riverside House site

**Appendix 2:** Changes to the Development Brief

**Appendix 3:** Questions and Answers from the Public Consultation

**Appendix 4:** Private & Confidential

## Report Information Sheet

Please complete and submit to Democratic Services with draft report

<b>Committee/Date</b>	4 November 2021	
<b>Title of report</b>	Riverside House Development Brief Update	
<b>Consultations undertaken</b>		
<b>Consultee *required</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Details of consultation /comments received</b>
<b>Ward Member(s)</b>		
<b>Portfolio Holder WDC &amp; SDC *</b>		
<b>Financial Services *</b>	12.10.21	
<b>Legal Services *</b>	12.10.21	
<b>Other Services</b>	12.10.21	
<b>Chief Executive</b>	12.10.21	
<b>Head of Service</b>	13.10.21	
<b>Section 151 Officer</b>	12.10.21	
<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	12.10.21	
<b>CMT (WDC)</b>	12.10.21	
<b>Leadership Co-ordination Group (WDC)</b>	18.10.21	
<b>Other organisations</b>		
<b>Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Ctte/Council?</b>		Recommendation to: Cabinet
<b>Contrary to Policy/Budget framework</b>		No
<b>Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?</b>		Appendix 4 is Confidential
<b>Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?</b>		Yes, Forward Plan item – scheduled for 4 November 2021
<b>Accessibility Checked?</b>		File/Info/Inspect Document/Check Accessibility