

WNDC Board Report

Report by Director of Regeneration and Development

Paper Reference: 2011-04-07-03

Agenda Item: 7

5 July 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, however the milestone targets are largely dependent on how the proposed revisions are taken forward and the resourcing of the joint WNDC/SNC Project team
- 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 for the 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 South Northamptonshire Council (SNC), WNDC, Northamptonshire County Council, Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership (NEP) – previously Northamptonshire Enterprise Limited (NEL), East Midlands Development Agency (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 level of investment made by the public bodies is as follows:

- EMDA £500,000
- NCC £3m
- NEP £1.1m
- SNC £4.2m
- WNDC £6.4m (excluding Watermeadows)

1.4 The success of that approach can be seen in the progress made over the last three years, in particular in 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 the new public park extends to almost 60 acres and is one of the largest public parks in the U.K. 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 and visitors.

2.2 The sensitive restoration of Bury Mount was complete in April 2010, 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 and has set the quality benchmark for the remainder of the scheme.

2.3 Bury Mount and the Watermeadows have recently won the restoration category at the Museums and Heritage Awards 2011 – winning against a very strong shortlist.

3. Moat Lane and Town Centre Regeneration

3.1 The procurement process led 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.

3.2 In June 2010 SNC initiated a legally complaint public procurement process to secure a developer partner to deliver the scheme. A prior information notice (PIN) was submitted to the Official Journal of the European Union inviting parties to register their interest in the project. This was followed by a Developers Day where partners presented the Moat Lane scheme to potential developer partners.

3.3 The initial call for proposals was well received by the private sector and elicited several high quality outline bids. A continuous Competitive Dialogue approach was adopted which has gradually reduced the field of applicants.

3.4 The final bids by the developers were received by SNC on the 20th June with the evaluation of the bids taking place during that week. WNDC officers have been involved in the key areas (for WNDC) of the evaluation including finance, design and sustainability and phasing and potential development.

3.5 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.

3.6 Parallel to the procurement process WNDC and SNC jointly commissioned legal advisors Trowers and Hamlins to develop a Cooperation Agreement between both parties. This is to ensure an agreed way forward and to confirm obligations to each other. The need for a Cooperation Agreement has become more important as the project has evolved over the past few years and in light of SNC's potential move into Moat Lane. This Agreement will be finalised before the completion of the Strategic Development Agreement between SNC and the developer partner.

4. The Sustainable Urban Extension

4.1 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 relief road linking the A5 and the A43 to the south of Towcester was submitted to WNDC in late 2007.

4.2 Progress with that application has been slow over the past two years due to a downturn in the housing market and a number of important issues which need to be resolved relating to the relief road and in particular its proposed junction with the A43.

4.3 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.

4.4 Discussions are on-going with the applicant as to whether these revisions constitute a new application, although officers remain to be convinced otherwise. Notwithstanding this, officers have targeted a determination date prior to April 2012 (committee resolution Jan 2012) and to meet this date have assembled a joint project team of WNDC/SNC officers, who will be based at SNC's offices, working to a joint set of objectives to ensure a consistent approach.

4.5 However, the key risks in meeting the Milestone targets (and in particular the pre April 2012 determination date) relate to the resourcing of this joint project team. This matter will be concluded during June/July. However until this matter is resolved then the project risks remain red as highlighted in section 5 below.

- 4.6 Moving forward, the key issues to be resolved in relation to the determination of the planning application relate to highway impact and the provision of infrastructure (education, community and leisure facilities) having regard to competing interests and limited viability. This will require difficult decisions to be made over which infrastructure items should be prioritised as part of the Section 106 package. As part of this process meetings will take place with NCC in July to resolve potential highway/education/public transport resourcing conflicts.
- 4.7 Other key issues to be resolved in the coming months relate to the revised masterplan. Consideration will need to be given to the levels of open space provided, impacts on the landscape and heritage assets and how the development integrates with existing settlements, including the adjacent Jackson-Stopps Land, which will be subject to a separate planning application later this year.
- 4.8 A series of briefings and topic area discussions will take place over the coming months with key consultees, stakeholders and local interest groups, beginning with a joint SNC/WNDC Member Briefing of the changes to the scheme.
- 4.9 Whilst officers are committed to ensuring the determination of the application, there still remains a great deal of uncertainty over how the application will be moved forward by the developer over the coming months, having regard to project resourcing, legal issues in respect of how the scheme revisions can be accommodated within a new application and potential land ownership issues. As such there is also a risk that the application may be heading towards an appeal.

5. Milestones

Milestone 1 - TUE	Target	Forecast
Submission of Revised Material	16/09/11	16/09/11
Milestone 2 - TUE	Target	Forecast
Completion of Reconsultation Period	21/10/11	21/10/09
Milestone 3 - TUE	Target	Forecast

Completion of Planning Application Assessment	23/12/11	23/12/11
Milestone 4 - TUE	Target	Forecast
Committee Resolution Attained	17/1/12	17/1/12

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 In Towcester, WNDC 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 be a potent and effective vehicle for accommodating and channelling the wide range of aspirations and expectations which a diverse mix of partners brings to the table.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 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 WNDC 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 relief) and makes a positive contribution to the successful regeneration of the town centre.