



WNDC Board Report

Report by Director of Regeneration and Development

Paper Reference: 2011-02-07-03

Agenda Item: 7

17 May 2011

Subject: Towcester Regeneration and Planning Overview

Advice: That the Board

1. **Note** the progress that is being made on regeneration and planning projects in Towcester

Summary:

- There is a strong partnership of public and community sector bodies driving a comprehensive programme of regeneration in Towcester
- A number of important new community resources are already in place and are well used by Towcester residents
- The proposed Sustainable Urban Extension and related bypass are now making good progress
- The Competitive Dialogue based procurement process undertaken by South Northamptonshire Council (supported by WNDC and other public sector bodies) to secure a private sector partner for the regeneration of Moat Lane is nearing completion

1. The Public Public Partnership (PPP)

- 1.1 The partnership body which has managed the regeneration plans for the centre of Towcester of these past few years continues to serve the town well. Based around a relatively informal structure but with a common set of objectives and aspirations the PPP has allowed SNC, WNDC, Northamptonshire County Council, NEL, emda and local bodies such as the Towcester Partnership to share resources and ideas.
- 1.2 Critically, that PPP allowed partners to invest funding and securing match funding in a coherent and focussed way, with each budget contributing towards a shared outcome for the town centre.
- 1.3 The success of that approach can be seen in the progress made over the last three years in particular in both delivering improvements on the ground and laying the foundations for the significant private sector investment which the public partners' original investments have made possible.

2. Early Community Infrastructure Delivered

- 2.1 The recent purchase of additional land adjacent to the Watermeadows means that new public park extends to almost 60 acres and is one of the largest new public parks in the U.K. for many years. Given the "landlocked" nature of Towcester, constrained by the Easton Neston Estate to the north and the A43 to the east, and the negligible green open space in the centre of town up to this point, the Watermeadows represents a very significant investment in the future of Towcester and one which has been very well received by Towcester residents.
- 2.2 The improvements to the Bury Mount, previously a derelict Scheduled Ancient Monument but now figuring in English Heritage publications as best practice, has been a powerful statement of commitment to quality and investment in community infrastructure. Bury Mount will now form the centrepiece of the regeneration of the Moat Lane area.

3. The Sustainable Urban Extension

- 3.1 A planning application for an urban extension of circa 3,000 new homes, a similar number of employment spaces, new community infrastructure including schools and

open green space, and a bypass linking the A5 and the A43 to the south of Towcester was submitted to WNDC in late 2007.

- 3.2 Progress with that application has been slow over the past two years thanks to a downturn in the housing market and a number of important issues which need to be resolved relating to the bypass and in particular its proposed junction with the A43.
- 3.3 Over the past few months considerable forward momentum has been made in resolving many of those highways related issues, resulting in a renewed impetus and desire on the part of the applicants to see their plans determined.
- 3.4 In practice this means the applicants will need to submit a revised masterplan for their scheme, as well as securing support for their highways design from both the Highways Agency and the local Highways Authority. This represents a considerable investment of time and resources on the part of the applicants and both WNDC and SNC. No firm timetable has been agreed yet for the determination of that application but, after considerable delay, progress is now being made.
- 3.5 To help ensure a consistency of approach to the application, especially in light of the time limited nature of WNDC, plans to have WNDC planning officers work directly with their SNC colleagues on this scheme (in all likelihood with WNDC staff based at least part of the week in SNC's planning team) are currently well advanced.

4. Moat Lane and Town Centre Regeneration

- 4.1 The procurement process undertaken by SNC, with the support of its public sector partners, to secure a private sector development partner for the Moat Lane initiative is now nearing completion. The initial call for proposals was well received by the private sector and elicited several high quality bids. A Continuous Dialogue approach was adopted which has gradually reduced the field of applicants, with final proposals submitted in the past few weeks.
- 4.2 The result of that procurement process will be made public in the near future but if successful it sets in train unprecedented levels of investment in the town centre. That investment will deliver new civic and community infrastructure including a significantly larger library, new community meeting space, new SNC accommodation, and the relocation into improved offices for some of Towcester's voluntary sector service

providers. At the same time it offers several new retail and employment locations, new public open space and a range of housing types at the heart of the town.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 In Towcester, WNDP and its public and community sector partners have developed an approach to market town regeneration which is already recognised as best practice. The PPP has proved to a potent and effective vehicle for accommodating and channelling the wide range of aspirations and expectations which so diverse a mix of partners brings to the table.
- 5.2 The town centre regeneration programme has managed to lever in considerable external funding and, with the procurement of a private sector partner nearing completion, is poised to lever in considerably more.
- 5.3 Critical to this process has been the early understanding amongst all the partners of the need to prepare the town for growth ahead of any urban extension approval and resultant population growth. The need to protect the existing town businesses and to enhance the social and economic offer of the town centre has been to the forefront in all that thinking.
- 5.4 That shared vision for the town centre has carried over into the consideration of the latest iteration of the urban extension plans, with SNC and WNDP sharing resources and staff to help ensure any development is of a high quality, delivers the infrastructure the town needs to grow (including a suitable bypass) and makes a positive contribution to the successful regeneration of the town centre.

Anticipated Towcester Urban Extension Forward Timetable

MILESTONE:	YEAR	QUARTER	TARGET DATE
Submission of Revised Material	2011/12	Q2	19/8/2011
Completion of Reconsultation Period	2011/12	Q2	23/9/2011
Completion of Planning Application Assessment	2011/12	Q3	22/11/2011
Committee Resolution Attained	2011/12	Q3	13/12/2011