

Item No: 7
Date: 7 th June 2010

**WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF THE JOINT PLANNING UNIT
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The Northamptonshire Arc

1. Background

- 1.1 A report outlining the concept of the Northamptonshire Arc entitled "*The Big Idea*" was produced by Northamptonshire County Council in April 2010. It advocated the fact that no single overall strategy existed which pulled together all the plans for the county in a way that offered a coherent approach, or expressed priorities in a practical spatial way. Moreover, no overarching advocacy document for external investment in Northamptonshire existed.
- 1.2 Northamptonshire County Council's Cabinet formally considered that report at its meeting on 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 a Northamptonshire Arc Connectivity Strategy be developed; and
 - Agree that the County Council invite the borough and district councils to consider adopting the Northamptonshire Arc as part of their policy frameworks
- 1.3 Formal consultation on the Northamptonshire Arc is yet to be undertaken, though it is anticipated to be subject to public consultation from late May/early June 2010 for a period of around 6 – 8 weeks: the precise time scale for the consultation is yet to be determined. The purpose of this report is to consider the West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee's formal response to the emerging Arc document once the consultation is launched. The final draft of the document was not available at the time of drafting this report. It is anticipated, however, that it will be available by the date of the Committee. The final draft of the document will be circulated to all on circulation list for the Committee as soon as it becomes available from the County Council and this will then form an Appendix to this report.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Joint Strategic Planning Committee;

- i) Considers its position regarding the non-statutory principle of the Arc in attempting to raise the profile of Northamptonshire, particularly in terms of developing a mechanism for increasing the potential for future investment,
- ii) Invites the County to reconsider the currently stated intention of the Arc to be a unifying alternative to the two Joint Core Strategies in Northamptonshire.
- ii) Considers the status, role and function of the Arc document, especially in terms of how it proposes to relate to the emerging statutory strategic spatial planning document for West Northamptonshire: the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, together with the rest of the planning policy documents forming part of the statutory Local Development Framework (LDF) for West Northamptonshire, as set out in the approved West Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme (LDS) February 2010.

3. The Northamptonshire Arc

3.1 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.

3.2 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.

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

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

- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 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 (STEM) Framework ;
 - Plans to develop a new high speed rail line between London and the north (HS2); and
 - The National Roads Programme and Managed Motorway proposals.
- 3.6 It is worth noting that since the original draft of the Northamptonshire Arc document was produced, the County Council have proposed to make clearer the relationship that the Arc document will have with the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy together with other related spatial development plan documents prepared by the JPU and its partner authorities forming part of the West Northamptonshire LDF. These documents are referred to in the approved West Northamptonshire Joint Local Development Scheme (LDS), February 2010. The precise detail of the proposed changes the County Council propose to make to the Arc document to achieve this are not yet known, they will be included in a revised version of the document released for public consultation in late May/early June, and as stated at paragraph 1.3 above, this revised version of the document will be circulated to those on the circulation list for this Committee when it is available from the County Council.

Considerations relating to the Arc identified by the Officers of the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit that the Joint Strategic Planning Committee may wish to bear in mind.

- 3.7 The officer considerations set out below are offered without prejudice to the Committee's consideration of the Northamptonshire Arc document and are expressed entirely without prejudice to any future action national Government may take regarding the planning system in general.
- 3.8 The principle of raising the profile of Northamptonshire, particularly in terms of developing a mechanism for increasing the potential for future investment may have some merit. However, it is considered that it needs to be made clearer in

the Northamptonshire Arc document, as currently drafted, how this will be done in a way that clearly expresses the relationship of the Arc with the emerging West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy and the other spatial planning policy documents in the LDF referred to in the approved West Northamptonshire Joint LDS. The Arc document must recognise the strategic lead given by the Joint Core Strategies for spatial, investment and infrastructure planning and desist from its currently stated position as a unifying alternative providing 'the overall spatial concept to guide future planning and investment in Northamptonshire..'

- 3.9 Articulating non-statutory local ambitions at a countywide level and reflecting the relevant Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS's) may, therefore, have some merit and it is considered this could positively assist in non-statutorily shaping the content of associated investment plans.
- 3.10 However, the concept and status of the Arc, as the document is currently drafted, fails to make clear its relationship with the emerging West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy or, indeed the other strategic statutory spatial planning policy documents referred to in the approved LDS for West Northamptonshire. Neither does it appear to relate in this way to higher-level statutory spatial planning documents.
- 3.11 The Northamptonshire Arc can only be a non-statutory document. The Joint Core Strategy, currently under preparation, will form when adopted, the only strategic level statutory spatial planning document for the West Northamptonshire area. This document along with other related statutory spatial planning documents in the LDF, will in turn, form the basis upon which decisions relating to development will be taken and how investment in infrastructure will be prioritised. It is regarded as important that the clarification refinements proposed to the detailed wording of the Arc referred to in paragraph 3.6 perform this role.
- 3.12 In the light of the Arc document not having any statutory role, whilst some informal non-statutory regard may be had to its contents by the JPU and its partner authorities in a corporate sense, it is considered that for this to happen, and work, its proposals need to more closely align with the emerging statutory West Northamptonshire LDF as a whole. Similarly, it should be made clear how the contents of the document are evidenced. Any implications associated with this should be considered and robustly tested through the full statutory development plan making process that is being led by the JPU and its partner authorities.
- 3.13 In light of the above it is not clear how the Arc, as currently drafted, is to complement the statutory planning framework (the LDF) being developed by the JPU and its partner authorities, especially given that given that statutory option testing has already been undertaken relating to the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, this occurred in summer of 2009. It is essential that the concept of the Arc is not regarded as an alternative strategy. It is therefore suggested that greater clarification be provided as to the contribution it is envisaged that the Arc will contribute to the statutory planning process.
- 3.14 Further, in order to be incorporated into a core strategy, the Arc must be subject to testing and assessment alongside 'reasonable alternatives' as required by the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive.

- 3.15 The geographic area that the Arc currently incorporates is also questioned. It does not appear to cover significant areas of West Northamptonshire; notably around Brackley and the rural area to the north of Daventry. It is felt that this could have negative implications in that, for example, strategic linkages between Brackley and Towcester could be inadequately considered. Similarly, whilst a perspective on Silverstone is offered; DIRFT does not appear to be referenced in the report.
- 3.16 In terms of content there are aspects of the Arc that reflect closely the direction of strategic statutory planning documents. In particular, the Arc concept is focussed primarily on linking up the main settlements within Northamptonshire and in reinforcing the role of Northampton as a regional centre and highlighting its importance in terms of future economic growth and investment. This approach is to be fully supported.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 It is acknowledged by JPU officers that their may be an informal, non-statutory role for the Northamptonshire Arc to, for example, articulate and reflect local ambitions and aspirations at a County level to complement the Northamptonshire Sustainable Community Strategy as well as to acknowledge Northamptonshire's wider strategic location and proximity to London and the greater South East, particularly regarding matters associated with securing finance for, for example:

- Transport improvements;
- Economic development;
- Environmental initiatives.

and other such investment activities. Associated with this their may also be an informal non-statutory role for the Arc document to help shape and guide the formulation of important non-statutory documents supporting such activities and associated investment plans. However, it is also considered that, as currently drafted, there ought to be significantly more clarification included within the Arc document relating to its status and how the contents of this non-statutory document is to integrate with the suite of statutory strategic spatial planning documents being prepared for West Northamptonshire as part of the LDF as set out in the LDS. The present concept of the Arc as an alternative to two Joint Core Strategies covering Northamptonshire is not acceptable.

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