

## **South West Cambridge Action Group (SWCAG) Frequently Asked Questions – Issue 2 – 09/01/2021**

As previously advised, members of the SWCAG steering group met with Thakeham on January 4<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. The meeting was initially chaired by Vicky Slade from Cratus Communications (PR firm advising Thakeham). From Thakeham: Tristan Robinson (Head of External Affairs) and John Stebbings (Group Development Director). Our questions as follows:

### **1) How important is this project for Thakeham? Is it at top of priority list?**

South West Cambridge is the largest and most important project ongoing for Thakeham. Next is the promotion of a 9,000-home scheme at Redhill Aerodrome and a number of schemes between 3,500 and 4,000 homes. Thakeham currently builds up to 1,000 homes a year but aims to deliver many more in each of the company's different regions (South, West, North of London).

### **2) Is Thakeham's relationship with Homes England important?**

Yes. Thakeham approaches Homes England on the basis of their current proposals although this does depend where in the development process the scheme currently sits.

### **3) Does Homes England – a Government agency – know about South West Cambridge?**

"Homes England know of the scheme's existence."

### **4) What are your thoughts on community engagement?**

The response was that Thakeham originally "wondered" whether it would be an appropriate scheme for the size of the Local Plan. They asked for a meeting with SCDC [South Cambridgeshire District Council] and met with the Leader and Director of Planning. It was made clear to Thakeham that any development proposals must be included as part of the Call for Sites before they could be considered; and that time was of the essence. Because of the delay by Thakeham in coming forward it was imperative that the scheme was put into the public domain as soon as possible to avoid any accusation of preferential treatment – "So that's why we launched on 8 December."

For a scheme of this size, to get to the level of detail for a Local Plan submission is a huge amount of work. We were not at that stage able to do that in time for the Call for Sites. Some of the land had been promoted in the Call for Sites separately by landowners. But we were simply not at that stage. We hope, with a fair wind, that we will be in a position to submit to the Call for Sites around Easter, at which point there will be a lot more information available. And we certainly want to do that.

### **5) Can you give us some idea on what alternatives you were or are considering?**

Now that this scheme is in the public domain, we are open to having conversations at a national level, be that with Homes England, MHCLG [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government] - although as you have seen, no conversations have taken place to date with MHCLG - but we are open to having those conversations and we don't have a fixed view at Thakeham of a vehicle for that to happen.

In terms of our engagement, it has been about going to the local planning authority first and working from there, upwards.

**6) Is your plan to submit to the Call for Sites by Easter realistic?**

From our internal conversations on the project, it is our intention to submit by Easter. That is our intention. It's not an aspirational deadline. It is the internal deadline."

**7) So then what happens? Timescales? Public engagement? National discussions?**

Once we have submitted to the Call for Sites, we will be pushing that angle forward locally.

*"We are looking to have concurrent conversations with national stakeholders."*

Thakeham don't have a fixed view of how this should come forward.

Originally, we didn't think it would come through a Local Plan, purely because of the scale of it. However, the local authority wanted us to consider that, and we are absolutely doing that in response. So we will have those concurrent conversations around local plan delivery and national designations or similar.

Those conversations will then lead to public consultation more widely.

What we've done at the moment is make sure the plans are publicly known, so that people know that these plans are under discussion, people can sign up for further updates on the website, people can be involved. And we are committed to making sure that people do know what's going on.

As far as consultation goes, we think it's really important that when we are consulting, people have something to consult on. Rather than saying, this is something embryonic that's an idea that might happen in lots of different ways, that doesn't get the best results. What's really important is, once an angle is considered, that people have the opportunity to have their say on those clear set of proposals, that this could be considered as x, y and z.

**8) But we don't know what the proposal is. Not even a map of the site.**

That's why our work leading into the Call for Sites submission at Easter is so important, because that will finalise a lot of things, **not least the red line**. We are still having conversations at a land level about what it is and what it isn't, which is why there is no red line plan published. When we submit to the Call for Sites, that will be clear, in the public domain.

**9) Thakeham have been working on this for 2 years, why has it taken so long to get to this point?**

Land assembly.

**10) You mentioned Homes England were aware of this - what is their view?**

"They haven't expressed a view, they are aware."

**11) Bassingbourn Barracks? MoD approach? Contact with County?**

Our first meeting with the County Council is this month. We haven't had those meetings yet.

The only people outside Thakeham who knew about the proposal prior to the public announcement on 8 December were the Leader of SCDC and the Director of Planning, purely out of respect for their roles.

We went public at a very early stage, an earlier stage than many might have done, because we felt it was important to get it out in the public domain. But our first meeting with the County Council is this month. We will be discussing key topics such as infrastructure, roads, schools, adult social care.

**12) Why are you interested in this site, this area?**

This area is key to the OxCam Arc and plans will address the housing crisis.

**13) How much land is required? How much do you control?**

This is commercially sensitive and also yet to be determined.

**14) What is Thakeham's connection with East West Rail?**

We looked at the location from two perspectives. There was an existing railway line that runs through the location, that runs north south, that creates that connection from this location into Cambridge as well as away from Cambridge eventually down to London. You

**15) What do you envisage as the required infrastructure for the new Town?**

For a sustainable new town, we would see everything: roads, schools, sports facilities, health care, community facilities, retail, commercial, green infrastructure, utilities, water, civic infrastructure.

**16) Would you deliver 40% affordable housing?**

Thakeham have never run a viability exercise to argue down affordable housing contributions; and would expect to meet the Local Plan requirements as they stood at the time.

**17) Can you talk about transport link especially the capacity constraints on existing railway?**

We intend to deliver the UK's first zero carbon town. That's about internalisation of journeys. But at early stage.

**18) Turning to the Local Plan. Your proposal follows a different strategy to that which SCDC has followed historically. How can you get this proposal assessed for the Local Plan?**

*"We had not envisaged going through the Local Plan.* We were asked to, which we have committed to do. We believe that we will be in a position to do that at Easter."

*"It may be that it takes a different route, though national designation.* It may be that it's not this Local Plan, but the next one, or a different shape within this."

**19) Can you outline the conversations about this that you've had so far?**

- a) Our go-public date was 8 December. Prior to that we had the initial meeting with the Leader and Director of Planning at SCDC who instructed us to include it in the Call for Sites process.
- b) We have made Homes England aware of the scheme, but no detailed conversations have taken place at this time.
- c) The day before launch on 8 December we wrote to the Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government, the Minister of Housing, a number of people at Homes England, Secretary of State for Transport, the Chief Planner, the head of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc at MHCLG.
- d) On launch day, we wrote to Chief Executive, Leader, Cabinet members at South Cambridgeshire District Council, and extended the same courtesy to Cambridge City Council. We also wrote to the Mayor. At the time of speaking, we do not have a date for a meeting with him.
- e) We also wrote to Anthony Browne MP, ward members, parishes, chair of the Local Enterprise Partnership, Arc leaders group, chair of Greater Cambridge Partnership, England's Economic Heartlands, Cambridge Ahead, business organisations.

**20) Is Thakeham actively lobbying for national designation?**

I mentioned we didn't envisage this coming through the Local Plan route. This was purely an internal Thakeham conversation around the scale of development. We at the time did not think that South Cambs would be interested in a scheme of this size coming through the Local Plan. We felt that as the opportunity we want to present - presenting the UK's first zero carbon new town - we felt that might fall outside the Local Plan remit.

**21) Why did you think SCDC wouldn't be interested?**

That is something that has evolved through our process, through our conversations. We didn't think that would be something of interest at the beginning, however, at our initial conversation with the Leader and the chief planner at South Cambs, they made it clear that the Local Plan process was the way forward and we have committed to do so follow that. That is something that has evolved throughout the process.

**22) Do you have any link to a potential Cambridge Development Corporation?**

No.

**23) What size of land do you require? Where? What control?**

We have not published a red line. We do control enough land to deliver the vision that we have publicised. However, we are still looking at other opportunities to make sure that we can deliver it in the way that we want. That land takes the form of option agreements.

**So what has SWCAG learned from the meeting?**

- 1) Contrary to reports in the media, Homes England (a Government agency) was aware of the project.
- 2) Thakeham had no intention of using the Local Plan process until required to do so by the Leader and Director of Planning at SCDC.
- 3) Which means Thakeham intended to leapfrog the local planning processes.
- 4) And continues to pursue that as an option, while simultaneously preparing a submission to the Call for Sites process by Easter.
- 5) The reasons we have not yet seen a map is because land acquisition continues.
- 6) On December 7<sup>th</sup> a wide range of Government departments including Transport and Housing were informed by Thakeham that it intended to go public with the South West Cambridge project on December 8<sup>th</sup>.
- 7) Why would they care? What interest would those Government Departments have in the launch of plans for a project by a mid-cap volume development company?