1. Purpose

1.1 A report outlining the concept and purpose of the Northamptonshire Arc entitled 'The Big Idea' was considered by Northamptonshire County Council in April. It promotes the need for a Northamptonshire approach to provide an overall strategic policy context for future planning and involvement decisions and an overarching advocacy document for Northamptonshire.

1.2 Northamptonshire County Council’s Cabinet formally considered the document at its meeting on the 13th April and resolved to:

- Approve and adopt the principle of the Northamptonshire Arc as the overall spatial concept to guide future planning and investment in Northamptonshire by the County Council and as a key policy and advocacy document for Northamptonshire.
- Agree that a formal public consultation be undertaken and the outcome reported back to Cabinet.
- Agree that Northamptonshire Arc Connectivity Strategy be developed.
• Agree that the County Council invite the borough and district councils to consider adopting the Northamptonshire Arc as part of their policy frameworks.

• In June a formal letter was received from the County Council inviting the Borough to respond to its consultation on the Northamptonshire ARC Spatial concept and its Background Report. The Background Report contains a number of text changes from that originally approved by the County Council. These appear relatively minor and are believed to be intended to clarify the relationship of the ARC concept to the Core Strategies as part of the statutory spatial planning process.

1.3 The purpose of this report is to enable Cabinet to consider and respond to the Northamptonshire Arc Concept and Background Report. A copy of the final consultation document is attached at Appendix A and a copy has been placed in the Members Room.

2. Recommendations

2.1.1 Cabinet agree that a written response to the ARC document be sent to the County Council principally as set out in this report, and the specific comments set out in Appendix B and that such a response be delegated to the Director of Planning and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration.

2.1.2 That the County Council be invited, in particular, to reconsider the currently stated intention of the Arc document to be a unifying alternative to the two Joint Core Strategies in Northamptonshire, and that the ARC Concept be repositioned to reinforce the spatial and investment priorities set out and being set out in Core Strategies.

2.1.3 That the County Council be informed that the Borough are prepared to work with NCC to develop and strengthen the Arc document as an advocacy document for the County so as to maximise future investment and infrastructure as set out within and directed by the Joint Core Strategies.

2.1.4 That the Borough fully supports and welcomes the documents recognition of Northampton’s regional role, its importance to the future success of the County in terms of its future economic growth and investment priority, and its dominant role as the commercial, cultural and retail heart of the ARC and wider region.

2.1.5 That the County Council be informed that the Borough Council Cabinet are not prepared to consider the Arc as currently written as part of their corporate policy framework.
3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

3.1.1 Northamptonshire County Council’s cabinet report outlines what they consider to be the purpose for the Arc and highlights that they consider there to be a need for an approach that articulates and reflects local ambitions at a county level and complements the Northamptonshire Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS). It also states that it is essential that this approach acknowledges Northamptonshire’s wider strategic location and proximity to London and the Greater South East and the opportunities and challenges this presents, particularly in relation to the housing growth Agenda.

3.1.2 In addition, from a strategic perspective, it states that it is important to have a policy document in place, which can inform and shape decisions on transport, economic development and regeneration, environmental and other investment related activities. This framework will help to shape and inform responses to external drivers and help to put local priorities and activities into context. It will also help to ensure that Northamptonshire capitalises on its strategic location, access to national networks and other opportunities. This framework is termed the Northamptonshire Arc.

3.1.3 Three thematic outcomes are outlined as underpinning the framework of the Northamptonshire Arc. These are:

- Transformed connectivity
- Leadership on climate change and biodiversity
- A stronger and greener economy.

3.1.4 A series of sub-regional priorities and activities are then identified which flow from, reflect, and will help deliver these outcomes. The County Council’s stated intention here is to provide further clarity and focus, particularly at the county level. This, the County Council consider, will help to strengthen and align existing activity. They further consider this will demonstrate collectively how such sub-regional priorities and activities fit with and complement external agendas and local ambitions, as well as helping to identify and address gaps. It will also, they consider, help to influence decisions on investment both internal and external to the county, and action on delivery.

3.1.5 The report continues by indicating that the Northamptonshire Arc will help to shape and guide the formulation and content of important new documents and investment plans.

- The Single Conversation (between the Homes and Communities Agency and Local Authorities)
- Regional Funding Advice
- The Digital Britain Agenda
- Creating Cleaner Jobs
- The delivery of a Sustainable Transport System (DaSTS) Agenda
• An increasing emphasis on the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEMK) Framework
• Plans to develop a new high speed rail link between London and the north (HS2)
• The National Roads Programme and Managed Motorway proposals.

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 A key issue for our consideration is that the Arc document fails to recognise or respect the strategic lead given by the Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategies for spatial, investment and infrastructure planning. It’s currently stated position is as a unifying alternative policy document providing “the overall spatial concept to guide future planning and investment in Northamptonshire…….”

3.2.2 **The Northamptonshire Arc document can only be a non-statutory document.** The Joint Core Strategy for West Northamptonshire, currently under preparation, will form, when adopted, the only strategic level statutory spatial planning document for this area (subject to any new legislation from the Coalition Government). As does the Joint Core Strategy for North Northamptonshire. These statutory documents will form the only basis upon which decisions relating to development will be taken, the scale and location of new growth and how investment in infrastructure will be prioritised and delivered.

3.2.3 It is important that the concept of the Arc is not regarded as an alternative spatial planning strategy. An Arc document can have no statutory role and it should be led and guided by the strategic direction in the two Joint Core Strategies. Nor can a document such as the Arc be simply incorporated into a core strategy as it would need to be subject to testing and assessment as required by various regulations. The ARC must remain focussed on its three high level thematic outcomes and should there be any suggestion that it represents a broad corridor of growth as an alternative to sustainable urban extensions, this would be strongly resisted.

3.2.4 However, as an advocacy document to raise Northamptonshire’s profile nationally and internationally to ensure it competes more effectively with other areas for public and private sector investment, it has merit. It must, however, be prepared to reflect and fully support both Joint Core Strategies and promote the strategic priorities in both documents, Its advocacy role will be seriously undermined and lack credibility if it were to promote alternative investment priorities to those determined through the proper statutory process.

3.2.5 In terms of its overall content there are aspects of the Arc that support and reinforce the direction of our statutory strategic planning documents. In particular, the Arc concept is focussed on linking up the main settlements within the County (Transformed Connectivity) and in reinforcing the role of Northampton as a regional centre, highlighting its importance to the County in terms of future economic growth and investment priority, and as to its dominant role as the commercial, cultural and retail heart of the County and wider region.. This approach can be fully supported.
3.3 Choices (Options)

3.3.1 NCC’s report to their Cabinet highlighted in its section as ‘Alternative Options’. Its purpose as a single unifying spatial concept. Their report states:

“The main alternative option to the identification of a single unifying spatial concept and approach for Northamptonshire would be to continue with a more fragmented approach which in part is centred on separate arrangements for Core Spatial Strategies and plan-making for the north and west of the country”.

3.3.2 Despite minor changes to the text since being formally considered by the County’s Cabinet, its real purpose is to replace what the County see as a “…fragmented approach” to strategic spatial planning through Core Strategies. Currently it can have no such statutory role.

3.3.3 Cabinet could decide not to respond to the consultation process, but this would leave the Arc concept as unchallenged and with some implied statutory credibility. It is recommended that the positive option of responding is supported.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

4.1.2 The Arc document as currently set out fails to fully respect the statutory Joint Core Strategy process and promotes itself as a unifying alternative to guide future planning and investment in Northamptonshire.

4.1.3 There are significant risks in such an approach:

- uncertainty as to priorities and consequently inherent weaknesses in funding bids leaving the County worse off
- no statutory basis for decision making, creating a policy vacuum encouraging development through the appeal process
- high risk of legal challenge
- would undermine the credibility of the Joint Strategic Planning Committee and its ability to deliver the LDS programme.

4.1.4 The new Coalition Government have announced their intention to reform the current planning system and to introduce their policy concept of “localism”. No details are currently available, but the need to “plan” for future growth at a local level, to evidence and withstand scrutiny of the amount of growth, and to promote investment in infrastructure, is likely to be a requirement of any reform. As and when details become available, the status and relevance of the ARC document may change.
4.2 Resources and Risk

4.2.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

4.2.2 If the County continue to promote the Arc concept as a unifying alternative to the Joint Core Strategies, then there is a risk that future investment and infrastructural into the Council will be seriously compromised.

4.3 Legal

4.3.1 The Joint Core Strategy for West Northamptonshire which is currently being prepared through statutory processes is a key Development Plan document that will form part of the Borough’s Planning Framework. The document, before being approved, will need to satisfy the test of soundness and will need to be based on a robust evidence base. This document will have statutory force and any relevant decisions that do not comply with this document, or, indeed, other Development Plan Documents for the Borough, may be susceptible to legal challenge through the planning process or possibly judicial review. It is therefore important that the ARC document does align itself to the Core Strategy as outlined in this report.

4.4 Equality

4.4.1 There are no adverse implications arising from this report and the County have carried out an Equalities Impact Assessment on their report.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

4.5.1 This is a response to a consultation being managed by the County Council. Internally Management Board. The Portfolio Holder and Leader have been consulted.

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

4.6.1 The Arc’s positive support for Northampton is to be welcomed and as such supports the Corporate Plan and several of our corporate priorities.

4.6.2 In the way the Arc as currently written seeks to position itself as an alternative spatial strategy to the Joint Core Strategy it undermines our priorities in respect of the growth agenda and the statutory process to deliver it.
5. Background Papers

5.1 The Northamptonshire Arc: The Big Idea
NCC Cabinet Report – April 13th 2010

David Bailey
Director – Planning and Regeneration
June 2010
SPECIFIC COMMENTS IN RESPECT OF THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARC
BACKGROUND REPORT AS PUBLISHED BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL
FOR CONSULTATION

Pages 4 and 5  Paragraphs (4) and (1)

It is fundamental that the County Council’s priorities in respect of transport, economic
development, environmental and other planning and investment activities follow the
strategic lead and direction of the Core Strategies. Whilst it is proper for the County
to seek to influence and inform the preparation of Core Strategies, the ARC Concept
must recognise the primacy of the statutory process. As currently written, it fails to
do this and presents itself as a “unifying alternative”.

Pages 5  Paragraph 2

The County’s contribution to the preparation of Core Strategies is recognised and
welcomed. Ensuring that both Core Strategies present a coherent approach across
the County is relevant and welcome.

Page 6  Paragraph 2

This paragraph fails to recognise and respect the statutory role of the Core Strategies
and whilst it seeks to “support”, it will only be able to do so if the investment and
other priorities are aligned.

Page 9  Paragraph 2

Core Strategies will only identify “strategic” locations for new developments,
“detailed” locations will be identified in Allocations DPD’s. The ARC concept should
not promote alternative strategic options for growth.

Page 9  Paragraph 3

Developer interest during the recession has clearly reduced throughout
Northamptonshire, and the pipeline supply is a result of proposals submitted before
the recession hit, but which have been stalled due primarily to unresolved highway
impacts on the Strategic Road Network.
A local spatial framework already exists through the Core Strategies. The document’s repeated failure to properly recognise the statutory role of the Core Strategies is its central weakness.

The focus on growth should be “in and around” the main towns, thereby recognising the role to be played by Sustainable Urban Extensions in the future development of the towns in Northamptonshire.

The recognition of Northampton’s growth offer and its potential role as a regional economic centre is welcomed.

The list of essential local road improvements to facilitate growth should prioritise Northampton’s requirements recognising its lead role within the County and its greater potential to provide new jobs and housing.

The “other improvements” needed for Northampton should be listed and prioritised in Paragraph 6 above.

Strategic Priority 8/9 – should recognise and identify the improvements needed in and around Northampton as the top priority, thereby recognising its greater potential to drive the way forward.

Strategic Priority 12 – the first “pilot phase” of the ARC’s MASS TRANSIT NETWORK (MTN) should be centred on Northampton and the County is urged to seriously consider this offer.

Givens the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations, the application of S106 funding is strictly controlled and limited to what is directly related and necessary for the development in question. It is unlikely to be a principal
scheme of funding for projects which are required to make up an existing deficit in provision or capacity on the network (refer to the recent Daventry Appeals). The Borough Council will willingly work with the County Council to identify/explore new funding mechanisms and a policy framework to ensure they can be required and delivered.

Page 32  Paragraph 1

Should also refer specifically to the importance of new retail/leisure investments in town centre so as to strengthen their offer to become once again the focus of economic and other activity.

Page 32  Paragraph 5 and 6

The dominant role of Northampton Central Area for commercial, cultural and retail investment is very welcomed and supported. A reference to Northampton’s ambition to be a “city” as reflected in the joint document “Market City” should be included.

Page 32 and 33  Paragraph 7 and 1

The Grosvenor Centre redevelopment should be recognised as the unequivocal priority as a transformational project for Northampton. Such major private sector investment in the heart of Northampton has the potential to act as the economic catalyst to subsequently facilitate the development of Castle Station and, indeed, the Waterside. A new expanded retail offer in the centre will encourage investment in new jobs and housing and help to secure funding for other transformational projects, such as the Station and Waterside. Its credentials in terms of its overall economic impact and ability to act as the catalyst are far greater than the other projects, which will more naturally follow such a major retail investment.

This section of the ARC should properly recognise the Grosvenor Centre as the strategic transformational priority for Northampton. Such recognition should then prioritise available funding streams to its delivery, thus securing £300 million of private sector investment.

Page 33  Paragraph 4

If priorities have been established with Northampton as the pivotal focus, then whilst investment in other towns should be sought, reality suggests that it would not be “major”. Deleting the word “major” would be more realistic in the current economic climate.
Appendix “B”

The Grosvenor Centre project should appear in the list before the Castle Station project to properly reflect its priority to Northampton.

These comments and suggestions are offered in a constructive manner to improve the ARC concept and document and reinforce its role as an advocacy document for the County.