

Saunderton

The Council will be preparing a 'mini plan' or village plan for Saunderton called an Area Action Plan(AAP) which will explore options for the village to grow in a managed way.

The village plan for Saunderton is a special project which our Planning and Sustainability team is working on. It fits within the wider work of the District's New Local Plan, but it has the advantage of being able to consider specific local issues for Saunderton in greater detail. It will set out a local context which identifies key factors which should be considered when the council has to make decisions on planning applications for development in and around the current village area.

The aim of drawing up an Area Action Plan for Saunderton is to manage any future development in a way which can achieve a balance between housing growth and providing local infrastructure to support any significant growth.

Molins site

An application was received earlier this year for a development on the former Molins factory near Saunderton for just over 200 homes (15/05250/OUTEA). Planning applications are normally dealt with in 13 weeks, but where planning applications are accompanied by an Environmental Statement, as in this case, they are normally dealt with in 16 weeks. However the applicant has given the Council additional time which means the deadline for us to determine this application is now at the end of July.

A planning application was approved in 2008 that would have brought this land back into use for jobs. However, the applicants did not proceed with the development. The site has now been sold to house builders. The Molins site is 'previously developed land', often called brownfield land. The planning system expects that wherever possible, brownfield sites should be developed before greenfield sites.

There are a number of issues relating to building this level of housing at Saunderton. For example, would it in effect be an isolated housing estate in the countryside not connected with the rest of the village?

Current planning guidance and housing targets set out by Government says that planning authorities should only refuse planning permission where adverse impacts of the proposed development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. An application of this scale would mean the developer would need to make some contributions to support the extra demands on local infrastructure – for example, providing additional school places, but it would not result in any new facilities being provided, either in Saunderton or surrounding villages.

In order to meet the new housing targets, the Council is having to look at housing options which it would not have looked at in the past. It has to balance building new homes with making sure that the right infrastructure is in place to serve current and new residents. Sometimes a smaller development (such as the current proposed development) is not enough to trigger new infrastructure facilities like schools or changes to transport and roads, but a larger development could mean the village

gets new facilities to adequately serve the people living there. It may seem counterintuitive to make the development larger if between 500 and 1,000 homes were built on land between the Molins site and the village, and possibly around West's Yard there could be wider benefits.

Transport links

The village plan for Saunderton will look at the current transport links and explore what pressures there could be if the village grows. Saunderton is one of the few villages in the District with a station, with a regular direct service to London. In terms of finding the right locations for development in the District, is it right that more development is located near that station, so that residents have an alternative to the car for some journeys? Bus services, on the other hand, are poor – if they are not improved would the new homes still be car dependent, despite the station? And what changes might be needed to the country lanes?

No decision can be made about how many homes should be built at Saunderton until work to investigate the implications has been undertaken.

Timetable

We are aiming to produce a draft village plan by early 2106. The plan then has to go through a government inspection.

Your input

We want you to be part of the village plan and to give us your input. There will be public workshops and exhibitions during the process. In addition we want to set up a Steering Group, made up of local interests. The group will, meet regularly and give direct input into the preparation of the village plan. We are currently talking with the Parish Council who will help us to set up a Steering Group.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

It is very unusual – and controversial – to be suggesting housing expansion in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and in the Green Belt. Any development (including on the Molins site) would have to be of very high quality to meet the standards required of development in the AONB. The approach to the landscape will be critical in the success of any design.

Green Belt

Development is permitted in the Green Belt in exceptional circumstances, and again, the development will have to demonstrate it meets the tests of sustainable development, if it is to meet this 'exception test' to be permitted in the Green Belt. Because Saunderton lies in the Green Belt, producing a Neighbourhood Plan is not an option, but the Area Action Plan is a way for local people to help to set out the parameters for the village.

Village plan vs District wide Local Plan?

We can finalise a village plan more quickly than the District-wide Local Plan which is not expected to be adopted until 2018. That means we can shorten the period of uncertainty about whether or not the development will take place in Saunderton. By working at a village level, we can focus very specifically on the issues for

Saunderton, to a level of detail that would not be undertaken for a District-wide Local Plan.

Scrutiny

An Area Action plan such as the Saunderton village plan has to go through the same level of scrutiny and public examination as the District-wide Local Plan. And, by being a specific village plan, the examination will also ensure a specific focus on the issues.

Molins application

The Council has to make a decision about the current application for the former Molins site by the end of July. However, if we are making good progress on the Saunderton Village Plan it may be possible to further extend the time on the current application. On the other hand, they may require the Council to determine that application. If the Council refuses planning permission, the applicant can then appeal.

Costs

Saunderton Village Plan is a core part of our Local Plan work which is funded directly by the by the taxpayer. By producing a village plan we are able to set a framework for future development which sets out, what would be allowed and the community facilities that must be provided. This is detail that would be required for any subsequent planning application. Landowners in the area are being invited to contribute towards this cost, given that they would have to undertake this work in any event. Any contributions of this nature would be through a 'planning performance agreement' (see <http://www.wycombe.gov.uk/Core/DownloadDoc.aspx?documentID=8408> which explains what this is).