

Report to: Strategic Planning Committee



Date of Meeting 29 October 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Cranbrook Town Centre

Report summary:

The future of Cranbrook town centre is of critical importance for the success of the growing community, that will eventually have around 20,000 residents. To ensure that the town has the essential, social, community and cultural facilities that are needed to support the residents, it is considered necessary to set out a masterplan for the town centre to steer how development is expected to take place on the land and to clearly identify priorities.

The masterplan is set out using a development narrative, structured around what we know so far, the broad preferences expressed by the community, the buildings and the order they are likely to be delivered. The document identifies locations for key civic buildings, including Cranbrook Town Council's building, a leisure centre and health and wellbeing centre. A location for a modular commercial development known as Cranbox is also identified.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That Strategic Planning Committee endorse the Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan as an evidence document for use by project teams looking to develop facilities on the town centre land and by the local planning authority as a material consideration of planning applications on the land subject to minor changes and corrections to be agreed in consultation with the Portfolio holder Strategic Planning.

Reason for recommendation:

To provide a coherent narrative 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.

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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 High Impact

The delivery of Cranbrook town centre will have a high impact upon the community as a whole, including those with protected characteristics and the production of the masterplan has the ability to influence and frame how these will be accommodated and catered for. As individual projects progress, they will also need to be subject of Equalities Impact Assessment by the respective project teams.

Climate change Medium Impact

Risk: Medium Risk; East Devon District Council owns land in Cranbrook town centre and is due to take transfer of most of the remaining town centre land when relevant development triggers are reached.

Links to background information Cranbrook Town Centre masterplan - [Agenda for Strategic Planning Committee on Tuesday, 13th February, 2024, 10.00 am - East Devon](#) Cranbrook Town Centre masterplan - [Agenda for Cranbrook Placemaking Group on Monday, 1st July, 2024, 9.30 am - East Devon](#) Cranbrook Town Centre masterplan - [Agenda for Cranbrook Placemaking Group on Monday, 16th September, 2024, 10.30 am - East Devon](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- A supported and engaged community
- Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- Resilient economy that supports local business
- Financially secure and improving quality of services

Background

1. The assembly of land in the town centre is on-going and will result in all the remaining non-residential land being in public ownership. Devon County Council are working with LiveWest to see the building of an Extra Care development on the first of these areas of land with public consultation having taken place in September 2024 in advance of the submission of a planning application.
2. Together with the imminent completion of the supermarket, high street shops and children's nursery, the town centre is starting to take shape and the endorsement of a masterplan will serve to steer how the remaining land is used and developed.
3. Although good progress is being made, there are areas where this progress is slower than hoped and in particular, the uplift works to the main streets in the town centre (Tillhouse Road and Court Royal) by the developer consortium are yet to be undertaken. This is extremely disappointing as it has meant that the high street shops will open without the narrowed road, widened footways, tree planting and pedestrian and cycle crossings in place. The masterplan has nevertheless been based upon the layout with these works completed as they are critical to the success of the public realm.

Status of the masterplan

4. The masterplan has been produced with the intention of it being endorsed as an evidence document for the council; it is not intended to have any formally adopted planning status.
5. One option would have been to adopt the plan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and to build upon policy CB21 (Cranbrook Town Centre) of the adopted Cranbrook Plan Development Plan Document. However, as the public sector is or will be in control of the land that is covered by the masterplan and therefore as landowner will have strategic

oversight over how the sites come forward for development, it is not deemed necessary to pursue the adoption of the plan as an SPD.

6. The status of the masterplan was discussed in more detail at the Strategic Planning Committee meeting on 13th February 2023 (report paragraphs 3.10 – 3.13), the link to which is included under the 'background information' of this report.

Development narrative

7. The masterplan is set out using a development narrative, structured around what we know so far, the broad preferences expressed by the community, the buildings and the order they are likely to be delivered.
8. The narrative builds on this to discuss what is likely to happen from one stage to the next, setting out how earlier stages of town centre delivery will be used to inform decisions about what buildings and spaces are wanted or needed as feedback comes from the community using the town centre.
9. Managing expectations has been a long-running theme at Cranbrook and in particular for the delivery of the town centre, many residents feel that organisations involved in the delivery of the town (developers and councils alike) have over-promised and under-delivered. Although all involved in Cranbrook would very much like for the town centre to be delivered in a timely fashion, the reality is that development will take many years and there will be areas of empty land for some time to come. The document is clear in explaining this situation and setting priorities for delivery.

Key buildings and public realm

10. One of the fundamental purposes of the masterplan has been to identify locations for a number of facilities that are important for the proper functioning of the community. Locations are shown but the masterplan does not prescribe the precise layout or scale of each of these buildings, which will become clearer as the individual projects progress.
11. The Tillhouse will be Cranbrook Town Council's offices and a key community building, intended to house meeting rooms, a café and workspace. This will be located on land parcel TC2, on the opposite side of Tillhouse Road to the public square that has been built between the new retail blocks. The building will sit at the back of a second public square that it is intended will have a greener and less formal layout than that to the south of Tillhouse Road.
12. To the west of the square in TC2 is the location for Cranbox, a modular development that is intended to be quick to build and will serve to provide space for small, local enterprise and bring additional vibrancy and vitality to the town centre. The intention is for Cranbrook Town Council to own and manage this development as part of the overarching strategy of asset endowing the council to help them generate revenue.
13. A co-located site for a health and wellbeing centre and leisure centre is identified at the southern end of the town centre on land already owned by East Devon District Council. The site is adjacent to the supermarket car park and although level with Badger Way to the south, is on higher ground than the car park. The location benefits from being at a wide part of the site where there will be more scope for the scale of development desired and it will be prominent upon the approach into the town centre from the B3174 London Road.
14. Discussions are on-going with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service over the requirement for a fire station and a site opposite the health and leisure campus has been shown should it be needed. This will give quick and easy access to the B3174 London Road.
15. In the rest of the town centre land, development blocks are indicatively shown on the masterplan but no specific uses are set out. This is a deliberate approach to allow for future flexibility of the plan to adapt to the emerging and changing needs of the community as it matures. Appropriate uses may include offices, retail, community and cultural uses, workshop spaces or, particularly above ground floor level, housing.
16. Unless it is set over multiple storeys or placed underground, car parking is land intensive and in the town centre, land is at a premium. The supermarket car park (c. 145 spaces) will be available for all visitors to the town centre for 2 or 3 hours, although we do not have

written confirmation of this from Morrisons. There is inadequate space in which to provide a second car park of a similar size to that at Morrisons and so to try and balance the needs of the different operators of services we know are needed with the strong desire for a high quality public realm, the approach endorsed in the document is to have modest sized car parks to serve each use or cluster of uses (e.g. health and leisure may share a car park as their peak hours are largely opposite one another) and then include well designed on-street general parking. This may mean that the dedicated car parks are for limited use only and the general public will be expected to use the supermarket or on-street parking if they aren't arriving by public transport or by walking or cycling.

17. The plan sets out a strategy for the public realm, using street trees to give structure to spaces and on TC2, creating a series of linked spaces that meander from a public square down to the country park, becoming increasingly informal as they do so. This strategy will help to integrate the two areas.
18. Critically the town centre will need to comply with the requirement to deliver not less than 10% biodiversity net gain. This brings about a financial impact both in terms of delivery and on-going management but also of land take in order to meet the uplift. The approach recommended in the masterplan of using green and blue infrastructure to link places and spaces will help with this requirement. It is though recognised that placing such weight on the quality of the green public realm comes at a cost, however it is one that should be attributed significant weight for the wider quality of Cranbrook and in creating a place that the community will feel proud of and want to use and visit regularly for many years to come.

Financial implications:

The work to produce to this report and the draft Masterplan have been met within existing budgets. There are no other specific financial implications within this report on which to comment

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications requiring comment (002533/29 October 2024/DH)