



WNDC Board Report

Report by Director of Regeneration and Development

Paper Reference: 2011-06-07-04

Agenda Item: 7

15 November 2011

Subject: Towcester Programme

Advice: That the Board:

1. **Endorse** the progress that is being made with regard to the delivery of the Towcester Programme.

Summary:

- The report provides a summary of progress
- South Northamptonshire Council have met to consider the appointment of their development partner for Moat Lane.

1. Summary

- 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 procurement process which is nearing completion and into the future.
- 1.2 That agreement could 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 catalyses in bringing forward a town centre “fit for purpose” for the future growth of Towcester.
- 1.4 The proposed Sustainable Urban Extension is being progressed through a joint WNDC and SNC project team. Progress has been made over the technical highway solution to the relief road and junction improvements, which has been the key issue in the long delay involved in progressing the application.
- 1.5 The applicant is now working to a revised programme which will take the determination of the outline planning application beyond the lifetime of WNDC’s planning powers. In recognition of this, SNC will take more of a lead in the determination process in preparation for the transfer of planning powers in March 2012.

2. Regeneration and Towcester Town Centre

- 2.1 Early community infrastructure has been delivered by the PPP to secure the successful growth of Towcester as a whole. The Watermeadows extends to almost 60 acres and is one of the largest new public parks in recent years.

- 2.2 Bury Mount (which has already won two national awards for quality) was completed in April 2010 and forms the centrepiece of the regeneration of the town centre and has set the quality benchmark for the remainder of the scheme. Watermeadows and Bury Mount represent a significant investment in the future of Towcester and have been very well received by residents and visitors.
- 2.3 To take the regeneration of Towcester Town Centre forward 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.
- 2.4 The final bids by potential developers, including full financial details, were received by SNC on the 20 June with the evaluation of the bids taking place that week. WNDC have been involved in the evaluation of the bids in relation to finance, design and sustainability and phasing.
- 2.5 On the 29 June SNC officers presented to their Sounding Board on the progress of the procurement. The Sounding Board agreed that WNDC and SNC should work together to look at other options of bringing the scheme forward if a preferred bidder is not identified. This will also ensure that the final Council decision is a sound one. WNDC also presented an overage paper on the 30th August to SNC's Business Planning Cabinet.
- 2.6 On the 19 October a special SNC Council Meeting was held to update members on the progress of the Council's procurement process and to seek approval to secure a preferred bidder.
- 2.7 The appointment of the developer partner will be made public as soon as legally possible and 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 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.

3. Planning and Sustainable Urban Extension

- 3.1 A planning application for an urban extension located to the south of Towcester for approximately 3000 homes and 3000 employment spaces; 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 Officers continue to work closely with the applicant and SNC to resolve a number of technical issues in advance of the applicant submitting revised details in 2012. Significant progress has been made over strategic highway issues which have significantly delayed the progression of the application. The revisions to the proposed relief road and junctions with the A5 and A43 have now been accepted in principle by the Highways Agency and the solution is now becoming more aligned with the results of the adopted Towcester Transport Study. Recent meetings have also taken place with Northamptonshire County Council in relation to education and archaeology, identified as being key issues in the determination of the application.
- 3.3 The applicant is now working to a revised programme, which is likely to see the submission of a revised masterplan and application documents in April 2012. On this basis, provided that the transition of planning powers takes place as planned, the application will be transferred to SNC, who will seek to determine the application by December 2012 (resolution to grant in September 2012.) In recognition that SNC will now be the determining local planning authority for the application, the Council who will take more of a lead in the determination process over the coming months. Further discussion will take place with SNC colleagues during November to agree how the application will be managed until the transition process and the role that WNDC takes in this.
- 3.4 Viability remains a key issue, in particular how the scheme will deliver the necessary infrastructure (education, community facilities, affordable housing and leisure facilities) having regards to a limited Section 106 'pot' and the high infrastructure costs of delivering a relief road. This will require difficult decisions to be made over which infrastructure items should be prioritised as part of the Section 106 package and whether a policy compliant scheme can be delivered. To aid this process WNDC will be briefing SNC on the viability work that has been undertaken to date.

3.5 No further discussions have taken place with the representatives for the Jackson-Stopps Land, since WNDC/SNC set out the policy position in relation to their proposals in July.