

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

## Cabinet

---

**Date of Meeting:** 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015  
**Report of:** Executive Director for Economic Growth and Prosperity  
**Subject/Title:** Alderley Park Development Framework  
**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Don Stockton, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Assets

---

### 1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Alderley Park is a major employment site of strategic importance to the economy of the Borough and a key element of the North West Life Science ecosystem.
- 1.2 After the announcement of the planned withdrawal of Astra Zeneca's R&D staff from the site, Cabinet endorsed a vision for the site as set out in the Alderley Park Prospectus which outlined the site transforming from a single occupier site to a cluster of life science businesses continuing to complement and support life science facilities across the wider region. Following this in March 2014, the Alderley Park site was purchased by Manchester Science Partnerships with Cheshire East Council purchasing a 10% stake in the Special Purpose Vehicle for Alderley Park as well as a 3% stake in Manchester Science Partnerships.
- 1.3 It is critical that work is undertaken to remodel the site without delay so that talent and skills associated with AstraZeneca can be redeployed on site before becoming dissipated and to ensure that the world class facilities on site are maintained and do not become obsolete. Following initial viability work, Manchester Science Partnerships have suggested there is a need to sell parts of the site for high value uses to release funds to enable the necessary early site remodeling. The need for guidance to be provided to help steer an appropriate form of such development has been recognized and to this end on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015, Cabinet approved the consultation draft of the Alderley Park Development Framework and agreed proposals for a six-week programme of public consultation.



1.4 The consultation ran between the 30<sup>th</sup> January and 13<sup>th</sup> March, during which representations were received from 72 parties. A summary of representations submitted in response to that consultation is set out in the table at the end of the attached **Statement of Consultation (Appendix C)**. The majority of representations relate to the following issues:

- General strong support for the Life Science Park focus to retain opportunities for skilled employment;
- General support for increased public access through/ within the site with linkages to existing recreational routes in the locality;
- Concerns over the possibility of losses of sports facilities;
- The extent of complementary uses which could be developed;
- Mixed views regarding housing proposals but general concern to ensure quantum of any new housing is no more than is absolutely needed to ensure the viability of the life science park, together with specific objections to housing in certain locations, particularly adjacent to the Mere and visible from Congleton Road. Mixed views expressed regarding affordable housing provision and housing types;
- General view that high quality development must be ensured and the character of the area protected. Concern that the proposal could harm the openness of the Green Belt and views that extent of Previously Developed Land is overly inclusive of open areas;
- Concern that heritage assets and character, biodiversity and the natural environment of the site and local area are protected;
- Concerns regarding potential impact on local services, facilities, and infrastructure, including highways.
- Concerns regarding the potential conflict of interest between the Council as Local Planning Authority and the Council having a commercial interest in the site with suggestions that the Framework should be referred to the Secretary of State rather than being approved by the Council.

1.5 All comments have been considered by officers and a number of amendments have been made to the draft Framework to reflect the views demonstrated through the public consultation period. The table at Appendix E of the attached Statement of Consultation summarises how changes have been made in response to specific issues raised.

1.6 The most significant changes are considered to be:

- The Masterplan has been significantly adapted as shown in **Appendix A**. Mereside car park, although previously developed land, is no longer suggested as an area where housing could be considered suitable. This is because the consultation responses brought to officers' attention that the planning permission which had been granted for this area was only temporary and has expired. Thus whilst the area is previously developed land, this is only by virtue of the fact that conditions on the temporary planning permission requiring its removal have not been complied with. Officers therefore feel it is no longer appropriate to include this as a potential housing area but rather have amended the Masterplan to indicate the area restored to farmland unless it is satisfactorily demonstrated through a formal planning application, that very special circumstances exist to justify its continued temporary retention for parking.
- A second area identified as previously developed land immediately adjacent to Congleton Road towards the south of the site (south of the main cricket pitch) is also no longer suggested as potentially suitable for housing given the many representations raised regarding the desirability of retaining a rural character to the locality and the visual prominence of this part of the site.
- Additional text has been added to clarify the fact that any planning application proposing development of housing in areas where it would normally be considered inappropriate in Green Belt policy terms will need to demonstrate 'very special circumstances' at planning application stage in the normal way supported by detailed viability and business modelling reports.
- Further emphasis has been placed on design quality and ensuring the historic parkland landscape is valued as a key feature with proper provision made for its maintenance going forward.
- Further guidance has been given on potential leisure routes and the opportunity to complement and link with other heritage landscapes and properties in the locality such as the National Trust owned Nether Alderley Mill and Alderley Edge.

1.7 A final version of the Framework document can be found at **Appendix B**, where all changes to the draft version are highlighted in red for convenience.

## 2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) Approve the revised version of the Development Framework appended and endorse its use as a material consideration when determining future planning applications on the site as part of the Development Management process.

- b) Approve the formal withdrawal of the existing now outdated Alderley Park Planning Brief of 1999 as a Supplementary Planning Document.

### **3.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 AstraZeneca's withdrawal from the Alderley Park site creates a need for investment before the adoption of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy. It is critical that work is undertaken to remodel the site without delay so that talent and skills associated with AstraZeneca can be redeployed on site before becoming dissipated and to ensure that the world class facilities on site are maintained and do not become obsolete. The current adopted local plan presumes continued occupation and growth by AstraZeneca on the site. It is considered important, in the interests of assisting the rapid and appropriate re-functioning of the site, that the Council therefore gives a clear picture of how the new site owners may interpret planning policy in light of the changed site circumstances. Thus the Alderley Park Development Framework is required to act as a planning guidance document to assist the site owners and potential investors in understanding the planning policy situation as viewed by the Council in light of significant changed circumstances at the site.
- 3.2 Following a six week public consultation process, a number of amendments have been made to the draft Development Framework to reflect issues raised by stakeholders. Given the pace of AstraZeneca's withdrawal from the site and the freeing-up of space for investment in addition to delays with the adoption of the Local Plan, it is recommended that the Framework be approved for use as a material consideration when determining any planning applications for the site.
- 3.3 Although there is an existing Planning Brief for this site, adopted by Macclesfield Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance in 1999, this is predicated on the assumption that AstraZeneca would continue to occupy and develop this site, and is therefore unsuitable given AstraZeneca's withdrawal from the site.

### **4.0 Wards Affected**

- 4.1 The Alderley Park site is part located in the wards of Chelford and Prestbury.

### **5.0 Local Ward Members**

- 5.1.1 Cllr George Walton (Chelford) and Cllr Paul Findlow (Prestbury)

### **6.0 Policy Implications**

- 6.1 The Framework is fully aligned with Policy CS29 in the Submission Draft of the Local Plan Strategy whilst still taking full account of current adopted local planning policy and the NPPF. The Framework is also cognisant of the vision and parameters set out in the Alderley Park Development Prospectus and is considered to be aligned to the Government's Strategy for UK Life Sciences.

6.2 The Framework is also complementary to the following corporate policies

- 'Ambition for All: Sustainable Communities Strategy 2010-2025' – *Priority 2 Create conditions for business growth, harness emerging growth opportunities and create a climate attractive to business investment.*
- 'Cheshire East Corporate Plan 2013-2016' – *Outcome 2 Cheshire East has a strong and resilient local economy. Priority 1 – investment to support business growth.*

6.3 Notwithstanding the current situation, as set out in paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2 above, the Local Plan Strategy was submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 20th May 2014 and is currently undergoing an independent examination. As it may be necessary to make changes in order to make the Local Plan Strategy 'sound', there is a possibility that such changes may have an impact on policy alignment.

## **7.0 Implications for Rural Communities**

7.1 The location of Alderley Park, within the Prestbury and Chelford wards, means that a successful and sustainable future for the site is of benefit to the rural communities in the area in terms of job creation and retention.

## **8.0 Financial Implications**

8.1 Cabinet members will be aware that the Council has a financial interest in this site. Whilst there are considered to be no direct financial implications for the Council in endorsing this document for use in Development Management given that it seeks to provide guidance rather than change policy, Cabinet Members should ensure no weight is given to the fact that the Council has a commercial interest in this site when determining the acceptability of the Framework as a planning guidance document. To give any weight to this matter would be contrary to the Council's constitution. Final production of the Development Framework will be managed from within existing resources.

## **9.0 Legal Implications**

9.1 There are no identified legal implications for the Council in adopting this document for use in Development Management.

## **10.0 Risk Management**

10.1 Not having any Framework in place could leave potential developers, investors and occupiers without a clear understanding of the planning framework and expectations of the Council as Local Planning Authority for this site. This could hinder the submission and smooth determination of planning applications potentially increasing developer's costs leading to frustration with the local planning process. This could ultimately decrease the ability of MSP

to provide suitable space for new start-up companies in an appropriate timescale and subsequent loss of skills and employment opportunities.

## **11.0 Background and Options**

- 11.1 As a major strategic employment site within the borough, Alderley Park is of key importance to the local economy and plays a pivotal role in the wider North West science ecosystem.
- 11.2 Following the successful sale of the site, AstraZeneca are currently in the process of decanting the majority of their R&D activities from the site in line with their planned withdrawal by late 2016. This process is progressing at pace. Whilst this presents the new site owners with a positive opportunity to bring forward the delivery of new jobs in the areas that AstraZeneca have already vacated, it inevitably brings forward the need for investment to ensure that the world class facilities are maintained, and the site is re-modelled to be suitable for multi-occupancy.
- 11.3 Crucially, investment is needed to prevent the decline of the facilities and ensure that there is enough high quality space to offer to those former AstraZeneca staff not moving to Cambridge, so as to prevent their loss to employment opportunities elsewhere.
- 11.4 Given the decision to suspend the examination into the Local Plan Strategy, and the progress being made on the Alderley Park site, to await adoption of the Strategy before developing and adopting a Masterplan/Development Brief would not enable production of planning guidance in time to fit with the new site owners timetable for remodelling of the site.
- 11.5 Although there is an existing Planning Brief for this site, adopted by Macclesfield Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance in 1999, this is predicated on the assumption that AstraZeneca would continue to occupy and develop this site, and has, therefore, become outdated by virtue of recent events.
- 11.6 A draft Development Framework was, therefore, prepared outlining the Council's expectations for development proposals at Alderley Park to aid the smooth processing of future planning applications and to guide any developer or investor considering development on the site. This was considered by Cabinet on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015 and approved as a consultation draft.
- 11.7 In line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, a 6 week period of public consultation commenced on the 30<sup>th</sup> January with the following activities undertaken:

<b>Consultation Activity</b>	
Draft Framework available to view in Council offices in Crewe, Sandbach and Macclesfield	30/01/15 – 13/03/15
Draft Framework available to view at libraries across the Borough	30/01/15 – 13/03/15
Draft Framework available to view on the Council's website and consultation portal	30/01/15 – 13/03/15
Public notice published on the Council's website and in local newspapers	28/01/15
Press release issued	26/01/15
Email notification sent to all those registered on the LDF database	30/01/15
Letters sent to all residents within approximate 1500m radius of the site	30/01/15
Letters and copies of the Draft Framework sent to Parish Councils in the vicinity of the site	30/01/15

11.8 In addition to this, a public drop-in event was held at Nether Alderley Parish Hall on the 11<sup>th</sup> February and was attended by over 60 local residents. A picture of the event is included in the updated attached Statement of Consultation.

11.9 A summary of representations submitted in response to the consultation is set out in the table at Appendix E in the updated attached Statement of Consultation (**Appendix C** to this report). Representations can be viewed in full at: <http://cheshireeast-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/planning/dfb/alderleypark>

11.10 The following gives a brief overview of responses:

- General strong support for the Life Science Park focus to retain opportunities for skilled employment;
- General support for increased public access through/ within the site with linkages to existing recreational routes in the locality;
- Concerns over the possibility of losses of sports facilities;
- The extent of complementary uses which could be developed;
- Mixed views regarding housing proposals but general concern to ensure quantum of any new housing is no more than is absolutely needed to ensure the viability of the life science park, together with specific objections to housing in certain locations, particularly adjacent to the Mere and visible from Congleton Road. Mixed views expressed regarding affordable housing provision and housing types;
- General view that high quality development must be ensured and the character of the area protected. Concern that the proposal

could harm the openness of the Green Belt and views that extent of Previously Developed Land is overly inclusive of open areas;

- Concern that heritage assets and character, biodiversity and the natural environment of the site and local area are protected;
- Concerns regarding potential impact on local services, facilities, and infrastructure, including highways.
- Concerns regarding the potential conflict of interest between the Council as Local Planning Authority and the Council having a commercial interest in the site.

11.10 All representations submitted have been considered by officers and a number of amendments have been made to the draft Framework to reflect the views demonstrated through the public consultation period. The attached version of the Framework at **Appendix B** shows all changes in red for clarity and the table in Appendix E of the attached **Statement of Consultation at Appendix C** includes a summary of changes made in response to specific representations.

The most significant changes are considered to be:

- As shown on the **revised Masterplan at Appendix A**, the Mereside car park, although previously developed land, is no longer suggested as an area where housing could be considered suitable. This is because the consultation responses brought to officers' attention that the planning permission which had been granted for this area was only temporary and has expired. Thus whilst the area is previously developed land, this is only by virtue of the fact that conditions on the temporary planning permission requiring its removal have not been complied with. Officers therefore feel it is no longer appropriate to include this as a potential housing area but rather have amended the Masterplan to indicate the area restored to farmland unless it is satisfactorily demonstrated through a formal planning application, that very special circumstances exist to justify its continued temporary retention for parking.
- A second area identified as previously developed land immediately adjacent to Congleton Road towards the south of the site (south of the main cricket pitch) is also no longer suggested as potentially suitable for housing given the many representations raised regarding the desirability of retaining a rural character to the locality and the visual prominence of this part of the site.
- Additional text has been added to clarify the fact that any planning application proposing development of housing in areas where it would normally be considered inappropriate in Green



Belt policy terms will need to demonstrate 'very special circumstances' at planning application stage in the normal way supported by detailed viability and business modelling reports.

- Further emphasis has been placed on design quality and ensuring the historic parkland landscape is valued as a key feature with proper provision made for its maintenance going forward.
- Further guidance has been given on potential leisure routes and the opportunity to complement and link with other heritage landscapes and properties in the locality such as the National Trust owned Nether Alderley Mill and Alderley Edge.

11.11 Subject to the approval of Cabinet, the updated Development Framework will be used as part of the Development Management process and will be a material consideration in the processing of any planning application for development on the site.

## **12.0 Access to Information**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

Name: Adrian Fisher  
Designation: Head of Strategic and Economic Planning  
Tel No: 01270 686641  
Email: [Adrian.fisher@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:Adrian.fisher@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

Appendix A – Masterplan changes

Appendix B – Proposed Final Alderley Park Development Framework

Appendix C - Statement of Consultation (See Appendix E of this document for a summary of representations and changes made in response)