



WNDC Board Report

Report by Director of Regeneration and Development

Paper Reference: 201-05-07-03

Agenda Item: 7

20 September 2011

Subject: Towcester Programme

Advice: That the Board:

1. **Endorse** 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 the comprehensive programme of regeneration in Towcester
- A number of important new community resources are already in place and are well used by Towcester residents and visitors such as the Watermeadows and Bury Mount
- The Competitive Dialogue based procurement process undertaken by South Northants Council (SNC) and supported by WNDC and other public sector bodies continues
- The proposed Sustainable Urban Extension and related bypass are now making good progress through a joint WNDC and SNC project team
- Positive pre application discussions have taken place with representatives of the Jackson-Stopps land

1. The Public Public Partnership (PPP)

- 1.1 The partnership of public and community sector bodies including the Public Public Partnership (PPP); are driving the comprehensive regeneration of Towcester town centre forward. This approach has served the Moat Lane project well over the years but a formal cooperation agreement between WNDC and SNC would be useful in helping steer the project through the final stage of procurement process which is nearing completion.
- 1.2 That agreement will help ensure both parties have a clear understanding of the various outputs, financial contributions and outcome targets we have entered into on behalf of the wider scheme in advance of confirming a new, private sector partner. This agreement is currently under discussion and will, hopefully, be completed before SNC sign a Development Agreement with the preferred development partner.
- 1.3 The success of the partnership can be seen by the progress that has been made over the last three years in particular bringing forward early community infrastructure benefits such as Bury Mount and the Watermeadows. Bury Mount and Watermeadows are key to bringing forward a town centre “fit for purpose” for the future growth of Towcester.

2. Moat Lane and Town Centre Regeneration

- 2.1 In June 2010 SNC initiated a public procurement process to secure a development partner to deliver the comprehensive regeneration scheme. The Competitive Dialogue procurement process followed the European Union Procurement Regulations.
- 2.2 The final bids by potential developers, including full financial details, were received by SNC on the 20 June with the evaluation of the bids following thereafter. WNDC has been involved in the evaluation of the bids in relation to finance, design and sustainability and phasing.
- 2.3 On the 29 June SNC officers presented to their Sounding Board on the progress of the procurement at which Members decided to defer Cabinet decision on the preferred development partner due to the need for further information.
- 2.4 The outcome of the procurement process will be made public as soon as legally possible and, if successful, will set in train unprecedented levels of investment in the

town centre. That investment will deliver new civic and community infrastructure including a new library, new community meeting space, new SNC offices and improved offices for some of Towcester's third sector organisations. It will also deliver new retail and employment opportunities as well as a range of housing at the heart of town.

2.5 All of the above has been made possible due to the dedication of the PPP. Towcester Town Centre will be "fit" for the future Sustainable Urban Extension.

3. Planning and Sustainable Urban Extension

3.1 A planning application for Towcester's Sustainable Urban Extension of approximately 3000 homes and 3000 jobs; new community infrastructure including new schools; 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 Discussions will be taking place with SNC over the coming weeks as to how the determination of the application can be taken forward having regard to this matter and the legal risks associated with taking either approach. Fundamentally as a result of this situation, strategic highway issues and uncertainty over the progression of the Joint Core Strategy, it is now highly unlikely that the application will be determined prior to the transfer of planning powers.

3.3 Future discussions with SNC will determine how the scheme will be managed either side of transition, resourcing of the development team and the role and responsibilities for each authority in the determination process. Progress made on this matter will be reported to Board in due course.

3.4 The key issues to be resolved in relation to the determination of the current 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. Notwithstanding the current uncertainty relating to the updating of the application and resourcing, WNDC and SNC recognise the importance of maintaining a joint development team approach and working to a shared set of objectives for the scheme. This approach will continue over the coming months as officers seek to resolve a number of key issues associated

with the scheme. A key task during the course of September will be to engage further with NCC to determine how key infrastructure can be delivered having regard to limited viability. Other key tasks will be to determine the applicants anticipated submission timetable and to agree a revised programme and tasks with both the applicant and SNC.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 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 at the forefront of that thinking.
- 4.4 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 by-pass) and makes a positive contribution to the successful regeneration of the town centre.