



East  
Northamptonshire  
Council

## Planning Policy Committee – 17 March 2014

### Four Towns Plan site specific development plan document – developing policies and proposals, towards preferred options consultation

#### Purpose of report

This report provides details regarding a potential way forward, in view of Members' decision on 12 February 2014 to continue with preparing a Four Towns Plan site specific development plan document for the south of the District. It considers the scope of the emerging Four Towns Plan; i.e. the range of options and site specific proposals that may be taken forward into the Plan, and seeks Members' approval for this.

#### Attachment(s)

Appendix 1 – Themes/ Topics to be covered by North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) Review

Appendix 2 – Example of Themes/ Topics which may be appropriately covered by a Neighbourhood Plan

#### 1.0 Background

- 1.1 On **12 February 2014**, a special meeting of the Council debated options for preparing the next site specific development plan document (DPD) for the District. Council decided that its preference was to continue with the preparation of a Four Towns Plan for the south of the District.
- 1.2 Members should note that the Four Towns Plan cannot be taken forward in advance of the JCS review as it must be in conformity with it. As this has been delayed by the Rushden Lakes decision, Members and officers have been looking to review and update the evidence base for the Four Towns Plan, so that rapid progress with this can be made alongside the JCS review once the Secretary of State has determined the Rushden Lakes scheme.
- 1.3 This report will enable Members to consider the range of themes, topics and policies that the Four Towns Plan may cover.

#### 2.0 Emerging planning policy framework for the Four Towns Plan

- 2.1 Since the representations and responses for the Four Towns Plan Regulation 18 consultation were endorsed by the Planning Policy Committee (13 February 2013), a number of Town and Parish Councils within the Four Towns Plan area are now seeking to prepare their own, Town or Parish level, Neighbourhood Plan. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) explains that: "*Local planning authorities should avoid duplicating planning processes for non-strategic policies where a neighbourhood plan is in preparation*". (paragraph 185)
- 2.2 As at February 2013, Members will recall that the Planning Policy Committee (on behalf of the Council) has already consented the following Neighbourhood Plan areas within the Four Towns Plan area:
  - Chelveston cum Caldecott;
  - Higham Ferrers;

- Raunds; and
- Rushden.

2.3 Furthermore, Irthlingborough Town Council and Stanwick Parish Council are also actively considering whether to prepare Neighbourhood Plans for their respective Parish areas. As such, it is likely that the majority of the Four Towns Plan area may ultimately be covered by Neighbourhood Plans.

2.4 The range and level of detail contained within the Four Towns Plan is therefore greatly dependent upon the scope (range of policies) that will be contained within the emerging JCS review, together with the emerging Neighbourhood Plans. Members are reminded that most of the Four Towns Plan area is likely to be covered by a three-tier development plan, which will consist of:

- North Northamptonshire JCS review (strategic Local Plan policies);
- Four Towns Plan (site specific Local Plan policies);
- Neighbourhood Plans (parish level locally derived policies – optional).

### **3.0 Themes and topics which may be covered by the Four Towns Plan**

3.1 The Regulation 18 consultation highlighted a range of themes that need to be included within the scope of the Four Towns Plan. The principal references, in defining the scope of the Four Towns Plan, are:

- Regulation 18 consultation feedback/representations (Planning Policy Committee, 13 February 2013);
- National planning policy (NPPF) requirements;
- Adopted 2008 CSS policies;
- Emerging JCS review policies;
- East Northamptonshire Corporate Plan;
- Recent planning applications/ appeal cases.

3.2 **Four Towns Plan** – Through considering these references and other relevant evidence, a range of themes and topics that the Four Towns Plan ought to consider is set out below.

Key issue/ concern	Further details – proposed policy content/ topics
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link plan vision and outcomes (objectives) to NPPF Core planning principles (paragraph 17)</li> <li>• Context for Neighbourhood Planning</li> <li>• Duty to cooperate</li> <li>• Viability testing</li> <li>• Positively prepared</li> <li>• Justified</li> <li>• Effective</li> <li>• Consistent with national policy</li> </ul>
Spatial development strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Settlement-specific spatial development strategy (Settlement Hierarchy – rural areas)</li> <li>• Spatial development strategy for "urban outliers"</li> <li>• Settlement boundary criteria</li> <li>• Settlement boundary definition?</li> </ul>
Environment (historic/ built)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town centre regeneration</li> <li>• Rural buildings</li> <li>• Locally listed buildings</li> <li>• Local policies for individual settlements or character areas</li> </ul>
Environment (Green infrastructure – specific proposals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designation of local green spaces (i.e. potential locations for new public open space, allotments, Local Nature Reserves etc)</li> <li>• Protection of existing green spaces/ important open spaces</li> <li>• New cemetery for Rushden/ Higham Ferrers</li> </ul>
Sustainable Urban Extensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rushden East</li> <li>• Irthlingborough West?</li> <li>• Raunds North (Phase 3)?</li> <li>• Alternative directions for growth</li> <li>• Infrastructure requirements, e.g. addressing existing infrastructure deficit</li> </ul>
Design standards/ criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing mix</li> <li>• Housing density</li> <li>• Parking (e.g. residential parking standards)</li> </ul>
Social issues – housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable housing criteria</li> <li>• Gypsy and traveller provision</li> </ul>
Town centres and retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town centre boundaries</li> <li>• Primary shopping areas/ frontages</li> <li>• Mix of uses, e.g. Fast food takeaways</li> <li>• Town centre car parking</li> <li>• Rushden centralised bus stop provision</li> <li>• District/ local/ neighbourhood centres</li> </ul>
Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism</li> <li>• Rural economic development (NPPF paragraph 28)</li> <li>• Existing employment areas</li> <li>• Community assets</li> </ul>

- 3.3 **North Northamptonshire JCS review** – The inclusion of possible policies relating to the Nene Valley Natural Improvement Area (NIA), renewable energy, flood risk management, windfall development and rural exceptions housing have also been considered. However, it is considered that the emerging draft JCS review (August 2012) provides more than sufficient information and detailed policy criteria to cover these issues (see **Appendix 1**).
- 3.4 **Neighbourhood Plans** – The preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan is optional. The range of themes, topics and policies to be covered by a Neighbourhood Plan will vary greatly. These are entirely dependent upon local priorities and issues. As such, unlike the Local Plan, there is no standard template or national requirement for a Neighbourhood Plan to cover any particular matter.
- 3.5 While individual Neighbourhood Plans will differ greatly, Members should note that there is a range of non-strategic matters and issues which a Neighbourhood Plan may seek to address. The themes and topics specified below are considered to lend themselves especially well to be addressed through neighbourhood planning (**Appendix 2**).
- 3.6 Fundamentally, a major issue affecting the preparation of the Four Towns Plan is the exact scope of this, within the overall development plan. For example, some communities (represented by the relevant Town / Parish Council), may seek site specific land allocations through a Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.7 **Case study: settlement boundaries** – Members will be aware that the definition of settlement boundaries raised major concerns throughout the RNOTP process, especially regarding village settlement boundaries. The Council previously expressed a view during the 2011 JCS review “Issues” consultation. This was reported to the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee (JPC); “*East Northamptonshire Council considers that boundaries have restricted growth and the drawing of boundaries is **not** a necessity. The council would instead support a criteria-based approach to make boundary decisions, which would enable planning decisions to be made on a site-by site basis. They suggest that the criteria should be flexible enough to provide for some development, in order to enable villages to be sustainable. Criteria should also enable the different local circumstances to be taken into account*” (JPC, [23 June 2011](#), Item 5, paragraph 3.12).
- 3.8 Assuming that the above statement remains the Council's stated position, it is anticipated that Members would not seek the definition of fixed settlement boundaries (defined on the proposals/ policies map) through the Four Towns Plan. However, if a local community (through an emerging Neighbourhood Plan) decided that this was the preferred approach, then the relevant Town / Parish Council would be able to define the settlement boundary in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.9 **Overview** – In reviewing the potential policy content and topics for inclusion in the Four Towns Plan, consideration must also be given to the range of matters where site specific allocations may/ will be necessary. These must be shown on the adopted policies (or proposals) map. Site specific land allocations may be required, in respect of:
- Settlement boundaries
  - Town centre regeneration
  - Locally listed buildings
  - Local character areas
  - New green spaces (e.g. Rushden/ Higham Ferrers Cemetery proposals)
  - Protected green spaces
  - Sustainable urban extensions
  - Housing land allocations (including mixed use proposals)
  - Gypsy and traveller provision

- Town centre boundaries
- Primary shopping areas/ frontages
- Rushden centralised bus stop provision
- District/ local/ neighbourhood centres
- Tourism
- Rural economic development (NPPF paragraph 28)
- Existing employment areas
- Community assets
- Neighbourhood Plan areas

#### **4.0 Conclusions**

4.1 This report is presented to Members to explain how officers consider that the Four Towns Plan may progress to a Plan. This follows the Regulation 18 statutory consultation, which took place just over 1 year ago. This report illustrates what is considered, overall, to represent an appropriate range of themes and policy topics, as a way forward to progress the Four Towns Plan.

4.2 Members are asked to consider whether the key issues and concerns, with the proposed policy content / topics (paragraph 3.2, above), provide an appropriate draft structure/ framework for preparing the Four Towns Plan.

4.3 Once the Planning Policy Committee has agreed a way forward, the next step will be to use paragraph 3.2 (proposed policy content table) as the basis for preparing the Four Towns preferred options for consultation. This will enable rapid progress to be made in putting together a preferred options document, including draft policies for consultation, later in 2014.

#### **5.0 Equality and Diversity Implications**

5.1 There are no equality and diversity implications.

#### **6.0 Legal Implications**

6.1 The preferred options for the Four Towns Plan will be the second (non-statutory) consultation in the plan process. However, the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 require the preparation of, and consultation upon, the Initial Sustainability Appraisal / SEA report, which must be prepared in parallel with the Four Towns Plan.

#### **7.0 Risk Management**

7.1 Delays to the preparation of the Local Plan will result in the south of the District not having an up-to-date, robust detailed planning policy framework to defend against any unwanted development. However, the existing North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (adopted June 2008) does provide a strategic policy framework for this area, and a small number of “saved” policies from the 1996 District Local Plan still remain in force.

#### **8.0 Financial implications**

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

#### **9.0 Corporate Outcomes**

9.1 The relevant Corporate Outcomes are:

- Good quality of life – prosperous, sustainable, healthy
- Effective partnership working
- Strong community leadership
- Effective management

## 10.0 Recommendation

10.1 Members are asked to endorse the proposed policy content/ topics (paragraph 3.2, above) as an appropriate draft structure/ framework for the Four Towns Plan.

*(Reason – to enable the Council to progress with the preparation of the Four Towns Plan site specific development plan document).*

<b>Legal</b>	Power: <b>Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004</b>				
	Other considerations: National Planning Policy Framework North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (adopted June 2008) North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy review Emerging Draft for Consultation August 2012				
<b>Background Papers:</b> Council (Issues Debate) – Site Specific Development Plan Document Preparation Strategy – 12 February 2014 Planning Policy Committee papers – 13 February 2013 Four Towns Plan Site Specific Development Plan Document Regulation 18 Consultation (November 2012) North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee – 23 June 2011					
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<b>Date: 10 March 2014</b>					
<b>CFO</b>		<b>MO</b>		<b>CX</b>	

(Committee Report Normal Rev. 22)

## APPENDIX 1: THEMES/ TOPICS TO BE COVERED BY NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT CORE STRATEGY (JCS) REVIEW

Key issue/ concern	Further details – proposed policy content/ topics
Draft vision/ outcomes	Latest version agreed by Joint Planning Committee, 31 January 2013 – “ <i>enhanced role for Rushden as the District’s Growth Town</i> ” specified in the latest draft vision
Protecting and enhancing assets	Development management policies, re: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting historic environment</li> <li>• Landscape</li> <li>• Biodiversity and geology</li> <li>• Water environment and flood risk management</li> <li>• Protecting community assets</li> </ul>
Ensuring high quality built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and construction policies</li> <li>• Provision of infrastructure</li> </ul>
Overall spatial strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban and rural areas</li> <li>• Town centres</li> <li>• Rural exceptions housing</li> </ul>
Connections	Strategic transport policies, e.g. key transport projects, HGV parking
Green and blue infrastructure framework	Policies for delivering strategic green infrastructure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nene Valley NIA</li> </ul>
Economic prosperity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguarding/ enhancing existing employment areas</li> <li>• Job creation targets</li> <li>• Strategic employment allocations (e.g. Nene Valley Farm)</li> <li>• Strategic distribution (major warehouse developments)</li> <li>• Rural economic development</li> <li>• Renewable energy (e.g. wind/ solar farms)</li> </ul>
Delivering homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing requirements</li> <li>• Distribution of new homes – indicative strategic sites (&gt;500 dwellings) – Irthlingborough West/ Rushden East</li> <li>• Housing mix/ tenure</li> <li>• Gypsies and travellers – strategic requirement</li> </ul>
Strategic sites	Site specific development criteria

## APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLE OF THEMES/ TOPICS WHICH MAY BE APPROPRIATELY COVERED BY A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Key issue/ concern	Further details – proposed policy content/ topics
Spatial development strategy	Settlement boundaries – detailed criteria/ definition
Environment (historic/ built)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town centre regeneration – specific sites</li> <li>• Rural buildings – e.g. specific rural hubs/ farms</li> <li>• Locally listed buildings</li> <li>• Local historic/ built environment policies for individual settlements or character areas</li> </ul>
Environment (natural)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designation of local green spaces (i.e. potential locations for new public open space, allotments, Local Nature Reserves etc)</li> <li>• Protection of existing green spaces/ important open spaces</li> <li>• New cemetery for Rushden/ Higham Ferrers</li> </ul>
Design standards/ criteria	Housing mix/ density Parking (e.g. residential parking standards)
Social issues – housing	Non-strategic housing land allocations (including mixed use proposals)
Town centres and retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town centre boundaries</li> <li>• Primary shopping areas/ frontages</li> <li>• Mix of uses, e.g. Fast food takeaways</li> <li>• Town centre car parking</li> <li>• District/ local/ neighbourhood centres</li> </ul>
Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism</li> <li>• Existing employment areas</li> <li>• Community Assets (e.g. Assets of Community Value)</li> </ul>