

CABINET
5TH APRIL 2022

JUNCTION 27 AND 28 REPORT

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Richard Chesterton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration
Responsible Officer: Richard Marsh, Director of Place.

Reason for Report and Recommendations: At the January 2022 Economy PDG meeting, a request was made for an update on work being undertaken to progress opportunities for business growth by development at the motorway junctions in Mid Devon. This report therefore seeks to present an update in relation to work underway in relation to Junctions 27 and 28, and opportunities that exist therein.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CABINET:

To note the current position in relation to Junctions 27 and 28, and the work planned to be undertaken.

Financial Implications:

No financial implications arise from this report.

Budget and Policy Framework:

The Mid Devon Local Plan (2013-2033) establishes planning policy for development within the district. It sets out clear expectations in terms of the type and scale of development anticipated at Junctions 27 and 28:

Junction 27: approximately 71 hectares of land adjoining the southbound carriageway of the M5 is identified within the Local Plan for the provision of a major high quality regional tourism, leisure and retail attraction. It is expected that this will be supported by ancillary roadside services and associated supporting infrastructure. The Local Plan sets out clear expectations in relation to the progression of the site and notably that the site “should be brought forward in accordance with the terms of a detailed development brief, comprehensive masterplanning, including at least two stages of public consultation and adoption of the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) before any planning application for any part of the site is determined”.

Junction 28: the Local Plan establishes Cullompton as the principal focus of development within the district, in accordance with the development strategy as set out in Policy S11. As such, the Local Plan contains various policies relating to Cullompton, and several of these have a relationship with Junction 28. Most notable are Policies CU7 to CU12. Development around Junction 28 is supported and promoted through the Local Plan – such as early phases of development at Culm Garden Village and the development of further commercial floorspace – but the Plan also makes reference to the need to ensure capacity improvements to the Junction

in order to support the continued development of the town in the manner foreseen through the Local Plan.

Further to the Local Plan, 'Culm garden village' has also formally been recognised as a 'garden village' project. Further work is now underway to progress plans for the garden village – which is also pertinent to Junction 28.

The Local Plan also establishes policy relating to employment provision, and this is contained within policy S6 of the Local Plan. The plan seeks to support the delivery of approximately 140,000 sq metres of commercial floorspace during the plan period.

Finally, the new Local Plan, 'Plan Mid Devon', is also now under development and early consultation is now underway in relation to the preparation of this plan through the formal 'regulation 18' consultation. Plan Mid Devon will, when complete, update and/or replace the planning policy contained within the current Local Plan.

Legal Implications:

No legal implications are identified as arising from this report.

Risk Assessment:

The report is focused on providing an update in relation to development of/at Junction 27 and 28. At this stage, 'risks' associated with the projects are relatively limited – but risks do exist at a strategic and corporate level. These risks principally pertain to development not occurring in the manner, or at the speed, envisaged by and through the Local Plan. For example; the Local Plan is predicated on development occurring at, or linked to, Junctions 27 and 28. Should development therefore fail to occur at these junctions, the Council may find that it is unable to unlock strategic growth within the district in the manner foreseen – be that housing delivery, commercial development, or any other form of development. It is therefore important that the Council takes proactive action to seek to ensure that development does occur in these locations in order to ensure that development occurs as expected and forecast through the Local Plan. In this context of this report, that is especially relevant from the perspective of commercial development.

Alternatively, should the form of development envisaged appear unlikely, owing to structural or market changes accruing to covid-19 or other issues, the Council should take action to consider how development might otherwise occur, reflecting this within the new Local Plan, Plan Mid Devon, as appropriate.

Equality Impact Assessment:

No equality issues are deemed to arise from this report.

Relationship to Corporate Plan:

Progression of projects relating to Junctions 27 and 28 have a direct relationship to, and impact on, all strands of the Corporate Plan: economy, homes, community and environment. Progression of these projects is therefore very important.

Impact on Climate Change:

Progression of the Junction 27 and 28 proposals offer scope for both negative and positive impacts on climate change: on the one hand, expanded capacity and increased traffic flows at motorway junctions have the scope for increased vehicle movements and therefore the scope for further pollution. On the other hand, development also has the potential to mitigate the impact of future development by encouraging modal shift to more sustainable modes of transport and by reducing the need to out-commute for employment opportunities. The type of development proposed also has scope to proactively contribute towards our understanding of climate change, and facilitate action to mitigate climate change.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council has a stated ambition to see development around Junctions 27 and 28 of the M5. As set out above, the principles of development are contained within the district's Local Plan and supported by other planning policy documents.
- 1.2 Since the adoption of the Local Plan, varying levels of activity have taken place in relation to development in and around Junctions 27 and 28 and, in recent months, there has been a renewed interest in what development activity is occurring, or planned to occur, in these locations.
- 1.3 At the Economy PDG meeting in January 2022, a request was made for a report to be brought to the March PDG to update on "work being undertaken to progress opportunities for business growth by development at the motorway junctions." This report therefore seeks to provide Members with the requested update.

Junction 27:

- 1.4 Expectations for the form and scale of development at Junction 27 are clearly articulated within the Local Plan – along with the anticipated steps required to progress development through the planning process.
- 1.5 Since the adoption of the Local Plan, progress on the scheme has been slower than anticipated. Undoubtedly, this progress has been heavily influenced by the ongoing covid-19 pandemic and by the uncertainties and market changes that have been driven by it. As such, no plans have progressed for the site and landowners/interested parties have not progressed a masterplan or plans which would facilitate delivery of the previously envisaged scheme.
- 1.6 Discussions with some of the landowners and interested parties suggest that interest in development at Junction 27 remains, but that market changes mean that it is necessary to consider and understand whether interest still exists in delivering the scheme as originally envisaged, or whether changes are required to some elements of the scheme in order to support delivery.

- 1.7 Importantly, interest in the scheme does remain from Eden for the 'Eden Grounds' project and £255,000 of funding was recently received by Eden as a result of their successful bid through the UK Community Renewal Fund for the project. This funding will allow Eden to begin to develop proposals for the site. This work has recently begun and is expected to be completed later in 2022. Importantly, owing to wording of the planning policy for the site, any masterplan must cover the whole of the site and be adopted as an SPD prior to the determination of any planning application. It will therefore be necessary for Eden to work with MDDC and landowners in order to develop proposals for the site.
- 1.8 As part of the development of their work, Eden are also expecting to undertake elements of economic analysis related to their proposed development, as well as undertaking their own community engagement work strands.
- 1.9 Discussions with Eden and some of the landowners, and the fact that Eden is now progressing consideration of their plans for the site, have demonstrated that it would now be timely to bring together key parties (all landowners, especially those not yet engaged, and any prospective occupiers) to discuss plans and ambitions for the site with the aim of confirming the deliverability of the currently proposed scheme, and/or any changes or evolution which might be required to the scheme to aid in delivery.
- 1.10 If discussions and any subsequent work demonstrate that changes or amendments to the proposed scheme are required, it will be necessary to consider what these might be, how it might affect the overall concept or vision for the site, how acceptable such change could be, how delivery might be affected in light of these changes and how this is impacted by the existing planning policy relating to the site.
- 1.11 Whilst MDDC does not itself have any direct interest in the land at Junction 27, the strategic importance of the site does clearly mean that it is important that MDDC is involved in discussions about the site both from a planning perspective, but also from a 'Place' perspective, ensuring that a high-quality regional attraction is delivered which will meet the needs and expectations of the district.
- 1.12 With this in mind, officers are currently considering options for MDDC to take on a proactive facilitation role in enabling discussions with and between landowners and prospective occupiers. The intention for such discussions will be, as set out above, to get further clarity on current landowner expectations for the site and consider what action, joint and independent, is necessary by key stakeholders to progress work in relation to the site. It is expected that such discussions will also involve opportunities for member engagement.
- 1.13 The intention is to progress this engagement in the coming weeks and for all parties to then be clearer in relation to future development of the Junction 27 allocation. The outcome of such discussions will clearly be

important and will allow all parties to better understand the timescale of any development.

- 1.14 Clearly, whilst planning policy already exists for the site, there is also a strong relationship between the matters discussed within the report and 'Plan Mid Devon', the new Local Plan. In fact, the current 'regulation 18' consultation exercise (underway now) is actively seeking opinions in relation to development at Junction 27.
- 1.15 Officers will therefore be mindful of discussions underway with landowners and prospective occupiers in the context of existing planning policy, but also mindful of the work of the new Local Plan. Clearly, there is likely to be a relationship between the two which Officers will monitor with the key aspects between the current and new Local Plan likely to focus on the overall form of development and the timetable for delivery.

Junction 28:

- 1.16 In terms of Junction 28, development interest clearly exists within the vicinity of the junction, and some key projects are progressing – such as the Cullompton railway station project. However, for the purpose of this report, a focus will be maintained on opportunities for business growth within the vicinity of the junction.
- 1.17 Junction 28 clearly already performs an important economic function for the district, and is home to several major employers/businesses including Gregory distribution, BAKO and ABN. Further allocated and identified employment sites exist within the vicinity of Junction 28, although development of these sites has, for a variety of reasons, not progressed more recently. However, strong occupier demand exists for accommodation within the district, and within the wider Devon geography. At the same time, commercial accommodation is currently also in short supply – meaning that many businesses are struggling to find the type, size and/or quality of accommodation which they aspire to. This therefore presents a challenge to the district, and to the Council, as without the development of further quality accommodation in the right locations, businesses are likely to be forced to look elsewhere to satisfy their accommodation requirements. Officers are however also aware that other Devon districts are also experiencing high demand for commercial accommodation, and that supply is currently limited. This therefore presents a challenge at a wider County level, as well as at a more local level.
- 1.18 Opportunity does therefore exist for further commercial development to progress – driving economic growth and job creation within the district, especially where it aligns to key growth sectors.
- 1.19 The Council has recently, as part of the Culm Garden Village project, instructed an employment and skills study to consider how the Culm Garden village can support and contribute to further employment

growth and development in and around junction 28 – in a manner which supports the delivery of the garden village, and in adherence to garden village principals (i.e. reduce car ownership and out-commuting.)

- 1.20 Provisional outputs from this work are expected soon (during March), after which the garden village team, and the Council, will be able to consider next steps to continue to support employment provision and growth within the vicinity of junction 28.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

- 2.1 To note the current position in relation to Junctions 27 and 28, and the work planned to be undertaken.

Contact for more Information: Richard Marsh, Director of Place

Circulation of the Report: Cllr Richard Chesterton, Leadership Team

Background Papers – n/a.