



## Planning Policy Committee – 19 September 2011

### Development Plan Document update and Revised Four Towns Plan Local Development Scheme

#### Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to inform members of the latest progress in the preparation of Development Plan Documents (DPDs) – Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan (RNOTP), Four Towns Plan and Core Spatial Strategy Review and to seek approval for the revised Four Towns Plan Local Development Scheme.

#### Attachment(s)

Appendix 1: Updated LDS

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Following the recent adoption of the RNOTP by Full Council on 18 July 2011, it is now necessary to set out a revised project programme for the preparation of DPDs with key milestones.
- 1.2 Briefly, this report covers the following:
  - Final stages in the completion of the RNOTP
  - Brief summary of current progress by the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (JPU) with the Core Strategy Review
  - Local Development Scheme (LDS) update – project programme for the Four Towns Plan
  - Progress with evidence base preparation

#### 2.0 Final stages in the completion of the RNOTP

- 2.1 As members will be aware, the RNOTP, East Northamptonshire Council's first "site allocations"/site specific DPD, was adopted on 18 July 2011. This means that the north of the district now enjoys full coverage by a complete and up to date development plan. When combined with the current North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (adopted June 2008), the majority of the geographical area of the district now has a comprehensive and up to date development plan.
- 2.2 The RNOTP covers that part of the district north of the A14, plus Denford, Great Addington, Little Addington and Woodford. It identifies specific sites for housing, public open space, the natural environment, the economy (employment, tourism and town centres) and community uses. It also contains a number of other policies covering affordable housing, biodiversity, design and transport (e.g. car parking standards).
- 2.3 Formal notification of adoption (i.e. "Statement of Adoption") was published on 6 August. This also notified interested parties wishing to challenge the DPD that they may make an application to the High Court under Section 113 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The grounds on which any persons may apply to the High Court are as follows:
  - The document is not within the appropriate power
  - A procedural requirement has not been complied with

Any such application must be made within 6 weeks of the date of the Adoption Statement, i.e. before **Saturday, 17 September 2011**. Meanwhile, officers are working towards publication of the final version of the RNOTP and accompanying Proposals Map. It is anticipated that these will be ready by early October, when members will each receive a copy of the final document.

### **3.0 Brief summary of current progress by the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (JPU) with the Core Strategy Review**

3.1 The JPU, with input from the partner local planning authorities, is currently progressing with the Joint Core Strategy Review, having considered responses from the previous (“Issues”) consultation (February/March 2011). The preferred approach to the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) review will be considered by the Joint Planning Committee on 8 October with consultation mid October/November. It is anticipated that this will be followed by formal consultation on the pre-submission Joint Core Strategy early in 2012.

3.2 The JCS review will cover the period 2011-31. Critically, however, it will cover the majority of DPD strategic and general policies (e.g. green infrastructure design and transport) for the district, other than the detailed site specific policies and proposals (many of these were developed for the RNOTP). The JCS review will include reference to “strategic” sites but the definition and scale of these sites has yet to be formally defined. This means that the range of topics (scope) of the Four Towns Plan should be greatly reduced. Officers from East Northamptonshire Council are involved in the development of the JCS and this ongoing work will reduce the potential for duplication of work when preparing the Four Towns Plan.

3.3 Overall, the JCS review, as it progresses will become increasingly important as it will set the strategic framework for site specific work to be undertaken. Agenda Item 6 provides a more detailed update on the Core Strategy.

### **4.0 LDS update – project programme for the Four Towns Plan**

4.1 Many of the issues previously intended to be covered by the Four Towns Plan may be, instead, covered by the Core Strategy Review. However, from ongoing discussions with JPU officers through the “Wider Team Meetings”, a number of themes/ topic areas have been identified that are of a non-strategic nature, that would not be covered by the emerging Core Strategy Review. These issues would still require policy designations or site allocations in the Four towns Plan:

- Settlement boundaries (if defined on Proposals Map)
- Smaller allocations (below CSS strategic site allocations threshold)
- Town centres – town centre boundaries/ primary shopping areas (or frontages)
- Non-statutory environment designations (local wildlife sites, locally listed buildings etc)
- Local green infrastructure proposals – cycle routes, GI links etc
- Local landscape designations (e.g. Important Open Land)
- Residential character areas
- Gypsy and traveller sites

4.3 Completion of the Four Towns Plan (see below) will follow the completion of the Core Strategy Review. Given that the Core Strategy Review will cover the period 2011-31, the Four Towns Plan will be prepared to conform to the Core Strategy Review rather than the current (2008) Core Strategy.

4.4 Based upon guidance from the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), a draft revision to the LDS timetable has been prepared. This sets out the following key milestones:

- **January – February 2012** – “Scoping” of DPD (Regulation 25 Consultation); i.e. views sought as to what the Four Towns Plan should contain (consultation

to take place once the content of the “preferred options”/ pre-submission Core Strategy Review has been approved)

- **September – October 2012** – Consultation on Four Towns “Options” document
- **March – April 2013** – Pre-Submission Consultation
- **July 2013** – Submission to Secretary of State
- **September 2013** – Pre-Hearing Meeting
- **November – December 2013** – Examination Hearings
- **May 2014** – Adoption

4.5 The detailed update to the LDS timetable is set out in appendix 1.

## **5.0 Progress with evidence base preparation**

5.1 The Four Towns Plan will need to be supported by a number of evidence base documents. Much of this will be prepared “in-house”, or will be sufficiently covered by evidence gathering/survey projects for the Core Strategy Review, e.g. “Urban Structures”, retail study, strategic sports facilities, Cultural Investment Plan, market towns futures, Water Cycle Strategy, Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) etc. Others require the appointment or involvement of consultants, i.e. to carry out specialised work or provide staff mentoring.

5.3 **Sustainability Appraisal/ Strategic Environmental Assessment** – Sustainability Appraisal (SA)/ Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a statutory requirement, alongside the DPD preparation process. Preparation is expected to take place in parallel with the Four Towns Plan process. “Scoping” work, in particular identification of relevant plans, policies and programmes is currently being undertaken by officers. The initial formal scoping stage in the SA process will take place alongside the statutory Regulation 25 consultation.

5.4 **Appropriate Assessment/Habitat Regulations Assessment** – Appropriate Assessment/Habitat Regulations Assessment (AA/HRA), along with SA, is a statutory requirement, alongside the DPD preparation process. Due to the nature of such work, this requires the input of specialist consultants. To this end, Enfusion was appointed in February 2011 to undertake this work. By June, Enfusion had completed draft site characterisation work in respect of the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area (SPA)/Ramsar site, together with a review of relevant plans and programmes. Enfusion will be continuing their work on AA/HRA over the coming 18 months, in parallel with the Four Towns Plan preparation process leading up to the pre-submission consultation stage (March – April 2013).

5.5 **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)** – URS/ Scott Wilson were appointed in November 2010 to complete a Level 1 SFRA. This was completed in August 2011, but is currently awaiting final approval from the Environment Agency. The Level 1 SFRA identified a number of potential development sites in Rushden and Irthlingborough that could require further, more detailed assessment (e.g. modelling work) through a Level 2 SFRA.

5.6 In order to ensure a sound evidence base for the Four Towns Plan, it is proposed that this work be undertaken in autumn 2011. During the bid process for the Level 1 SFRA work, URS/ Scott Wilson provided an indicative costing of approximately **£2000 per site** for a Level 2 SFRA, dependent upon the nature of further modelling or assessment work deemed to be necessary. URS/ Scott Wilson also stated that a potentially difficult Level 2 SFRA for Northampton (including modelling work for no less than six flood defences) cost **£15,000**.

5.7 The Level 1 SFRA identified the following six sites where it was considered that a Level 2 SFRA would be necessary if the council wishes to allocate them in the Four Towns Plan:

1. Land east of Addington Road and adjacent to Diamond Business Centre (Irthlingborough East)
2. Skew Bridge/ Rushden Lakes
3. John Street Car Park/ Alfred Street Junior School, Rushden
4. Wilkinsons/ Lean r/o Rushden Delivery Office/ Car Park Opposite Imperial Court, Rushden
5. Splash Leisure Pool, 64 Station Road, Rushden
6. Land off St Mary's Avenue, Rushden

Of significance, all of the Rushden sites are situated along the same watercourse: **Skew Bridge Dyke**. It should also be noted that the Splash Leisure Pool and Land off St Mary's Avenue (Rushden) represent some of the Council's own land assets, while sites 3, 4 and 5 are immediately adjacent to one another. A Level 2 SFRA would be essential before these could be brought forward for development through the Four Towns Plan.

- 5.8 Given the indicative site by site cost, the maximum cost for a Level 2 SFRA is anticipated to be no more than **£15,000**. It is anticipated that URS/ Scott Wilson will be retained in order to complete the Level 2 SFRA work for the Skew Bridge Dyke (Rushden) and Irthlingborough East.
- 5.9 **Infrastructure Planning** – Various studies and projects have been undertaken at a County (Northamptonshire) or North Northamptonshire level. East Northamptonshire Council has also had further input into this through projects such as the Local Investment Plan (previously considered by the Planning Policy Committee on 22 November 2010) and Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) (Policy and Resources Committee, 8 November 2010). Ongoing input will be required for the Core Strategy Review IDP, and to identify specific local infrastructure requirements for the Four Towns area.
- 5.10 **Housing projects** – A number of studies are emerging at a strategic (Northamptonshire/ North Northamptonshire) level, including updating the North Northamptonshire Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), expected to be completed imminently by the JPU. Other relevant projects currently under preparation include updates to the 2008 Northamptonshire Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) and 2007 North Northamptonshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). Officers are also undertaking more detailed site assessment work for potential housing sites within the Four Towns Plan area.
- 5.11 **Other projects** – Further in-house evidence gathering projects are currently under preparation and it is expected that these will be considered in due course through Working Party meetings. These include:
- Settlement boundaries option paper
  - Settlement hierarchy (rural areas update)
  - Open space study update (in support of emerging Open Space SPD)
  - Employment Land Review update (new and existing employment areas, likely to focus on existing employment areas as significant new employment sites will be identified through the Core Strategy Review)
  - Town Centres boundary definition
  - Town wide Masterplans (Masterplans for Rushden and Raunds undertaken during 2010; Irthlingborough Masterplan expected to be completed during autumn 2011; Higham Ferrers Masterplan expected during 2012)
- 5.12 Overall, it is intended that most evidence base projects will be undertaken in-house, as far as possible. Other evidence base studies are being prepared in support of the Core Strategy Review and in many cases these will also prove sufficient evidence for the Four Towns Plan.
- 5.13 At the Planning Policy Committee meeting on 14 June 2010, it was agreed that before

specialists be appointed to undertake work for the Four Towns Plan, costing estimates would be submitted to members for approval. It should be noted that URS/Scott Wilson have already been appointed to carry out SFRA work, however, the Planning Policy Committee only approved the Level 1 work (on 20 September 2010). In order to provide transparency, members' approval is therefore now sought for the Level 2 work (note: this work is within current budget and is anticipated to be able to commence this Autumn 2011).

- 5.14 Members will also note that the Policy and Resources Committee will consider an agenda item on an initial resource plan for the Four Towns Plan. The resource plan report, to be presented to Policy and Resources on 29 September, will address the detailed work programme/currently known resource issues.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

- 6.1 Now that the RNOTP is adopted, progress may now be made with preparation of the Four Towns Plan. The Four Towns Plan will follow submission and adoption of the Core Strategy Review, so will be prepared in accordance with the revised Core Strategy. It is anticipated that many policies, themes and topics currently covered by DPDs, such as the RNOTP, may be incorporated into the Core Strategy Review (adoption anticipated late 2012/early 2013), however this will not dramatically diminish the work required to prepare other DPDs, such as the Four Towns Plan.

- 6.2 An outline of work required for the Four Towns Plan is set out and members' approval is sought for the updated Local Development Scheme.

- 6.3 Members' approval is also sought for the Level 2 SFRA, in order for it to progress this Autumn 2011.

## **7.0 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 7.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from the proposals.

## **8.0 Legal Implications**

- 8.1 The Four Towns Plan is anticipated to be prepared in accordance with the current 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act and associated Regulations. The development planning system is currently being comprehensively reviewed through the emerging Localism Bill (anticipated to become law by late 2011/early 2012) and National Planning Policy Framework (see Agenda Item 5).

- 8.1 The Localism Bill (if passed) and NPPF (once finalised) will define the form that both the Core Strategy Review and Four Towns Plan will finally take.

## **9.0 Risk Management**

- 9.1 There are no significant risks associated with continuing with the Four Towns Plan. The preparation of a robust evidence base is essential, whatever form the development planning system might take following adoption of the NPPF and/ or implementation of the Localism Bill.

## **10.0 Financial Implications**

- 10.1 This report requires members to approve the Level 2 SFRA work, which is contained within existing budget.

## **11.0 Corporate Outcomes**

- 11.1 The relevant corporate outcomes are:

- Regeneration and Economic Development
- Sustainable Development
- Strong communities
- High quality built environment
- Improved housing
- Strong Strategic Partnerships

## 12.0 Recommendations

12.1 It is requested that the Planning Policy Committee approves:

- The updated LDS – project programme for the Four Towns Plan
- Funding for the Level 2 SFRA work

*(Reasons: to provide an up to date timetable of work, in accordance with current planning requirements; to ensure that the evidence base for the Four Towns Plan is robust; and to enable progress on the Four Towns Plan evidence base to proceed as fast as possible.)*

<b>Legal</b>	Power: Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 and subsequent amendments				
	Other considerations: None				
<b>Background Papers:</b> Planning Policy Committee, 14 June 2010 and 20 September 2010					
<b>Person Originating Report:</b> Michael Burton – Senior Planning Policy Officer Extn: 2221 mburton@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk					
<b>Date:</b> 09 September 2011					
<b>CFO</b>		<b>MO</b>		<b>CX</b>	

(Committee Report Normal Rev. 22)

