

Local Plan Site Allocations - Cromer

Summary: To seek agreement on the way forward for site allocations in the draft Local Plan particularly in relation to the final selection of sites at Cromer.

Recommendations: **1. That land west of Cromer adjacent to Norwich Road is included in the Reg19 Local Plan as an allocation for approx. 400 dwellings, Sports pitches, elderly persons accommodation, open space and supporting infrastructure and that development of the site accords with a single comprehensive master plan and phasing agreement.**
2. That land at Clifton Park is allocated in the Reg19 Plan for approx. 55 dwellings, elderly care accommodation and public open space.

Cabinet Member(s)	Ward(s) affected
Cllr J Toye	All
Contact Officer, telephone number and email: Mark Ashwell, Planning Policy Manager, mark.ashwell@north-norfolk.gov.uk Tel. 0263 516325	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the meeting in July Members considered options for site allocations in Cromer. It was resolved to defer consideration and give Officers delegated authority to investigate options for an enlarged allocation on the western side of Cromer on land adjacent to Norwich Road (the Gurney/Cabbell Manners proposals) with a view to seeking a single comprehensive joint scheme encompassing parts of both land holdings. This report updates Members on these discussions and recommends a final selection of sites to include in the Reg19 consultation version of the Local Plan.
- 1.2 Over the last year the Working Party has resolved to allocate new development sites which would allow the overall housing target included in the Draft Local Plan to be met. Subject to resolution of site selection in Cromer the Plan can now be finalised for Regulation 19 consultation and submission.

2. Selection of Sites in Cromer

2.1 Cromer is identified as one of the Large Growth Towns in the Draft Plan and requires land to be identified in the town (adjacent parishes) for around 600 dwellings. This number is much lower than both Fakenham and North Walsham, which are the other two Large Growth Towns in the Plan. This reflects the degree to which growth in Cromer is constrained by the North Sea, the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and other localised constraints. Set against this, Cromer

has amongst the highest numbers of people in housing need and the range of supporting services that is available is comparatively good.

2.2 Given this, it is strategically important that the town makes a significant contribution toward addressing the overall housing requirement and other development needs in the District and that sites are identified which are suitable to provide a land supply both early in, and throughout, the plan period whilst also mitigating environmental and other potential adverse impacts. The Draft Plan at Regulation 18 consultation stage included four sites:

Land west of Pine Tree Farm (the 'Gurney' site) – proposed to be allocated in the Draft Plan for 300 dwellings, elderly care and replacement football club facilities *subject to access issues being resolved.*

Land at Cromer High Station – A small site for around 20 units rolled forward from the existing adopted Plan. This site is now subject to a current planning application. Members have previously endorsed this site for inclusion in the Reg 19 Plan so no further decision is required at this stage.

Land at the former Golf Practice Ground, Overstrand Road – proposed for approx. 180 dwellings and elderly persons accommodation. Members have previously endorsed this site for inclusion in the Reg19 Plan so no further decision is required at this stage.

Land at Clifton Park – proposed at Reg 18 for approx. 90 dwellings, primary school and substantial open space. Further consideration of a revised proposal for 55 dwellings and elderly persons accommodation was previously deferred by Members to allow for other options to be considered.

2.3 Collectively, these four sites were planned to deliver around 600 dwellings, which is the 'target' for allocated sites for Cromer included in the Draft Plan.

3. Updated Position – Norwich Road Sites

3.1 Since these earlier resolutions there have been a number of changes.

- It now appears probable that the Gurney site would not be sufficient to accommodate 300 homes together with elderly care and football club facilities as the Draft Plan intended. The current planning application on the site suggests it may only be suitable for perhaps 250 units if the authorities desire to deliver high quality sports pitch provision is also to be achieved within the available area.
- The proposals for Clifton Park, which had originally been for around 90 dwellings and school site (Reg 18) have been amended to 55 dwellings and an elderly persons care facility.
- Across the draft Plan, expected dwelling numbers on allocated sites have been reduced to take account of local factors and ensure adequate provision of open space.

3.2 In light of the above, and in particular the reduction in numbers of dwellings which might be delivered across the four sites in Cromer (505 rather than the 600 'target'), it is desirable to investigate the identification of further opportunities for growth in Cromer in addition to those identified in the Draft Plan. As well as concerns about

total numbers it is also considered important that the Plan includes a range of opportunities of different scale and location as a measure to ensure choice of site and assist with regular delivery throughout the Plan period. This is particularly the case where larger sites in multiple ownerships are proposed as these regularly take significantly longer to come to market, secure the required permissions and commence development.

3.3 Initial discussions have now taken place with agents acting on behalf of landowners to the west of Cromer (Site reference C22/1 and northern section only of C18 shown on the Map in Appendix 1). At previous stages of Plan preparation, these two significant land parcels had been promoted individually and Members will be aware that both have been, or are subject to, current undetermined planning applications. In total, these combined proposals have the capacity to deliver perhaps 700 dwellings, sports club facilities, elderly care and open space. This potential scale of growth:

- When added to other agreed allocations, is not planned in Cromer over the Plan period.
- Raises significant concerns about impacts on the AONB, and
- Is subject to unresolved highway objections

3.4 Both parties have now agreed to work together to promote a single comprehensive scheme on a smaller site area which could deliver approx. 400 dwellings, sports facilities (replacement Cromer Town Football Club), elderly care provision, open space and supporting infrastructure including comprehensive access strategy with vehicle access limited to Norwich Road and new pedestrian footbridge over the railway line.

3.5 Such a proposal has been agreed in terms of high-level principles with the highway authority (but remains contingent on a new roundabout being provided at Norwich Road, secondary point of access to Norwich Road and a footbridge over the rail line), delivers the scale of growth required over the plan period, and has the potential to provide a well-designed extension to Cromer incorporating significant green infrastructure in the form of sports pitches and various types of open space. It would however still be a significant incursion into the Norfolk Coast AONB and would result in localised landscape impacts. National guidance advises against such major developments in the AONB, which require particular justification including the consideration of alternative, non AONB, sites. In this respect the authority has considered a large number of alternatives most of which are also located in the AONB reflecting the fact that this designation covers the majority of the landscape surrounding the town.

3.6 This combined proposal did not feature in the Regulation 18 consultation Plan so has not been subject to specific consultation although both separate parcels were individually included in the draft Plan. Comments received at that stage are reproduced in the Appendix to this report.

4. Land at Clifton Park

4.1 Potential development of this site was subject to large numbers of objections at Regulation 18 stage when it was proposed for 90 dwellings and a primary school.

4.2 There were 91 objections and 3 general comments, a number focussed on the potential loss of a green gap between Cromer and East Runton and the potential for the coalescence of settlements. It was felt that development of the site would could result in the loss of an important area of open space and that the number of dwellings proposed where unnecessary. Other objections raised concerns around highway access and safety, the need for a new school, the impact on neighbouring residential amenity and the impact of the water recycling centre on the site. Full summary of the representations can be seen in the Appendix.

4.3 Following Reg 18 the scheme was modified to remove the proposed primary school (following confirmation from the education authority that it was unlikely to be required), reduce the number of dwellings to 55, and introduce an elderly care facility.

4.4 Development of this site would clearly have localised visual impacts, will change the character of this approach to Cromer, alter the outlook from a number of adjacent properties and notwithstanding the inclusion of large areas of open space and footpaths, reduce recreational access to undeveloped countryside. However, these issues were all fully considered by officers in making the previous positive recommendation to allocate the site and nothing has changed since that time. It remains the case that compared to the alternatives which have been appraised this site 'scores' well and importantly is not located within the North Norfolk AONB. Officers continue to recommend this site for allocation in the Plan.

5. Recommendations

- 1. That land west of Cromer adjacent to Norwich Road is included in the Reg19 Local Plan as an allocation for approx. 400 dwellings, Sports pitches, elderly persons accommodation, open space and supporting infrastructure and that development of the site accords with a single comprehensive master plan and phasing agreement.**
- 2. That land at Clifton Park is allocated in the Reg19 Plan for approx. 55 dwellings, elderly care accommodation and public open space.**

6. Legal Implications and Risks

- 6.1 The Council must produce a Local Plan which complies with various regulatory and legal requirements and in determining its policy approaches and site allocations must be justified and underpinned by up to date and proportionate evidence, the application of a consistent methodology and take account of public feedback and national policy and guidance.
- 6.2 Preparation of the Plan is subject to regulatory requirements, legal and soundness tests, and reputational risks particularly in relation to development site selection.

7. Financial Implications and Risks

- 7.1 Failure to undertake plan preparation in accordance with the regulations and NPPF is likely to render the plan 'unsound' at examination and result in the need to return to earlier stages. Substantial additional costs would be incurred.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Site Appraisal details and Regulation 18 consultation responses summary for Cromer (Site Assessment Booklet).