

TITLE OF REPORT: Chopwell Regeneration Plan**REPORT OF: Paul Dowling, Strategic Director, Communities and Environment**

Purpose of the Report

1. Cabinet is asked to approve the preparation and development of a sustainable community plan for Chopwell and to begin formal engagement and consultation with the community, local businesses and partner organisations. The plan would identify and set out interventions to support the long term sustainability of the local area.

Background

2. A number of development-led plans for Chopwell have been created over the years to address socio economic issues and support the area to be more sustainable.
3. In 2009 a Masterplan was agreed, which aimed to take forward improvements over a 15-20 year period. While a number of policies were implemented successfully, such as the introduction of landlord licensing within the private rented sector and small scale environmental improvements, progress in some of the longer term initiatives have been met with difficulties. This is due to a number of issues including; the broader economic climate, austerity and impact of regeneration across local authority boundaries.
4. The Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne 2010-2030 identified specific sites in Chopwell for housing. Land was allocated for approximately 305 homes on two specific sites at Middle and South Chopwell. In addition the Heartlands site has been earmarked for development through the Gateshead Regeneration Partnership. It was originally projected that works would start on this site in 2020. The existing challenges and constraints of the site along with the current economic climate currently make it a difficult site to develop at this stage in the partnership.
5. The area faces challenges with low demand for Council owned homes, high levels of vacant properties in specific streets, viability concerns associated with development sites as well as other social economic issues. A new sustainable communities plan would incorporate these elements within a wider socio-economic approach to the village.

Proposal

6. It is proposed that a sustainable communities plan is developed for Chopwell. This will aim to address underlying causes of deprivation and viability. Building on the previous plans for Chopwell and maximising the strengths of the village, the work would include a number of interventions that collectively aim to address the issue of the viability of the area predominantly focusing on employment, economic growth and housing.

7. The Heartlands site in Chopwell is currently one of the sites allocated to the Gateshead Regeneration Partnership. A recent sustainability and viability report regarding the Heartlands site has stated that the existing challenges and constraints along with the current economic climate in the area, makes it a difficult site to develop at this stage in the partnership. Therefore it is proposed that the potential for development of this site is further reviewed to consider the options available to enable and facilitate the delivery of new housing.
8. The Council will work closely with the local Chopwell community to build on existing strengths to support sustainability and it is proposed that consultation with the local community and businesses informs future intervention. The Council will also seek to work with relevant partners and collaborate with initiatives that may add value. For example the Council is exploring opportunities to work with partners and Community Interest Company Collaborate and Lankelly Chase Foundation on place based systems change work to improve outcomes where there are complex issues. This could potentially have a focus on the Chopwell area. The work will also link to and draw upon health and social care services. This includes drawing upon data and intelligence as well as how a more holistic approach can be taken towards achieving better outcomes for all.
9. It must be recognised that scarce Council resources cannot support regeneration activities of this scale in all areas of Gateshead. It is therefore proposed that Chopwell becomes an area for focused activity in order to make improvements to the area in a co-ordinated way and to maximise resources. This focus on a rural area located in the outer west of the borough may provide a framework for action that could be deployed in other parts of Gateshead.
10. The work would require some investment from the Council in order to undertake: consultation; prepare detailed plans and put in place some key interventions to make early progress. Further work would be needed to understand the scope and implications of the plan along with the financial implications. The Council will work with the local community to develop a plan with short, medium and long term actions. This will also set out the estimated costs and resource needs to deliver the plan. It is proposed that this will be brought to Cabinet for consideration in autumn 2017.
11. The project outline is as follows:
 - Detailed scoping and resource needs identified including review of evidence and data, (especially where this has changed) baseline current plans and activities identifying gaps
 - Implement a programme of engagement with community groups and residents including potential for a Neighbourhood Plan and any ongoing development support requirements
 - Draw upon partners or other initiatives working in the Chopwell area who could offer support
 - Undertake a regeneration options appraisal. This would endeavour to include options to enable robust action at pace.
 - Decision on recommendations
 - Implementation of a range of actions related to existing and potential new private and social housing stock; job creation; business growth and the approach to the environment

12. Approval of these proposals would seek to support achievement of Council Plan priorities and contribute to a more sustainable place and would seek to achieve the following high level objectives:
- Achieve housing development that will increase the range of homes available in Chopwell through looking at land supply and interventions to improve viability and attractiveness of land for development and sale
 - Support economic growth with a stronger more viable business presence building on strengths of Chopwell
 - Continue to work with existing groups and engage other groups to help improve and sustain the attractiveness of the local environment
 - Promote Chopwell making the most of the rural location, history and heritage

Recommendation

13. It is recommended that Cabinet:-

- (i) Agree to the development of a sustainable communities plan for Chopwell and for a costed plan setting out short, medium and long term actions to be brought to Cabinet in the Autumn
- (ii) Agree to the Council developing and implementing an initial programme of engagement with the local community, businesses and partners as part of the development of the plan
- (iii) Agree that as part of the review of the Gateshead Regeneration Partnership the Council considers if the Heartlands site should remain in the Joint Venture programme

For the following reasons:

- (i) To ensure investment is targeted in the most appropriate way and that it is focused on long term outcomes and community needs
- (ii) The support sustainable housing and economic growth
- (iii) To support Council Plan priorities for Prosperous Gateshead, Live love Gateshead, and Live love Gateshead

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Policy Context

1. The proposal supports Vision 2030 by contributing to City of Gateshead, Sustainable Gateshead and Gateshead Volunteers Big Ideas. The proposal supports the Council Plan outcomes for: Prosperous Gateshead by supporting more jobs and people in work; Live Love Gateshead, developing a sense of pride and ownership including sharing responsibility for the environment; and Live Well Gateshead by helping the area to become a destination of choice with a range of affordable housing options.

Background

2. Chopwell faces a variety of challenges including low demand for properties, poor retail offer, low economic base and other social economic issues. A number of development-led plans for Chopwell have been created over the years to address the issues. The most recent being a Masterplan for Chopwell which was produced in 2009. While a number of policies were implemented successfully, such as the introduction of landlord licensing within the private rented sector and small scale environmental improvements, progress in some of the longer term initiatives has been met with difficulties. This is due to a number of issues including; the broader economic climate, austerity agenda and impact of developments across local authority boundaries. It was also accepted at the time that interventions would be dependent upon availability of resources.
3. The Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne 2010-2030 identified specific sites in Chopwell to be progressed. Land was allocated for 305 homes on two specific sites at Middle Chopwell and South Chopwell. In addition the Heartlands site has been earmarked for development through the Gateshead Regeneration Partnership in the period after 2020. The existing challenges and constraints of the site along with the current economic climate currently make it a difficult site to develop at this stage in the partnership.
4. This new sustainable communities plan will incorporate these development led elements within wider socio-economic approach to the village.

Issues

5. Chopwell faces a number of issues that, when combined suggest that intervention would be needed to improve the housing and economic offer viability of the area, It is the combination of complex factors and interconnected difficulties (as well as being a rural setting) that suggests more fundamental activity is needed to deliver real change.
6. In summary:
 - The population (3,700) breakdown is similar to the Gateshead average, though has been declining against an overall increase in population across Gateshead
 - The area is amongst the 25% most deprived in England, some parts falling into the 8% most deprived for some economic indicators.
 - The location in the far west of Gateshead means it is relatively isolated from other centres including employment and retail. There are a large number of

vacant retail properties. More could be made of the rural location and improving the access and links to Chopwell Woods.

- Landlord licensing implemented in 2010 -15 enabled 154 private rented properties to be improved and complaints from tenants reduced by 50%, though more recently these have started to increase.
- Much of the previous work centred on the potential housing offer, though the market was unable to support this. The number of long term voids in the area along with the lower than average property values are ongoing challenges. Demand for Council homes in the area is low compared to other areas.
- A retail survey has identified that around 50% of properties are vacant which will impact upon the economic viability of the area including the visitor appeal
- Various local community groups are active in the area, each working to improve the sustainability of Chopwell

What action could be taken?

7. The Council has a key role in shaping the plan, driving forward delivery and co-ordinating activity to support a broad approach to regenerating Chopwell. There are a number of interventions that could be implemented to improve the sustainability of Chopwell and these would all need to be considered through an options appraisal approach. These will include looking at the allocated housing sites as well as further potential sites and how these could be supported to enable development to happen at pace. It is likely that a mix of other housing interventions would be needed and the role of the Council and The Gateshead Housing Company would need to be explored.
8. Economic growth would be needed to support housing growth as well as to attract people to the area. Supporting new businesses or ways to exploit the links to Chopwell Woods and the rural location would be explored. Environmental improvements working with the community in the park as well as stepping up enforcement to reinforce responsible behaviour could be considered. Some fundamental challenges would need to be addressed to enable regeneration to happen and this will involve work with the community as well as investment to stimulate and encourage growth.
9. Community engagement will form an important element of the work something which the Council and partners can also help to support. Interventions may also be community led through a Neighbourhood Plan approach, although this would need to be explored through the consultation process and any ongoing development support implications fully understood and resourced.
10. The first step is to begin project initiation and to engage the community, understand evidence, current activity and plans to be clear about what is needed, what we have in place, the gaps and what can be done either differently or at greater pace.

Consultation

11. Cabinet members have been consulted as part of the preparation of the report. Chopwell and Rowlands Gill ward councillors have also been consulted.
12. The proposal includes a recommendation that Cabinet agree to the engagement of the local community in Chopwell on the future sustainability of the area.

Alternative Options

13. The alternative options would be to either take a lower level approach to intervention in the area or to take no action to intervene. While the former would utilise fewer resources it would be unlikely to make a long lasting impact given the interrelated issues within the area, the latter would leave the area to market forces and current analysis suggests that this is failing to make real or sustainable improvement.
14. Although at an initial stage, it is suggested that the recommended option would offer the best chance in shaping Chopwell for the future and contributing towards longer term sustainability.

Implications of Recommended Option

15. Resources:

- a) **Financial Implications** - The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources confirms that there are no financial implications arising directly from this report. It is likely that there will be financial implications going forward as the work develops, though this would be subject to further reports to Cabinet as appropriate.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – There are no direct human resource implications arising from this report.
- c) **Property Implications** – There are no direct implications arising from this report.
16. **Risk Management Implication** – There are no direct implications arising from this report though a full risk assessment would be undertaken as part of the project initiation.
17. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – There are no direct implications arising as result of the proposals described in the report, though the resulting plan would identify and assess any implications relating to equality and diversity and protected characteristics, with actions identified to mitigate potential adverse impact.
18. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no direct implications arising as a result of this report, though a greater focus on enforcement could result in more people receiving fines for dropping litter etc. through this aims to contribute to having a cleaner, safer environment.
19. **Health Implications** – There are no direct health implications resulting from this report, though the sustainable communities plan would contribute to healthier communities in the Chopwell area.
20. **Sustainability Implications** – The proposals aim to support the area to be more sustainable including housing and economic growth potential.
21. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no implications arising from this report though further recommendations that have Human Rights implications will be reported to Cabinet.
22. **Area and Ward Implications** – the proposal affects Chopwell and Rowlands Gill ward in the West area.