

Date of Meeting 13 February 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Cranbrook Town Centre

Report summary:

Cranbrook town centre has been a long time in the making, with the first new buildings since 2017 currently under construction and anticipated for completion in 2024. In 2022 the Council completed the purchase of 4 acres of town centre land and together with other public sector organisations, will in time control the remaining non-residential town centre land. Resolutions to grant planning permission for 3,510 further homes at Cranbrook are in place and once finalised, the legal agreements for these will secure financial contributions toward town centre facilities.

A community consultation was undertaken in late 2023 regarding the future of the town centre and this attracted significant levels of engagement. The community prioritise health and leisure delivery and want to see the town centre as a vibrant place to be with further shops and covered/shaded outside spaces in which to spend time.

In order to keep momentum with the town centre, the next step is to develop a masterplan that will be used to establish the location of land uses and the form and feel of the town centre.

Subsequent developments will be expected to follow the masterplan to ensure that there is a joined-up and plan led approach to town centre delivery. Once produced, the masterplan will come back to SPC for endorsement but is not intended to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

1. That Strategic Planning Committee note the outcomes of the Cranbrook Town Centre consultation.
2. That Strategic Planning Committee approve the production of a Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan.

Reason for recommendation:

To enable Cranbrook town centre to continue to be delivered in order to provide the services and facilities necessary to support the growing town and its community.

Officer: Ed Freeman, Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Medium Impact

Cranbrook Town Centre needs to be designed so as to be accessible for all people and groups. This will mean that careful consideration of accessibility and the scope and range of facilities provided will need to be made through all projects that make up the programme.

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; At this stage of the programme, the overall risk is considered to be low as there is no commitment to capital expenditure.

Links to background information Cranbrook Plan Development Plan Document: [cranbrook-plan-dpd-adopted.pdf](https://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/cranbrook-plan-dpd-adopted.pdf) ([eastdevon.gov.uk](https://www.eastdevon.gov.uk))

OPE program (agenda item

16):<https://democracy.eastdevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=1707&Ver=4>

Cranbrook town centre (agenda items 23 and 24):

<https://democracy.eastdevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=1704&Ver=4>

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

1. Background

- 1.1 Following the conclusion of difficult discussions with the Cranbrook consortium of developers over the future of Cranbrook's town centre in early 2022, significant progress has since been made.
- 1.2 Construction in the town centre has taken a big step forward in the last 18 months, with construction of a supermarket, children's nursery and shops with town square having begun and due to be completed in 2024. These will mark the first completed developments in the town centre since the Cranberry Farm pub was opened in mid-2017.
- 1.3 In November 2022 the purchase of land parcels TC4d&e (see Appendix 1 for plan) by the Council was completed, using borrowing from the Enterprise Zone programme. Progress is being made to secure the transfer of parcel TC2 to East Devon District Council and TC1 to Devon County Council, the latter to see the delivery of an Extra Care housing scheme.

Devon County Council are also looking to advance the transfer of parcel TC4b to them and in due course, East Devon will be due the transfer of parcel TC4c. Together these parcels will mean that the public sector collectively owns the remainder of the non-residential town centre land, which excluding the Extra Care land amounts to 9 acres (3.68ha).

1.4 The Cranbrook Plan Development Plan Document was adopted by the Council in October 2022 and sets out the policy framework for the ongoing development of the town up towards 8,000 houses and an expected population of around 20,000 people. Policy CB21 of the Plan relates to the development of the town centre, seeking for it to be 'focussed around a market square which will be a multi-functional space used for cultural purposes, recreation, and outside/market trading and frontage development. The policy also sets out a number of additional uses that must be accommodated:

- a. A Health and Wellbeing hub
- b. Leisure Centre
- c. Civic Centre (Town Council offices)
- d. Library
- e. Children's Centre
- f. Youth Centre
- g. Extra Care housing

This policy forms the backbone of decisions to be taken about the future of the town centre and what it is comprised of.

1.5 Resolutions to grant outline planning permission have now been received for 3,510 additional homes across the planned expansion areas, with approximately a further 1,000 homes expected to come forward. Legal agreements for the schemes with resolutions to grant planning permission are in progress, with the first expected for completion early in 2024. Along with the delivery of facilities on the sites themselves, these legal agreements will secure financial contributions toward other infrastructure, including the delivery of specific facilities in the town centre.

2. Community Consultation

2.1 On the back of the good progress made as already detailed, in late summer 2023 the Council employed Ash Futures to undertake a public consultation exercise regarding the development of the remaining town centre land. The company previously produced the Cranbrook Economic Development Strategy and so have some background knowledge of the town and its structure. The community consultation formally began on 11th October 2023 with the final community consultation event being held 16th November 2023. The consultation comprised of surveys hosted on Commonplace, drop-in sessions for the public, interviews with key stakeholders, focus groups and workshop sessions. In order to publicise the consultation, a leaflet was delivered to all properties and social media was used to engage with people.

2.2 Testament to the strong community desire to see the town have extra services and facilities, engagement in the consultation was exceptionally good and residents were enthusiastic and want to be involved. Three surveys were available for completion, the first short survey saw 1,397 responses, with 292 to the more detailed survey and 50 responses to a business survey. This represents a response rate of almost 50% of Cranbrook households. A copy of the final report from Ash Futures is included as Appendix 2.

2.3 The conclusions of the report are:

- A very strong preference to see the delivery of a leisure centre (preferably with swimming pool) and a health and wellbeing hub prioritised.
- The need for a variety of other facilities, of which a more diverse range of shops and eateries and an active town square were most popular.

- Desires for easier access to the town centre on foot, places to sit and chat, covered or shaded outdoor space and free public toilets. The town centre should be safe and offer a welcoming environment, especially for young people.
- Residents showed a keen interest in having a regular market – at least once a week. In particular there is support for farmers and street food markets.
- Excellent public transport and active travel infrastructure are important as are green construction credentials and including renewable energy on town centre buildings.
- Given the very young demographic of the town, the needs of young people are important. Young people are all different and some feel the need to have spaces where they can decide how and when to participate.
- More than 60% of respondents said they'd visit the town centre at least 2-3 times per week.
- There is support for Cranbox, which is a concept for a flexible and modular retail/food space in the town centre aimed as being a 'quick win' to provide additional floor space in which uses/businesses can be established/tested.
- There is some interest from local small businesses for space in the town centre but this is mostly focussed on markets and a Cranbox style development, with interest also in hot desking and workshops.

2.4 The undertaking of the community consultation is a big step forward for the future of the town and it is clear that the community want a modern and lively town centre. Continued engagement with all sectors of the community as the town centre progresses is important. The consultation report is clear in its recommendations that the Council must ensure that it has transparent and engaging communication with residents over the town centre in order to ensure that they are kept abreast of progress.

2.5 The Cranbrook Strategic Delivery Board is an advisory board made up of members from Cranbrook Town Council, East Devon District Council and Devon County Council. The Board were presented with the final consultation report at their meeting on 8th January. The board welcomed the consultation responses and emphasised the need for the masterplan and delivery of projects to be progressed quickly and for there to be good communication with the community on progress to manage expectations.

3. Masterplan

3.1 As part of the information given during the community consultation it was stated that the Council would progress to produce a masterplan for the town centre in Summer 2024. This masterplan will seek to set out where the main uses will be located and high-level principles for the form and feel of the town centre. In order to keep momentum, it is recommended that progress on this masterplan is advanced promptly.

3.2 As has been demonstrated through the consultation, the community would like to see the health and wellbeing hub and leisure centre prioritised. In the context of the NHS 10 year plan identifying staying healthy as a priority and the use of social prescribing to support people's health and wellbeing, these two uses are not mutually exclusive of one another and so a masterplanning exercise will enable consideration to be given to how the component elements can work together to foster good health outcomes. This would meet with the objective of Cranbrook Plan policy CB1 (Health and Wellbeing at Cranbrook).

3.3 In order to ensure that there are adequate medical services in the town to cater for the growing population, using funding from East Devon's One Public Estate programme, a consultant was commissioned to engage with health partners to understand strategic health needs and produce a feasibility study. The work was completed in 2023 and has established the NHS and DCC service needs for health and adult community services in the town and disseminated these into a spatial requirement.

3.4 In addition to the Cranbrook Plan DPD identifying a leisure centre as being a key facility in Cranbrook, the Council's Leisure and Built Facilities Strategy was approved in October

2022 and also contains within it a recommendation for a leisure centre in the town, to include a 6 lane, 25m swimming pool, health and fitness studio, 4 court sports hall and 2 studios as a minimum.

- 3.5 No new Council operated Leisure Centres have been delivered in East Devon since 1997 and so the prospect of progressing a new facility at Cranbrook is noteworthy.
- 3.6 Together with Exeter, Cranbrook is part of the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot, a programme that aims to tackle inactivity in the population. At Cranbrook it is families who are being targeted and whilst the pilot is not centred around sports to reduce levels of inactivity, a Leisure Centre would certainly align itself with the aims of the pilot.
- 3.7 There are presently no formal project teams established to progress either a Leisure Centre nor the Health and Wellbeing Hub but identifying a suitable location for both is one of the first exercises that should take place for them to progress. In addition to these two schemes Devon County Council are expected to deliver a children's centre, youth centre and library, with land and a capital contribution due to them from the current consortium and Cranbrook Town Council hold an ambition for a building that in addition to their offices, will also house rentable work space and other community uses. Depending upon the final mix of uses, this could act as a central building in the town centre.
- 3.8 The town centre masterplan is the document that will be used by all of the constituent projects to help inform the design and layout of their schemes so as to ensure that there is a consistent approach between them all and that they achieve the overarching objectives of the masterplan. Without a masterplan to identify where uses will be located and how they are expected to function together, it is very difficult for any other projects to move forward. It is therefore of critical importance that the masterplan is comprehensive and has buy-in from stakeholders.
- 3.9 The idea of having temporary space delivered in the town centre to allow uses to be tested and as a quick win to generate activity and vibrancy has long been discussed for the town, often known as Cranbox. The masterplanning exercise could also consider how temporary uses such as Cranbox may be capable of being accommodated on the land and the best location for it.
- 3.10 A masterplan can be either a Council endorsed document with no formal planning status, or it could be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). In January 2021, Cabinet resolved to put on hold the production of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the Town Centre until the final town centre MOU with the development consortium had been signed. The MOU was signed in May 2022 and was the document that in part facilitated the purchase of parcels TC4d&e by the Council. A SPD is a planning document that is governed by legislation and is required to be subject to public consultation but not independent examination. The glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework defines them as:

Documents which add further detail to the policies in the development plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan.

- 3.11 The Cranbrook Plan already includes policies relating to the town centre and also to the quality of development and other material considerations around sustainability and place making. As the public sector is or will be in control of the land that will be covered by the masterplan and therefore as landowner will have strategic oversight over how the sites come forward for development, officers are of the view that it is no longer necessary to pursue the adoption of the masterplan as an SPD. Rather, once completed, it is recommended that the masterplan be brought to Strategic Planning Committee for

endorsement. Once endorsed by the Council it would then act as a strategic guide to the development of the land but would not be a formal planning document.

- 3.12 The masterplan production will be resourced by officers in the Development Management team. External architectural support will be procured as part of this work, funded through existing budgets for Cranbrook and the work will not detract from resource or budget for the new Local Plan.
- 3.13 Production of the masterplan will enable projects for the constituent developments to move forward with certainty as to where they will be sited and expectations over form and character. Without this certainty there is a risk that the town centre development could stall or may come forward without the necessary co-ordination that is required to facilitate a coherent environment that meets the needs of the community.

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications requiring comment.