



East  
Northamptonshire  
Council

## Policy & Resources Committee – 16 February 2015

### Garden Community proposal for North Northamptonshire

#### Purpose of report

To seek approval in principle for the Council to enter into new Joint Committee arrangements for the delivery of Sustainable Urban Extensions across North Northamptonshire.

#### Attachment(s)

None

#### 1.0 Background – 'Garden Cities'

1.1 In summer 2014, the government invited expressions of interest in the creation of new 'Garden Cities' throughout the UK. The logic of the initiative is to generate new housing, of a high and sustainable character, which will improve the quality of housing in the UK, whilst also addressing the acute under supply that currently exists. It picks up on the original Garden City movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and some of the objectives of the eco-town proposals under the previous government. The implication of the offer was that government support for major new housing would be focused on designated Garden Cities in future.

#### 2.0 Delivery of consented urban extensions in North Northamptonshire

2.1 There are four major consented urban extensions in North Northamptonshire:

Development	Number of homes
Kettering East	5,500
Priors Hall, Corby / East Northamptonshire	5,100
Stanton Cross, Wellingborough	3,100
Wellingborough North	3,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,700</b>

2.2 During discussions with our North Northamptonshire colleagues about the challenges in delivering those developments, it was felt that they might fit very well with the Garden Cities concept, although it was also felt that a Garden Community would be a more appropriate collective description. Initial discussions, led by Kettering BC, have been held with government ministers and civil servants about that designation.

#### 3.0 Opportunity to bring in funding for Prior's Hall and Rushden East

3.1. As set out above, the focus for the Garden Community proposal is the four consented sites, so there is clearly a potential benefit to Prior's Hall. Rushden East, along with further proposed developments in Corby and elsewhere in North Northamptonshire, provide an opportunity to increase our 'offer' to over 25,000 houses.

3.2 The only Garden Cities designated to date have been at Ebbsfleet and Bicester. Both those designations have brought with them very significant funding, either by way of revenue to enable capacity-building or through capital / loan funding to enable the delivery of infrastructure. There is therefore an opportunity to access similar funding for Prior's Hall and subsequently Rushden East as part of this potential deal with CLG.

- 3.3. The extent of CLG interest in the proposal is evidenced by the visit on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February by Peter Schofield, Director-General (the most senior civil servant) of CLG, for a tour of the consented sites listed in 2.1 above. The Leader and Chief Executive attended the visit to Prior's Hall, and ensured that Mr Schofield is aware of this wider opportunity.

#### **4.0 Governance Arrangements**

- 4.1 The government will prescribe the governance arrangements. In the case of the two Garden Cities, the governance mechanism is a Development Corporation, such as that which operated in West Northamptonshire in recent years. There is a significant downside to this arrangement, which is that the local authorities are required to cede certain of their planning powers to it and therefore have very limited control and influence over its decisions.
- 4.2 The proposal to CLG in relation to the North Northamptonshire Garden Community is that a Joint Committee arrangement would provide the government with the confidence it needs as regards the guardianship of public finances. We have emphasised the longstanding and successful Joint Planning Committee (JPC) arrangements already in place, along with our collaboration on policy-making through the Joint Planning Unit.
- 4.3 While relations within the JPC have been strained at times, as is inevitable with any partnership, it has stood the test of time and has demonstrated its effectiveness by delivering the first Joint Core Strategy in the country and now in having agreed a revised strategy, which is currently out for consultation. It is felt that this track record provides a strong basis for making the case to CLG that a similar Joint Committee and Joint Delivery Unit arrangements would be the best way of delivering the urban extensions in North Northamptonshire.
- 4.4 It is proposed that a new Joint Committee and Joint Delivery Unit be created because the purpose of the arrangements is different – delivering consented housing rather than developing and adopting policy – and therefore the partners would need to be different and the skills needed in the delivery unit would be different from those that currently exist in the existing JPU.
- 4.5 An important component of the proposed Joint Committee's remit would be that it does not get involved in individual applications being considered by any of the partner authorities, whose sovereignty over such matters would remain intact.
- 4.6 As ever, the devil will be in the detail should CLG approve this governance mechanism. Detailed discussions will need to take place at the time to confirm exactly how it would operate.

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

- 5.1 There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this proposal.

#### **6.0 Legal Implications**

- 6.1 If the Joint Committee proposal is accepted by the government, it is probable that a Statutory Instrument would be required to give that Committee a legal basis.

#### **7.0 Risk Management**

- 7.1 Rushden East is at an early stage in its development; master planning has not yet been undertaken and it is far too early to assess its overall viability or establish the infrastructure requirements.

7.2 However, experience on all of the consented urban extensions and in development generally is that developers are seeking to renegotiate S106 agreements including, in some cases, arguing that providing any affordable housing at all makes their schemes unviable. It may well be the case that similar issues arise on Rushden east in due course, so any arrangement that has the potential to improve viability significantly has to be welcomed.

7.3 On the other hand, there are risks associated with entering into new Joint Committee arrangements. We, and every other partner, would need to be sure that our interests were protected and that our ability to shape the development beyond the initial planning approval was not compromised. These risks will need to be addressed during the more detailed discussions that will follow should CLG approve the concept.

## **8.0 Resource and Financial Implications**

8.1. The proposed Joint Delivery Unit would require appropriately-skilled and qualified staff resources and would need to be adequately funded. Part of the proposal is that the government should provide capacity funding for this purpose, so there are no financial implications at this stage.

## **9.0 Constitutional Implications**

9.1 There are no constitutional implications arising from the proposal at this stage. However, full Council will need to decide at a later date, should CLG approval be received and once further discussions have taken place as to the precise mechanics of the joint arrangements, whether it wishes to participate in them.

## **10.0 Corporate Outcomes**

10.1 The proposal will help to deliver the following Corporate Outcomes:

- Good Value for Money – by maximising the Council's ability to bring in government funding to support the delivery of Rushden East
- Effective Partnership Working – by extending the existing partnership working on strategic planning matters with North Northamptonshire.

## **11.0 Recommendation**

11.1 It is recommended that:

a) approval **in principle** be given:

- to support the potential designation of an area of North Northamptonshire including Prior's Hall and Rushden East as a Garden Community;
- for the Council to participate in the establishment of a Joint Delivery Committee and a Joint Delivery unit, in both of which **some** of the Council's functions and responsibilities **may** be vested, **subject to** satisfactory arrangements being agreed with CLG in respect of capacity funding, infrastructure support and other detailed matters.

and that:

b) it be noted that a further report will be submitted for consideration in due course when discussions with CLG have progressed.

*[Reason: to enable the Council to participate in discussions with a view to bringing in significant government funding to facilitate the delivery of urban extensions at Prior's Hall and Rushden East]*

<b>Legal</b>	Power:				
	Other considerations:				
<b>Background Papers:</b>					
<b>Person Originating Report:</b> David Oliver, Chief Executive ☎ 01832 742105 ✉ doliver@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk					
<b>Date: 4 February 2015</b>					
<b>CFO</b>		<b>MO</b> 5/2/15	<i>S. Matthews</i>	<b>CX</b> 5/2/15	<i>D. Oliver</i>