



CABINET:
14 March 2017

Report of: Director of Development and Regeneration Services

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor J Hodson

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SUBJECT: FIRSWOOD ROAD HOUSING ALLOCATION

Wards affected: Bickerstaffe and Skelmersdale South

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

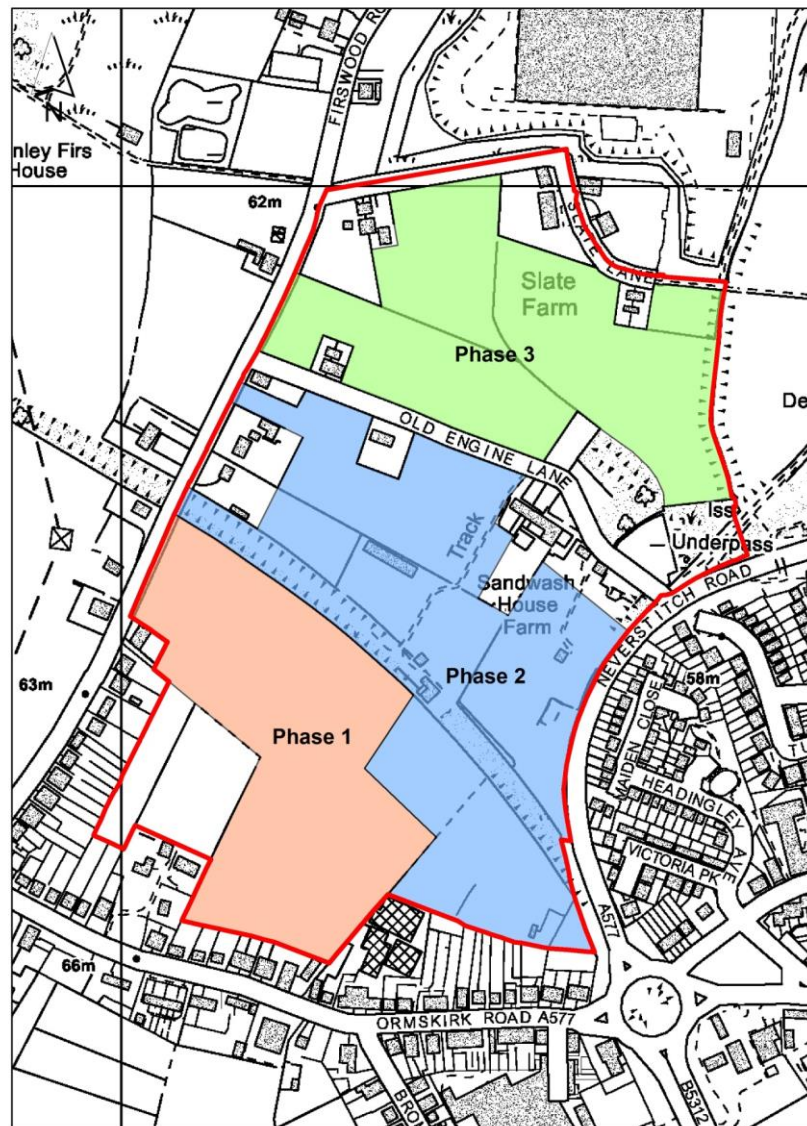
- 1.1 To seek authority to consider and take all necessary measures to bring forward the development of the Firswood Road Local Plan housing allocation in Lathom South / Skelmersdale.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

- 2.1 That Cabinet authorise the Director of Development and Regeneration Services to take all necessary measures to facilitate development of the Firswood Road housing allocation, which may include the use of CPO powers to purchase the land.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The adopted West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 includes a site allocation for housing development for circa 400 dwellings at Firswood Road in Lathom South / Skelmersdale. The site is bounded by Firswood Road to the west, the rear of properties on Blaguegate Lane / Ormskirk Road to the south, Neverstitch Road to the east and the XL Business Park to the north (see plan below) and so, while predominantly within Lathom South, sits on the edge of Skelmersdale and would have its primary access onto Neverstitch Road in Skelmersdale.



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- 3.2 The site is in multiple ownerships and encompasses several residential properties which would likely need to be built around and has the route of the former Ormskirk-Skelmersdale railway line crossing it, which is proposed to be a section of the Ormskirk-Skelmersdale Linear Park. As well as being allocated in the Local Plan, the site also benefits from a Development Brief that the Council adopted in 2014 and which guides how the site should be developed out.
- 3.3 Phase 1 of the site is currently the subject of a full planning application from Bellway Homes for 94 dwellings, with its own access onto Firswood Road. Phase 1 is in a single land ownership and can be brought forward independently if the proposed access is approved, and so there are no current concerns over the prospect of this site coming forward for development, although this may change if the access off Firswood Road were not to be approved.
- 3.4 Given that Firswood Road is a minor road and that its junction with Blaguegate Lane can only be improved in a limited way, further development of the Firswood Road site would not be able to have an access onto Firswood Road, and so

Phases 2 and 3 must be brought forward in a co-ordinated way to utilise one access onto Neverstitch Road. As such, this requires the multiple landowners of Phases 2 and 3 to work together to bring forward their site to the market together and have realistic aspirations as to the value of their land given the constraints associated with the site.

- 3.5 The Local Plan was adopted three and half years ago, and there has been no indication from the landowners of Phases 2 and 3 that they have any appetite to bring forward their land for development in the near future and no sign of any firm commitment for them to work together to bring the site forward (which would be absolutely necessary given the nature of the site and the highways access), contrary to the evidence presented at the Local Plan Examination. Furthermore, representations made on behalf of the landowners to the examination for the CIL Charging Schedule opposed the introduction of a CIL charge on the site and indicated that they expected to receive a higher land value for their land than they would receive once CIL was introduced.
- 3.6 Therefore, this lack of movement on Phases 2 and 3, and the very clear views expressed on behalf of the landowners previously related to their expectations on land value, give rise for serious concern that this important housing allocation would not come forward in the near future and would not deliver anywhere near the full 400 dwellings anticipated in the Local Plan. This removes an important contributing site to West Lancashire's rolling 5-year housing land supply and therefore adds to the risk that the Council may fall beneath the required 5-year housing land supply and so risk Local Plan policies for the supply of housing being considered out-of-date. As has been seen in the recent Appeals related to proposals for housing developments on safeguarded land in Aughton, this is a significant issue with considerable risks.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION & NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 In order to facilitate the development of the Firwood Road housing allocation, the Director of Development and Regeneration Services is requesting authority to consider the options for bringing forward this site and to take all necessary measures to bring about its development. Initially, this may simply be a conversation with the landowners to ascertain precisely why Phases 2 and 3 of the site have not yet been brought forward for development and consider potential solutions for overcoming the issues that the landowners raise, but it may also extend to making an offer for all or part of the site in order to bring the site into a single ownership or a more manageable number of landowners and so facilitate the development. Failing this, the option of seeking a CPO of the site would also be an option, and Cabinet is being asked to grant authority to the Director of Development and Regeneration Services in the knowledge that CPO may end up being the only solution.
- 4.2 Alongside these steps, the Council is liaising with the HCA regarding any role they may play in facilitating the site's development, given that they are interested in working with the Council to identify a site where Starter Homes might be developed, and are able to bring significant funding to unlock constrained sites for the development of Starter Homes.

- 4.3 As such, it would be hoped that the Council and HCA, working together, could encourage the landowners to sell their land at a reasonable price either to the Council / HCA or directly to a housebuilder, and so expedite the development of the site.

5.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS / COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 5.1 Delivering new housing in West Lancashire is a key aspect of developing sustainably, and so the delivery of allocated housing sites in the Local Plan is central to this. Failure to do so has the potential consequence of sites not allocated for housing development in the Local Plan coming forward for development instead, meaning that development comes forward in a less sustainable, unplanned way, or that insufficient housing is built to meet the needs of West Lancashire.

6.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Any officer time required in the initial discussions or negotiations with the landowners of the Firwood Road site, and in working with the HCA, can be resourced through the Development and Regeneration Service's revenue budgets. Funding for any purchase of land, and the costs of pursuing a CPO if required, would need to be identified in due course, reporting to Council as appropriate. The costs of pursuing a CPO, particularly where landowners object and the matter proceeds to public inquiry would need to be fully considered at that time. There may be a role for the HCA in contributing to the cost of purchasing the land or making it ready for development or in reaching an agreement with a suitable house builder to develop the site.

7.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The initial steps involved in this decision would involve very little, if any, risk for the Council, and would, hopefully, stimulate movement from the landowners on the development of the site. Were the Council to ultimately end up purchasing the site or applying for a CPO, the risks are of course greater, but the final decision on such a course of action would be the basis of a further report to Cabinet/Council at that time.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is no direct impact on members of the public of this decision. Therefore, an Equality impact Assessment is not required.