



WNDC Board Report

Report by Director of Regeneration and Development

Paper Reference: 2010-07-06-01

Agenda Item: 6

2 November 2010

Subject: Regeneration Overview Report

Advice: That the Board:

1. **Note** the progress being made on key regeneration and development projects;

Summary:

- WNDC continue to make good progress on a wide range of projects and activities across West Northamptonshire
- Arrangements are now being confirmed for the official opening of the Sandy Lane Improvement
- The Ransome Road London Road Junction Improvement works are due to start on site later this month
- WNDC and its partners working on the regeneration of Northampton's Waterside have recently submitted a £3.8m bid for European and emda funding to support the development of a new Innovation Centre
- The Construction Futures project has struck an agreement with Tresham College which sees its offer extended to include the rest of the County.

1. Grosvenor Centre

- 1.1 The Confidentiality Agreement with Northampton Borough Council has now been signed, representing a significant step forward in the development of this project, where effective partnership working between all public and private sector partners is seen as essential.
- 1.2 WNDC's Director of implementation and Delivery continues to work closely with both the Borough Council and Legal & General to help progress the project.

2. Sandy Lane Improvement North

- 2.1 As noted in September's Board report, construction work is nearing completion.
- 2.2 Northamptonshire County Council, who have managed the project, are currently confirming a revised date of the official opening of the road.
- 2.3 Discussions continue on the second phase of Sandy Lane Relief Road.

3. Avon Nunn Mills

- 3.1 The London Road Ransome Road junction improvements are due to start on site later this month (subject to the completion of the sale of Netto land to the Homes and Communities Agency and licences granting Northamptonshire County Council access to HCA land to undertake the works).
- 3.2 The work to resolve issues surrounding the Collaboration Agreement between WNDC, the Homes and Communities Agency and the private sector interests in this site are nearing completion. The current version of the Agreement is due to be considered by HCA's Board on 1st November. The private sector partners await the outcome of that Board meeting and HCA's comments but in the meantime most of their own substantive points have been resolved.
- 3.3 In preparation for the planned Compulsory Purchase Order the work to identify land and other interests continue with contact made in the past few weeks with Northampton Borough Council, Central Networks and the Environment Agency.
- 3.4 Meanwhile Halcrow are working on behalf of WNDC to consider the road alignment issues which need to be clarified and resolved ahead of that CPO action

4. Becket's Park

- 4.1 The main works to create the marina itself have now been completed. It will be available for new moorings and open to the public from May 2011.
- 4.2 The Environment Agency are currently negotiating with two prospective contractors for the facilities building. It is anticipated that a preferred partner will be secured in early November to enable works to commence mid November.
- 4.3 The Clamber Art element of the project continues to progress well, with the main art feature installation scheduled for November.
- 4.4 Last week saw the first meeting of the newly formed Friends of Becket's Park, organised by Groundworks as part of the Clamber Art project with the support of WNDC and Northampton Borough Council

5. Northampton Waterside

- 5.1 A recent Board workshop on the Waterside project confirmed the approach being taken by WNDC and its partners, including the ongoing acquisition strategy which has seen WNDC purchase a number of key sites and buildings in recent months as part of the process of "de-risking" the site ahead of wider regeneration. That acquisition activity includes completion of the Indespension purchase which took place on 7th October.
- 5.2 High level discussions with National Grid on the gas holders and surrounding land and buildings continue to take place.
- 5.3 Following some months of negotiation between the main public sector partners in Northampton (including both Local Authorities, NEL, the University of Northampton and WNDC) a proposal for a new Northampton Innovation Centre has been submitted to the emda-managed East Midlands Urban Development Fund (EMUDF).
- 5.4 The EMUDF has been established by emda to support the development of commercial property focused around innovation, science, technology and growth.
- 5.5 The Fund has secured £15 million, made up of £5 million of emda's own funding and £10 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and will primarily focus

on ERDF's Priority Axis 1, creating the physical environment for businesses to innovate and grow.

5.6 Early discussions with stakeholders identified the key areas to be addressed before any bid can be submitted, including:

- Governance arrangements (especially important given WNDC's time limited existence)
- The identification and securing of a suitable site (a number of sites have been identified)
- Management arrangements (who would take on the day to day responsibility for the centre)
- Financial viability (especially important given the centre will be expected to repay a loan, make a return for the investor, or offer an attractive equity share)

5.7 The discussions around governance have led to the conclusion that, although both the Borough and County Councils are supportive of the idea, neither are in a position to make any commitment to take on the management or governance arrangements of any new facility.

5.8 The University of Northampton, however, is more positively inclined towards taking on this role, reflecting its desire to have a more significant town centre presence, and also build on its commitment to innovation and business support (seen in the WNDC and NEL supported expansion of the Portfolio Centre, the iNet and the Daventry iCon).

5.9 Of the potential sites identified in Northampton, the University's preference is for the WNDC-owned former United Social Club site in Green Street given its gateway location, proximity to the railway station and the potential for further development of the area through the regeneration of the key Waterside site.

5.10 One of the attractions of the Northampton Innovation Centre project is that it has the potential to catalyse the move towards innovation and higher skills, helping establish the direction of travel for the regeneration of the town.

5.11 Currently the proposal is being worked up with a focus on High Performance Computing and Business Services, taking advantage of the University of Northampton's experience in this field (e.g. the UoN's Northampton Business School

already manages the Chesham House Innovation Centre in Kettering). Additionally, the new centre could be linked directly to the University's NVision 3D Immersive Technology Centre via a multi-gigabit Dark Fibre internet connection. This would give new businesses in the centre access to significant levels of computing power and exceptionally fast internet access.

5.12 This approach gives the Centre the distinctive, ambitious offer it will need to define itself and takes advantage of the strengths offered by Northampton as a location and the University as a lead partner.

5.13 The aim is to create a substantial, environmentally exemplar (BREEAM "Excellent") structure at a key Gateway location which will effectively mark the new commercial heart of Northampton. The building itself could be:

- c.2500 – 3000 sq meters with business space available for letting
- c.60 units in the centre for businesses
- Units would range from 250-1,000 sq ft.
- There would be meeting rooms for occupants and seminars / small conferences

6. Castle Station

6.1 We continue to make progress on the development of the full outline designs for the station and multi storey car park. The outline design work is due to complete in February 2011. The outline design work is due to complete in February 2011.

6.2 Ground investigations (used to inform that design work) are now underway and are due to finish by mid November. At that point all survey and site investigation works will have been completed.

6.3 Detailed discussions between Network Rail and Northampton Borough Council on planning issues in preparation for the submission of the Prior Approval application under Network Rail's Permitted Development Rights continue. Meanwhile work on the Transport Assessment (first stage work due to complete this month) and the Flood Risk Assessment (first stage work completed, second stage currently being specified) continues

6.4 On funding, Network Rail has now confirmed in writing that it is unable to make any financial contribution to the Castle Station project. As noted in the papers of the September Board meeting Network Rail has been exploring potential rail industry funding with both London Midland and the Department for Transport based on increasing the regulatory asset base. Unfortunately those discussions have not generated any commitment of financial support.

6.5 WNDC are now considering updating the outline business and investment case for the project taking account of this position. That work would be due to complete before the end of 2010 and would help link project benefits to costs of delivery and potential funding sources.

7. iCon

7.1 With the building work continuing to make good progress and still on track for its March opening, the emphasis has now switched to the marketing and promotion of the iCon as an employment location.

7.2 WNDC has been supporting the iNet team (who will manage the building) and the University of Northampton to develop their marketing strategy as well as directly approaching potential tenants and users of the building. That work will continue apace through the winter to try and ensure maximum occupancy levels for the first year of operation are achieved.

7.3 At the same time high level discussions between WNDC, the University, emda and iCon East Midlands (the iCon's management body) on an enhanced role for the University in the future ownership and management of the building continue. Emda's legal team has been positive and supportive throughout this process, helping the partners fully understand their commitments in terms of iCon activity and the options open to them in terms of future governance arrangements.

7.4 A topping out ceremony, an important milestone in the project, will take place on 4th November.

8. Construction Futures

- 8.1 The Construction Futures project has continued to make excellent progress and is now established as a key element in the day to day operations of WNDC, with WNDC's planning team working closely with the Construction Futures to secure almost 1,500 weeks of training for young people via the Section 106 process to date.
- 8.2 That has resulted in many of the construction and development companies operating in West Northamptonshire (including William Davis, Winvic, Pro Logis, Taylor Wimpey and Stepnells) offering on site, real life training for construction trainees at a time when nationally there has been a significant fall off in training opportunities within the sector.
- 8.3 Those same companies have also taken part in several school events as part of the Construction Futures offer includes career events, curriculum support, mock interviews, etc. (Stepnells have been particularly supportive of this activity).
- 8.4 That joint working between public and private sector partners extends to the project's Advisory Group which includes William Davis, OffPat, Pro Logis, NEL, University of Northampton, WNDC and both Tresham and Moulton Colleges.
- 8.5 In recent weeks the project has begun to promote the Construction Futures model and the innovative use of planning powers pioneered by WNDC with other local authorities in the East Midlands, including Leicestershire County Council and Leicester City Council (follow up meetings involving Leicester City Council's Directors of Regeneration and Planning, Construction Futures and WNDC's planning officers are taking place in November).
- 8.6 This East Midlands work is possible because of the European Regional Development Fund money secured for Construction Futures as part of the iNet project's extension. ERDF funding means we now have a requirement and rationale for promoting the approach developed in West Northamptonshire within the region, sharing best practice but also opening up new business opportunities for the project.
- 8.7 That desire to develop new business opportunities is also reflected in the project's growing list of private sector partners. Daventry District Council is encouraging up skilling, via Construction Futures, of those construction and maintenance SMEs currently on DDC's preferred contractors list who are at risk of losing out to

- competitors because their workforce are lagging behind on issues such as health and safety training. The approach developed here means local companies stay competitive, their workforce is better trained and DDC are able to procure locally.
- 8.8 A similar partnership is being finalised with Carillion Construction Training, the U.K.'s largest private sector construction training provider, which will allow us to create significantly more construction apprenticeships (at a time when the sector is awash with failed apprenticeships as the market shrinks), with Carillion employing the young people themselves but Construction Futures placing them within West Northamptonshire sites. Such apprenticeships are beginning to figure more prominently in the project's training offer, with a number agreed in recent weeks.
- 8.9 Finally, Construction Futures has in the past few days confirmed new working arrangements with Tresham College, opening up the north of the county to Construction Futures and finally giving the project a presence across all of Northamptonshire.

9. Moat Lane and the Watermeadows

- 9.1 . The existing Watermeadows continues to be well used by the public, with further enhancements to the site currently being undertaken by the Towcester Wildlife Trust (including a major bulb planting programme).
- 9.2 Progress is being made to resolve outstanding planning issues with further on site meetings planned with English Heritage. Positive discussions between WNDC's planning team and SNC's legal advisors on Section 106 matters continue.
- 9.3 Traffic and parking issues are still under consideration by the Highways Agency and Highways Authority, though the Agency have confirmed they are treating Moat Lane as a priority project and a successful resolution is expected within the next few weeks.
- 9.4 An Inquiry date is still awaited for the Compulsory Purchase Order action being undertaken by SNC on behalf of the wider partnership. It is likely the CPO will be considered within the next two months. The date for objections has recently passed (4 were received).

- 9.5 Following a review of all the submitted Pre Qualification Questionnaires (PQQs) a total of 6 bidders were issued with Invitation to Submit Outline Proposals documentation on the 26th October.
- 9.6 The bidders now have until mid December to return their proposals at which point further short listing will be undertaken. Those organisations who reach this stage will then be asked to submit their detailed solutions.
- 9.7 Overall, procurement is proceeding to time and efficiently.