



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Science Capability in Animal Health

Master Outline Planning Application (MOPA)

Statement of Community Engagement

Date: February 2024

Ref: SCAHZZ-LDE-TPO-ZZ-RP-ST-0001 C01

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Contents

Science Capability in Animal Health	1
Master Outline Planning Application (MOPA)	1
Statement of Community Engagement	1
1. Introduction and Executive Summary	4
2. Why Consult?	5
2.1. Benefits to the Planning Process	5
2.2. National Legislation.....	5
2.3. Local Policies	5
3. About the Proposals	6
3.1. What does the Animal and Plant Health Agency do?	6
3.2. About the site	6
3.3. Why do we need a new masterplan?.....	7
4. Consultation Methodology	8
4.1. Consultation aims	8
4.2. Pre-consultation strategy	9
5. Early Stage Stakeholder Consultation	10
5.1. Community organisations and schools	10
5.2. Local councillors	11
5.3. The Member of Parliament	11
6. Internal Staff Consultation	12
7. Pre-Application Community Consultation	14
	14
8. Consultation verbal responses	16
8.1. Verbal comments from the drop-in event.....	16
9. Consultation Written Responses	17
9.1. Summary of feedback	17
9.2. Key response themes	17
10. Response to consultation feedback	19
10.1. Design responses	19
10.2. Project changes	19
11. Next Steps	20

1. Introduction and Executive Summary

- 1.1.1. This report has been prepared by Local Dialogue on behalf of Defra to support an Outline Planning Application for a Masterplan (MOPA) at the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) Site (the Site), New Haw.
- 1.1.2. Local Dialogue is an independent advisor and their remit, as requested by Defra, is to ensure a comprehensive period of engagement in line with best practice.
- 1.1.3. The Proposed Development comprises the phased redevelopment of the site including the demolition of existing buildings and erection of new research and development buildings, with ancillary buildings including car parking, servicing, landscaping improvements, works to public rights of way, flood alleviation and associated works.
- 1.1.4. This Statement of Community Engagement summarises all pre-application engagement undertaken by the Applicant. The engagement involved residents, community groups, staff members, local councillors and other key stakeholders.
- 1.1.5. This engagement was primarily carried out over a three-week period in June 2023. Engagement activities included an early stakeholder consultation with local schools, an internal exhibition for members of staff, and a community consultation event advertised to almost 2,300 local houses.
- 1.1.6. Comments received at engagement were largely positive toward the redevelopment of the Site. Some key concerns were raised, such as noise and light pollution during construction, but stakeholders were generally supportive of plans to redevelop the Site.
- 1.1.7. Amendments have been made to plans for the Site to reflect comments received during the consultation period. This includes early planting of trees to minimise privacy concerns and design changes to minimise light pollution.

2. Why Consult?

2.1. Benefits to the Planning Process

- 2.1.1. From the outset, the Applicant has committed to an extensive, transparent, and meaningful consultation process for the Site. This has included engaging as many stakeholders as possible, giving each the opportunity to influence the scheme's evolution.
- 2.1.2. The Applicant believes that genuine consultation results in improved proposals. Consultation can improve the design, layout and purpose of submitted proposals. Additionally, a thorough consultation produces a smoother planning process, as potential issues are typically addressed prior to submission. This can produce significant support for development project amongst the local community.
- 2.1.3. The Applicant was guided in its consultation by best-practice expertise developed by successful consultations at other Defra-owned sites, including The Crick Institute and Pirbright Institute.

2.2. National Legislation

- 2.2.1. The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012. It was subsequently revised in July 2018, June 2019, July 2021, and December 2023. The NPPF encourages engagement with local communities from an early stage, and outlines what 'healthy' encompasses. This includes economic, social, and environmental recommendations for the planning process.
- 2.2.2. The Localism Act (2011) seeks to encourage local people, representatives, and businesses to engage with the planning system at a local level, and to make decisions about the future growth and expansion of their neighbourhoods.
- 2.2.3. The ethos at the core of both the Localism Act and NPPF is about giving local people the chance to help make decisions in their area.

2.3. Local Policies

- 2.3.1. The Runnymede Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was adopted in March 2021 as part of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan.
- 2.3.2. The SCI does not prescribe in detail how consultation should be carried out. Rather, the SCI emphasises the importance of the NPPF, and states:

“The Council encourages developers to engage in early discussions on proposed schemes with the local community and relevant organisations and groups, before an application is finally put together and submitted as an application. This is of benefit to local communities as well as helping applicants identify areas where improvements or change might be beneficial to their proposal.”

2.3.3. The SCI also encourages applicants to submit a full SCI alongside planning applications, stating:

“When applicants on large or complex schemes have undertaken community consultation, it is advisable for them to include a full Statement of Community Involvement alongside their planning application submission. This will allow the Council to understand how the community and other stakeholders have been involved and how the feedback from this consultation has been incorporated into the application proposals.”

2.3.4. In response to the guidelines of the Runnymede SCI, the Applicant conducted thorough and extensive community engagement throughout the planning process.

3. About the Proposals

3.1. What does the Animal and Plant Health Agency do?

3.1.1. APHA is an executive agency under Defra, the government’s agency for environmental matters. APHA are committed to safeguarding animal and plant health for the benefit of people, the environment, and the economy. The Site is a key location for animal disease research, diagnostics, and surveillance.

3.1.2. The Site employs around 1000 people, including 550 scientists.

3.2. About the site

3.2.1. The APHA Site (the Site) is 93ha and situated near Weybridge, within Runnymede Borough, at grid reference 504535 (easting), 162975 (northing).

3.2.2. The Site is bounded to the east by the M25 motorway, to the south by Woodham Lane and residential properties, to the west by Woodham Park Road and to the north by adjacent fields, a park and residential properties.

3.2.3. The Site is divided into four working areas:

- The Main Site, which is the hub for APHA. The Main Site totals approximately 62,500m² of floorspace, with building height ranging from 3 to

24 metres. Of the total floorspace, 38,400m² is scientific facilities for specialist animal research. The remaining 24,100m² includes utilities, offices and support facilities (e.g., storage, workshops, security buildings). The Main Site includes one operational incinerator and one operational cremator, both served by a stack which is 22m high. There is also surface car parking across the Main Site.

- Across the APHA site there are three smaller sites: Halls, Coombelands and Grange. Each of these are comprised of research and development facilities, utilities, offices and support buildings. The typical building height at these sites is between 4m and 8m.
- These sites are connected by 69ha of grazing fields, infrastructure support and natural landscaping.



Figure 1: Site boundary and development plots (ref: SCAHZZ-ARP-TPO-ZZ-PL-A-0004)

3.3. Why do we need a new masterplan?

3.3.1. APHA has been operating at the Site for over 100 years. As such, many of the facilities need significant investment and upgrading to enable world-leading research.

- 3.3.2. The masterplan will be delivered through a major government investment project, the Science Capability in Animal Health Programme (SCAH).
- 3.3.3. The masterplan will streamline the dispersed sites, creating a modern science hub with upgraded facilities. Investment in the Site will improve the UK's ability to respond to emerging disease threats.

Figure 2: Illustrative Masterplan (ref: SCAHZZ-ARP-TPO-ZZ-PL-A-0010)



4. Consultation Methodology

4.1. Consultation aims

- 4.1.1. The aim of the consultation was to inform the local community and other key stakeholders about the planning application, and to give consultees opportunity to comment.
- 4.1.2. The consultation had key aims to improve the effectiveness of the process:
- Brief key stakeholders to build and sustain support for the programme.
 - Engage in timely and effective communications with immediate neighbours.

- Support the local reputation of APHA and Defra.

4.2. Pre-consultation strategy

- 4.2.1. Prior to conducting the consultation, the SCAH communications team consulted on best-practice stakeholder engagement.
- 4.2.2. This included learning best-practice advice from earlier Defra consultations, including at the redeveloped Crick and Pirbright sites.
- 4.2.3. Preparatory research was undertaken to identify key local stakeholders. This included an assessment of the residents for whom the proposals are most relevant.
- 4.2.4. The consultation zone was bounded by the M25 to the east and 100m surrounding the site, with additional properties along Woodham Lane and to the north towards Row Town. The consultation zone was discussed and agreed upon with local councillors and the Local Planning Authority, and is shown in Figure 3 below.

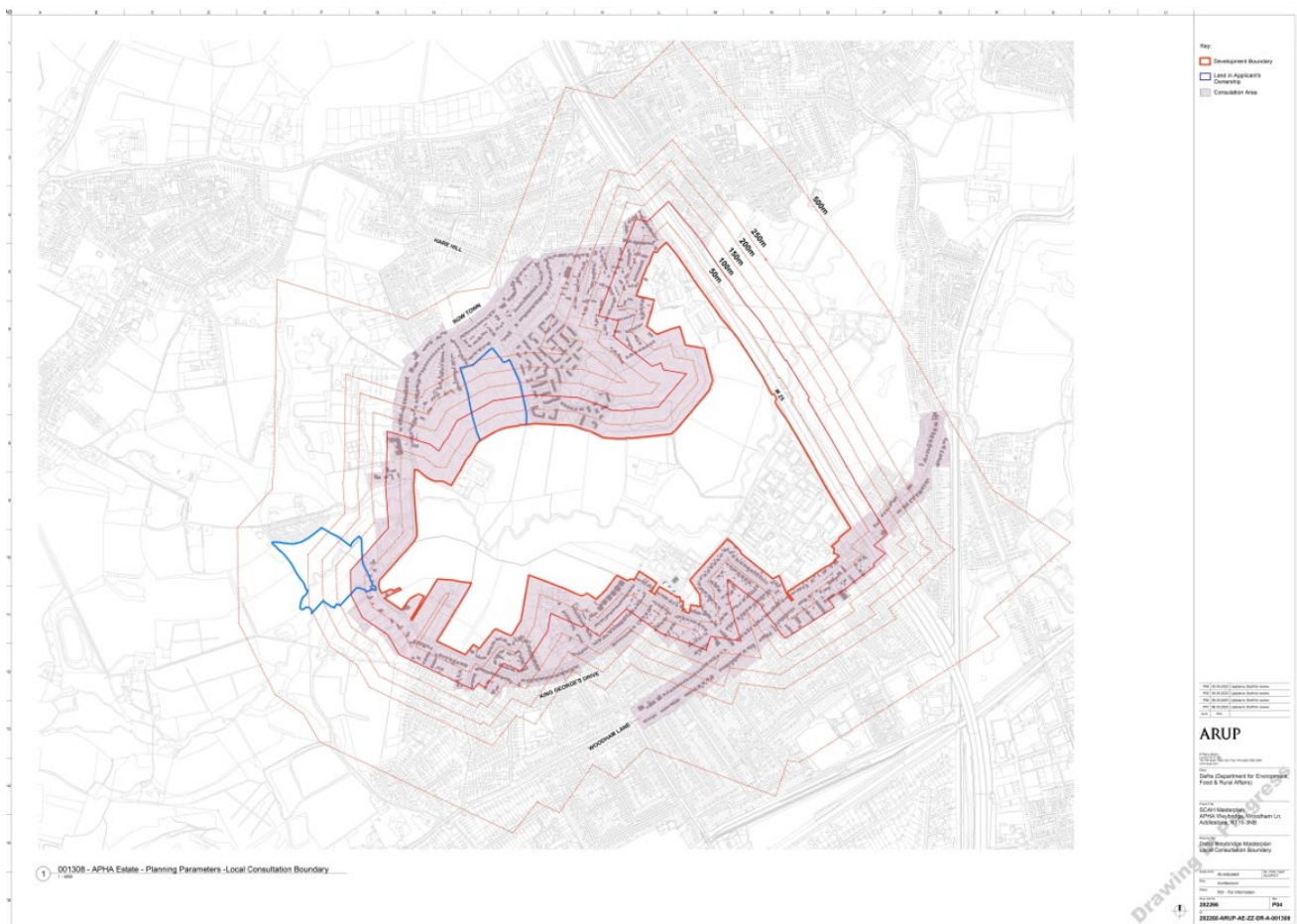


Figure 3: Public Consultation Zone (see Appendix 6)

5. Early Stage Stakeholder Consultation

5.1. Community organisations and schools

- 5.1.1. Prior to the formal launch of the community consultation, the Applicant held briefing meetings with local community groups and schools. Here, representatives were shown the consultation materials and asked for their thoughts.
- 5.1.2. These meetings were an opportunity to provide background information on the proposals and to give attendees an opportunity to ask any questions or raise any issues.
- 5.1.3. The community groups spoken to, and the suggested areas of collaboration moving forward, are detailed below:

Local Stakeholder Group	Date of Meeting	Partnership Moving Forward
Holme Farm Community	11 th May 2023	Collaborate on land management issues such as natural flood mitigation
All Saints Church	18 th May 2023	Shared visitor parking with the church on busy event days
New Haw Community School	24 th May 2023	APHA professionals to visit the school as part of their “Golden Futures” scheme
The Grange Community Infants School	24 th May 2023	Community outreach activities with the school to encourage students interested in STEM
Grange Nursing Home	1 st June 2023	Open communication channels between APHA and the nursing home as the project progresses

Rodwell House Nursing Home	Communication online	Open communication channels between APHA and the nursing home as the project progresses
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5.2. Local councillors

5.2.1. The project team reached out to all councillors representing local wards on Runnymede Borough Council. The chosen local wards were Ottershaw, New Haw and Woodham and Rowton. A number of councillors were newly elected in the May 2023 local elections.

5.2.2. All local councillors were offered a site visit. The following councillors accepted this offer and visited the site on the following dates:

Councillor Name	Ward represented	Date of visit
Malcom Cressey	Ottershaw	30 th May 2023
Michael Cressey	Ottershaw	5 th July 2023
Scott Lewis	Woodham and Rowton	11 th April 2023 and 5 th July 2023
Tom Gracey	Woodham and Rowton	5 th July 2023
Mike Smith	New Haw	5 th July 2023
Carl Mann	Ottershaw	5 th July 2023

5.3. The Member of Parliament

5.3.1. Ben Spencer, the Member of Parliament for Runneymede and Weybridge, attended a visit at the Site on 19th December 2022. Information about the new masterplan was provided during this visit.

5.3.2. Mr Spencer has subsequently written to Defra to confirm his broad support for the proposals (see Appendix 5).

6. Internal Staff Consultation

- 6.1.1. Over 1,000 people currently work on the APHA site at New Haw, many of whom live in the local area and their views on the masterplan proposals are clearly very relevant. The project team held a drop-in consultation event for staff. Staff were able to view details about the plans and learn more about the local consultation events.
- 6.1.2. Staff were invited via email and the event was advertised on the APHA intranet (see Appendix 1).
- 6.1.3. An internal newsletter was also circulated informing staff of the proposal and what it entails (see Appendix 2).
- 6.1.4. Approximately 30 members of staff attended this event. In addition to general questions about the scale and scope of the project and likely timings, the following specific issues were raised:

Issue	Further Information
Beehives	There are a number of beehives on the site. A staff member sought additional information on where these hives will be located during the works and where their permanent location will be.
Memorial plaques	There are a number of memorial plaques, commemorating previous staff, which are currently in storage. It was requested that the masterplan proposals should include a Memorial Garden, where these plaques can be displayed and there are benches to allow quiet contemplation.
Social spaces	Staff requested more information about the provision of social and recreational spaces.
Sustainable energy supply	Staff expressed a preference for the provision of battery back-up on site, rather than diesel generators. They showed a particular interest in the

	sustainability features proposed within the masterplan.
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- 6.1.5. Defra is committed to ongoing consultation and engagement with staff as the masterplan proposals progress. This includes through in person events for staff on site, as well as continuing to update staff through the quarterly 'One Weybridge' newsletter and APHA's own internal newsletter and processes where appropriate.

7. Pre-Application Community Consultation



Figure 4: Residents view the proposals at a consultation event on 15 June 2023.

- 7.1.1. The local community consultation was publicised via a leaflet sent to 2,299 local addresses in May 2023. The consultation zone to which leaflets were circulated was agreed upon prior with the Local Planning Authority.
- 7.1.2. This leaflet provided introductory information about the masterplan proposals and details about how the local community could take part in the consultation, either by giving their views online or by attending a public drop-in event.
- 7.1.3. The leaflet also publicised the dedicated website, email address and postal address for the consultation.
- 7.1.4. Three public drop-in events were held in June 2023. These drop-in events were held at the New Haw Community Centre. This is a well-used, fully accessible venue located near the New Haw site.
- 7.1.5. The opening hours for these events were varied to maximise opportunities for residents to attend.

Time and Date	Number of resident attendees	Number of Councillor attendees
8 th June, 16:00 – 19:00	15	2

15th June, 17:00 – 20:00	23	2
22nd June, 16:00 – 19:00	17	1
Total	55	5

- 7.1.6. An explanatory exhibition was displayed at the drop-in events (see Appendix 4). This exhibition included background information on the history of the New Haw site, as well as an explanation of the current facilities and the new masterplan proposals.
- 7.1.7. Each drop-in was staffed by several members of the APHA masterplan project team, who were able to explain the proposals to local residents and answer any questions.
- 7.1.8. In the invitation leaflet, residents were also offered an online facility to give their views, and APHA’s local engagement contact details so that residents who could not attend any of the three events could still discuss and comment on the proposals (see Appendix 3).

8. Consultation verbal responses

8.1. Verbal comments from the drop-in event

8.1.1. The verbal comments given by residents attending the three drop-in events focused on:

Focus of comment	Further detail
Privacy concerns	This was the most frequently raised issue. Residents had questions over screening and security during the construction phase
Lighting	Several residents mentioned current issues with light pollution from the site.
Housing	A small number of residents noted opposition to any housing being developed on Northern Fields.
Sustainability	While a number of residents welcomed the environmental habitat improvements proposed by the new masterplan, others raised issues relating to emissions.
Construction traffic	Several residents sought additional information about construction traffic routes, with some reference to concerns about Woodham Lane being too congested to be a construction traffic route.
Greenbelt development	The proposed development of a substation on greenbelt land at Grange was raised as a concern, with a request that options to relocating this to previously developed land elsewhere should be considered.
Community benefit	Residents praised the contribution made by Holme Farm, which was described as 'very positive'.
Community engagement	It was noted that, historically, APHA's engagement with the local community has been 'patchy'. A resident raised issues about the difficulty of reaching site contacts.

9. Consultation Written Responses

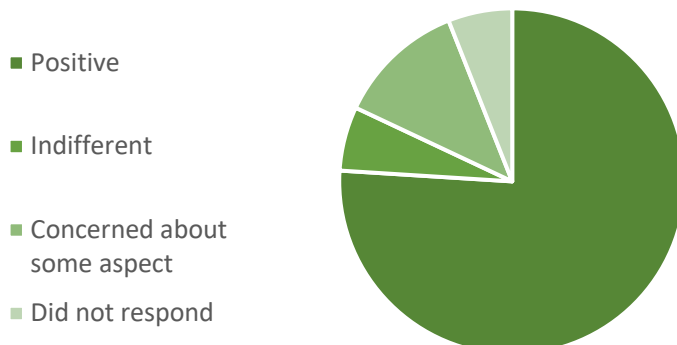
9.1. Summary of feedback

9.1.1. Feedback was collected via Citizen Space, a dedicated democratic involvement platform.

9.1.2. When asked “What is your view of the proposal” residents’ response can be summarised as:

Positive	76%
Indifferent	6%
Some concerns	12%
Did not respond	6%

What is your view of the proposal?

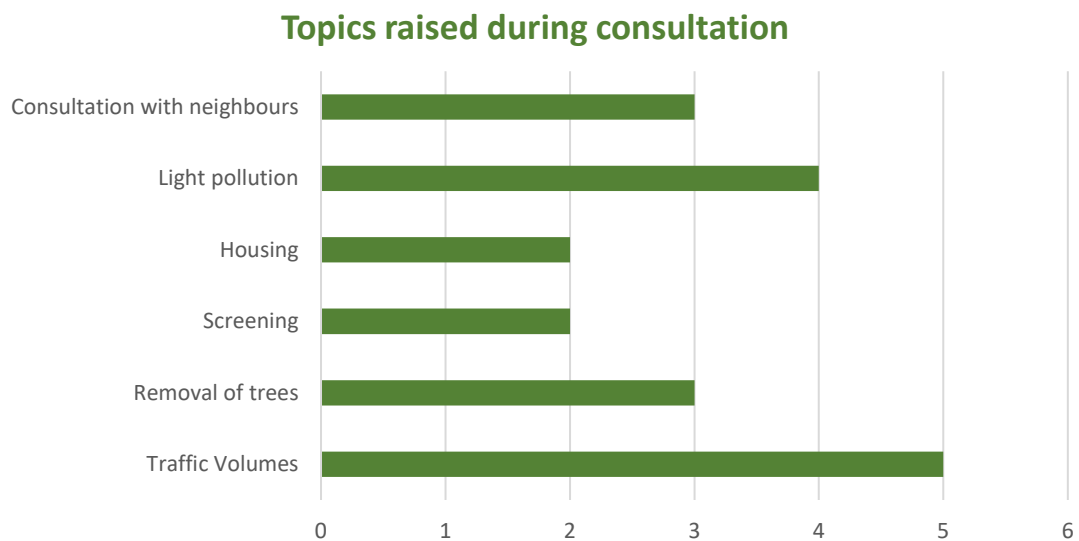


9.2. Key response themes

9.2.1. A number of different topics were discussed in the written consultation responses. They have been broadly summarised below.

9.2.2. **Continued engagement with neighbours.** Three residents welcomed the consultation undertaken by Defra on the outline masterplan and asked that consultation that continue during the future Reserved Matters applications and construction phases.

- 9.2.3. **Screening from houses.** Two residents, who predominantly live in properties immediately abutting the New Haw site, sought reassurance that adequate screening, predominantly in the form of landscape buffers, would be provided.
- 9.2.4. **Maintenance of trees and planting.** Three residents stressed the importance of having a landscape management plan, with a particular focus on ensuring that any new landscaping was well maintained.
- 9.2.5. **Habitat enrichment.** There was a positive response to the masterplan’s focus on environmental improvements and sustainability.



- 9.2.6. Residents were also given the opportunity to add further comments if they wished to. Below is a sampling of comments received:

“As residents of Selbourne Avenue we have always understood the need for the work and understand the importance of this work. All we ask is that the local residents get the respect they deserve.”

“Thank you for taking the time to reach out to the community and inform of us of what is going on in such an accessible and considerate way. It seems all aspects of the works have been thoroughly thought about with the goal being to improve the land for APHA use as well as for the ecosystem in general, with disturbances to neighbours being kept to a minimum.”

“Need to see further details to be sure of opinion. Not opposed to modernising but concerned about the impact.”

“I welcome the level of public engagement and outreach that has accompanied this first consultation and I look forward to continued engagement as the proposed scheme develops.”

10. Response to consultation feedback

10.1. Design responses

10.1.1. The Applicant has responded to the consultation feedback by making a number of changes to the project's design.

Resident feedback	Design response
Concerns over light pollution	Steps to address this are clearly set out in the Development Specification that forms part of the application pack.
Privacy concerns	APHA is committed to early planting, to ensure that effective landscape screening is in place.
Secure perimeter/boundary	Reference to additional measures that will be undertaken to ensure effective site security have been referenced in the Design and Access Statement, which forms part of the application pack.
Stacks and flues emissions.	Emission levels are set externally and are very carefully managed and monitored on an ongoing basis. More information about emissions and how they will be managed is provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment and non-technical summary that form part of the application pack.
Substation plot J encroaching on Green Belt	Plot J has been re-shaped so it is now completely within the prior developed estate land and no longer encroaches on the Green Belt.

10.2. Project changes

10.2.1. The applicant has put multiple measures in place to mitigate resident concerns regarding the construction process.

Resident feedback	Project response
Dust, noise and general disturbances	The steps that will be taken to address these issues are set out in full in the Construction Environmental Management Plan.
Construction vehicle routes and traffic	Additional research is being undertaken to identify steps that mitigate the impact of construction traffic on the local community and to potentially identify alternative routes.

11. Next Steps

- 11.1.1. Defra and APHA are committed to ongoing engagement with the local community in the application determination period, throughout construction and subsequently during the ongoing operation of the site.
- 11.1.2. Defra and APHA have maintained open communication channels with all identified local stakeholders. They will continue to do so, engaging with stakeholders both formally and informally, as the project progresses.
- 11.1.3. Defra and APHA have also committed to informing local neighbours when the proposal is submitted and highlighting how they can comment, in the purpose of transparent consultation.
- 11.1.4. This engagement will be both formal and informal. Mechanisms have been established, such as a dedicated mailbox, regular updates via letter to neighbours regarding major works on site and a local forum will be established.
- 11.1.5. Additionally, appropriate consultation will be undertaken at key future stages of the masterplan project, and specifically for all major future Reserved Matters applications.
- 11.1.6. Ultimately, Defra and APHA are committed to continuous engagement with the local community to produce an improved and resilient masterplan for the redevelopment of the New Haw site.