

Item No: 6
Date: 31 January 2011

**WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Pre-Submission West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF THE JOINT PLANNING UNIT

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the publication of the Pre-Submission version of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, as attached at Appendix 1, for the statutory six weeks representation period in accordance with Regulations 27 and 28 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Joint Strategic Planning Committee:

1. Notes and approves the officer responses to the representations received to the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy, July 2009, as attached at Appendix 2;
2. Approves the Pre-Submission version of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy for the statutory six weeks representation period in accordance with Regulations 27 and 28 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008, to run from 17th February to 31st March 2011;
3. Authorises the Chair of the Joint Strategic Planning Committee to agree any editorial changes required to the Pre-Submission version of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy; and
4. Formally resolves to rescind the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy published in July 2009 on the basis that it has been replaced by the Pre-Submission version of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.

3. Background

- 3.1 There is a real need for an up-to-date strategic spatial development plan for the West Northamptonshire area that is based on robust evidence and takes account of and responds positively to local development needs and aspirations. The publication of the Pre-Submission version of the West Northamptonshire

Joint Core Strategy (JCS) for statutory representations is a significant step towards this overriding and long held objective.

- 3.2 Publication of the Pre-Submission version of the JCS also brings certainty to the area regarding the management of development in a plan-led way thereby removing uncertainty about where development should go, how much will be permitted and how it will be accessed, serviced and supported by infrastructure.
- 3.3 It is also been identified that there is a pressing need for the West Northamptonshire area to move on from the Emergent Joint Core Strategy that was published for public consultation in July 2009, in view of the changed national political and economic landscape. A significant number of responses were made to this document during the twelve week consultation period and these have been carefully considered in the preparation of the draft Pre-submission edition of the document before the Committee this evening. Officer responses to the representations made on the Emergent Joint Core Strategy are referred to under Section 4 below and are set out in full in Appendix 2. In the light of the large community response there is a clear need to press-on with the Joint Core Strategy but in a different strategic direction: it is considered that the Pre-Submission achieves this.
- 3.4 In the light of the recent High Court ruling regarding the status of Regional Strategies still being part of the development plan, there is a current statutory requirement for the Joint Core Strategy to still be in general conformity. However, significantly, the Government have made it clear that in national planning policy making terms Regional Strategies are to be abolished and replaced with a system based more on a culture of local communities having a more direct involvement in the formulation of planning policy. The intentions behind this approach are set out in the Localism Bill published in December 2010. The Government's aim is to deliver the final provisions of the Localism Bill into law around summer of 2011, if this challenging timescale can be adhered to it will ensure that certainty regarding the 'direction of travel' for planning policy making will be provided as soon as possible. In the light of this changing statutory scenario and the reality that RSS figures simply cannot be delivered, it is not considered prudent or sound to pursue a Joint Core Strategy that would be in general conformity with the Regional Strategy. The Pre-Submission version Joint Core Strategy brought to the Committee is grounded in local need and deliverability.
- 3.5 There will be implications for the West Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme (LDS) by not complying fully with the Regional Strategy route and it will be necessary to produce and give effect to a revised LDS prior to the submission of the Joint Core Strategy for its public examination. The revised LDS will need to give consideration to the date it is anticipated that the Localism Bill will receive Royal Assent, and will therefore become law. This date is not known at present and more detail on this matter will be brought back to the Committee when more is known.
- 3.6 In the light of the Government's clearly stated intent to change the planning policy system in the ways described in paragraph 3.5 above, the approach being taken to the preparation of the Joint Core Strategy fits well with the evolving national changes to the planning policy system. Therefore, it is

important and appropriate to continue to make progress towards a Joint Core Strategy for West Northamptonshire as soon as possible.

- 3.7 A further reason for maintaining the momentum on progress towards an adopted Joint Core Strategy is to ensure that the West Northamptonshire area is safeguarded, as much as the policy planning system will permit, from predatory planning appeals which are often expensive to fight, in both financial and human resource terms, as one partner authority experienced recently. The most effective way of doing this is to ensure that an up-to-date, sound and adopted development plan is in place: the first and most important element of which is the Joint Core Strategy as this document sets the strategic spatial planning scene and context within which all subsequent development planning documents will be in general conformity with. Such an approach will ensure that development is managed in a plan-led way in that, sites or areas that are suitable for development of whatever kind are set out and statutorily adopted in the Joint Core Strategy. By following this approach developers, of whatever type, will have a clear understanding at a strategic spatial level of where development will be acceptable to partner Councils and where it will not. The West Northamptonshire area has been lacking such clear spatial planning policy for too long and by pressing on with the preparation of the Joint Core Strategy will ensure that such an undesirable scenario does not continue.
- 3.8 Related to the last paragraph, by publishing the Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy for public engagement now we provide more certainty to all users of the plan regarding acceptable locations for development. In addition certainty is provided regarding the development land supply position, in all its forms, including, land for homes, jobs and other commercial activity.
- 3.9 By publishing the Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy at this time the area as a whole will have greater certainty regarding bidding for supporting infrastructure funding, in all its forms. This will bring significant associated benefits to West Northamptonshire and the partner Councils within it relating, for example, to regeneration and the integration of new development with existing settlements in sustainable ways. The strength and robustness of bids made for funding through new and pre-existing funding mechanisms, such as through the Local Investment Plan, Regional Growth Funds, the Local Economic Partnership and other such funding routes, will increase significantly once a Pre-submission plan is available to bolster and support these bids.
- 3.10 By way of a summary of this section of the report approving, the Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy for publication represents a 'win-win' scenario for the whole West Northamptonshire area and the partner Councils within it. Not only will a more advanced edition of the Joint Core Strategy be available with more 'weight' able to be attached to in technical planning terms but, additionally, this document will have significant local support and buy-in from across the partnership with local development needs addressed in a proportionate, evidenced and manageable way. Pressing-on to the Pre-submission stage is a significant statutory step forward in plan-making certainty for the West Northamptonshire area and is simply the best and most effective use of the resources that have been made available to the Joint Planning Unit on behalf of partner Councils.

4. Overview of the Joint Core Strategy Process to Date

- 4.1 The Joint Core Strategy will be the long term strategic plan for the development of Daventry District, Northampton Borough and South Northamptonshire administrative areas – it deals with the big picture of what will happen in the future. It is a spatial policy document, which means it deals with places and the activities that happen within and between them. The Joint Core Strategy is the priority planning policy document and all subsequent documents must reflect what it says.
- 4.2 At its meeting on 6 July 2009 the West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee approved the publication of the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy for consultation. The Emergent Joint Core Strategy was published on 31 July 2009 for a six week consultation period which was subsequently extended. The content of the Emergent Joint Core Strategy was informed by the Joint Core Strategy Issues and Options and Regulation 25 consultations in 2007 and 2009 respectively, as well as the collection of a wide ranging evidence base and on-going work with technical bodies.
- 4.3 The responses to the Emergent Joint Core Strategy consultation were considered by the West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee at its meetings on 30 March 2010 and 26 July 2010. At its meeting on 26 July 2010 the Committee formally received the summary of the consultation responses to the Emergent Joint Core Strategy
- 4.4 The representations received to the Emergent Joint Core Strategy consultation in 2009 have been taken into account in the preparation of the Pre-Submission version of the Joint Core Strategy. Joint Planning Unit Officers have prepared recommended responses to the Emergent Joint Core Strategy consultation representations, attached as Appendix 2, for the Committee to note and approve at this meeting.
- 4.5 A report of the community engagement and consultation undertaken to date on the Joint Core Strategy, including details of previous consultation stages and the responses received, has been prepared and will be available alongside the Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy when it is published for the statutory six weeks representations period commencing in February 2011.

5. The Pre-Submission version of the Joint Core Strategy – An Introduction

- 5.1 The Pre-Submission version of the Joint Core Strategy sets out the long-term vision and objectives for the whole of the West Northamptonshire area for the period up to 2026, including strategic policies for steering and shaping development. It identifies specific locations for strategic new housing and employment and changes to transport infrastructure and other supporting community facilities, as well as defining areas where development will be limited. It helps to ensure the co-ordination and delivery of other services and related strategies.

5.2 The format of the Joint Core Strategy is as follows:

- Section 4 is the spatial portrait which gives an overview of West Northamptonshire's characteristics, the issues that arise from this and which lead to the identification of the Vision and 15 Objectives for this Plan, i.e. The Joint Core Strategy.
- Section 5 sets out the Spatial Strategy for the Plan – the big picture of “where” and “when” we want activity, development and investment to be over the period to 2026. This includes the roles and relationships of the settlements, the hierarchy of centres and the distribution of development.
- Sections 6 – 11 set out the policies that apply to the whole of the Plan area - the West Northamptonshire-wide policies. These policies cover: connections, regenerating and building communities, economic advantage, housing, built and natural environment, and, infrastructure and delivery.
- Sections 12 – 16 set out the policies and proposals for the places in West Northamptonshire. These policies cover: the towns of Northampton, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley; and the rural areas.
- Section 17 sets out the Implementation and Monitoring Framework – outlining “how” the Plan will be monitored and reviewed to ensure that its objectives are met.
- The Context Map, Key Diagram and the Proposals Map are included at the end of the Joint Core Strategy. The purpose of the Key Diagram is to present the spatial policies in the Plan in a diagrammatic form. The purpose of the Proposals Map is to identify areas of protection, areas at risk of flooding and sites allocated for particular land use and development proposals to which specific policies apply.

5.3 The Spatial Strategy outlines the hierarchy of places and centres within these places (i.e. the towns of Northampton, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley, and the rural areas) and the principles for the distribution of development between the places. This includes maximising the use of land and buildings within the existing urban areas of the towns as well as developing new sustainable urban extensions to the towns. The Spatial Strategy identifies how much new development will be provided and when, i.e. the overall phasing of development. The Spatial Strategy also sets out the principles of sustainable development that all development will follow in order to achieve the vision of West Northamptonshire, particularly in response to climate change.

5.4 The Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy makes provision for **50,150** new homes to be built between 2001 and 2026. **This is a substantial reduction from the Regional Spatial Strategy requirement of 62,125 homes.** Over **15,500** have already been built in the period up to 31 March 2010, and planning permission has already been granted for a further **13,000** homes. This means that the Joint Core Strategy is planning for a further **21,500** to be granted planning permission and be built before 2026. This level of provision is based on what can be delivered and supported by infrastructure and that will meet the needs of the existing population.

- 5.5 The Joint Core Strategy also makes provision for a minimum net increase of 16,000 jobs 2010-2026 in the Plan area and aims to maintain a broad balance between homes and jobs over time. Policies will support the creation a more diverse economic base.
- 5.6 The key strategic site allocations, referred to in the Joint Core Strategy as Sustainable Urban Extensions, are listed below:

Northampton

- Northampton Kings Heath (3,500 dwellings, 10 ha employment)
- Northampton North (2,000 dwellings, 7 ha employment)
- Northampton North of Whitehills (1,000 dwellings, local employment opportunities) [also known as Buckton Fields]
- Northampton South (1,000 dwellings, local employment opportunities)
- Northampton South of Brackmills (1,000 dwellings, local employment opportunities) [also known as North of Hardingstone]
- Northampton Upton Park (1,000 dwellings, local employment opportunities)
- Northampton West (1,500 dwellings, local employment opportunities)

Daventry

- Daventry North East (2,500 dwellings, local employment opportunities)

Towcester

- Towcester South (1,500 dwellings, 1,500 jobs)

Brackley

- Brackley East (380 dwellings, 1,000 jobs)
- Brackley North (1,380 dwellings, local employment opportunities)

- 5.7 The Joint Core Strategy is supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan which will ensure that the services and facilities required by new development and existing communities will be funded and delivered alongside the development proposals. The development will be managed and phased alongside the delivery of infrastructure and the plan proposals will be subject to rigorous monitoring and review.
- 5.8 The preparation of the Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy has been informed by the previous consultations on the Joint Core Strategy and the collection of a wide ranging evidence base which is listed in Appendix 2 of the Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy.
- 5.9 The Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy has been the subject of a sustainability appraisal and an appropriate assessment by independent environmental consultants Environ. Environ's reports will be published alongside the Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy to allow respondents to the Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy to reflect on Environ's appraisal and assessment in preparing their representations and to make any observations on the appraisal and the assessment themselves.

5.10 The Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy is subject to an on-going Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA). The purpose of the EqIA process is to identify whether the plan has an adverse impact on equality of opportunity on the basis of a person's race, gender, disability, sexuality, religion or belief or age or on relations between or within those groups, and how this can subsequently be addressed. The EqIA will be published alongside the Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy to allow respondents to the Strategy to reflect on this assessment in preparing their representations and to make any observations on the assessment itself.

6. The Communication and Consultation Strategy

6.1 Members will recall that at its meeting on 26 October 2010 the Joint Strategic Planning Committee approved the Communication and Consultation Strategy for the Pre-Submission version of the Joint Core Strategy. For ease of reference a copy of the approved Communication and Consultation Strategy is attached to this report as Appendix 3.

6.2 The purpose of the Communication and Consultation Strategy is to ensure that the approach to the Pre-Submission statutory representations period meets the requirements of the relevant Regulations and the Statements of Community Involvement (SCI) adopted by Daventry District, Northampton Borough and South Northamptonshire Councils.

6.3 The Strategy sets out a three stage approach which is detailed in Appendix 3 to this Committee Report:

1. Information and Engagement – This stage was completed in December 2010;
2. Pre-Submission Publicity – This stage was completed in January 2011; and
3. Pre-Submission Statutory 6 Weeks Representations Period – This is the next stage.

6.4 In order to minimise postage costs and make the most efficient use of staff resources Actions 1.6 and 2.1 in the Strategy have been rolled forward to form part of the third stage. These actions are not requirements of either the regulations or the SCIs and so this change has no legal implications.

6.5 Details of the nature of Pre-Submission Statutory 6 Weeks Representations Period are set out in Actions 3.1 – 3.8 under Stage 3 of the Strategy in Appendix 3 to this Committee Report. The Actions listed reflect the requirements of the relevant Regulations and the three adopted SCIs.

6.6 The statutory 6 weeks representation period will be from Thursday 17 February to Thursday 31 March 2011.

7. Next Steps

7.1 All representations to the Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy will be considered and the Submission version of the Joint Core Strategy prepared by June 2011. The Submission version will be published for comment at the same

time as being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration at an independent Public Examination. This Examination will test the soundness of the Joint Core Strategy and consider representations on the basis of whether the plan is sound.

- 7.2 Subject to the timing of the enactment of the Localism Bill, which may change, the nature of the Inspector's Report and the final stages of plan preparation, the Inspector, appointed by the Secretary of State to conduct the Examination, will produce a report with recommendations which will be binding. Any changes required by the Inspector will be incorporated and then the Joint Core Strategy will be adopted. The adoption of the Joint Core Strategy will be advertised. It is expected that the Joint Core Strategy will be adopted in May 2012 and published shortly afterwards.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 It is of critical importance to the well-being of the West Northamptonshire area to continue to progress the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy in the way outlined in this report without delay for a number of reasons. Not least, to safeguard partner local planning authorities from predatory planning appeals that are expensive to fight. The Joint Core Strategy will also give certainty and confidence to all with a spatial interest in the West Northamptonshire area, as well as providing focus regarding regeneration aspirations across the partnership area.
- 8.2 Simply, by pursuing the Joint Core Strategy to the next stage it assumes greater 'weight' in planning application and associated decision making processes. This is a valuable asset for the local planning authorities to have at their disposal in terms of implementing a plan-led approach to the delivery of development and environmental safeguarding across the West Northamptonshire area.

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