

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 21 April 2009

PRESENT: Councillor Tony Woods (Chair); Councillor Chris Millar (Deputy Chair); Councillors Weny Amos, Richard Church, Stephen Clarke, Keith Davies, Jane Hollis, Chris Over, Andre Gonzales de Savage, Ben Smith, John Townsend, Paul Varnsvery and Mr David Dickinson.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Sandra Barnes, Jim Bass, Daniel Cribbin and Ken Melling.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 FEBRUARY 2009

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint Planning Committee held on 17 February 2009 were signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1. Councillors Church, Miller, Smith and Woods declared personal interests in Item 5, "Working Draft Spatial Portrait, Vision and Objectives", insofar as the discussion might relate to the WNDC, as Board members of that organisation.
2. That Mr D Dickinson declared a personal interest in Item 5, "Working Draft Spatial Portrait, Vision and Objectives", insofar as the discussion might involve WNDC of which he was a employee.
3. Councillor Over declared a personal interest in Item 5, "Working Draft Spatial Portrait, Vision and Objectives", insofar as the discussion might relate to the ICON Board of which he was a member.
4. County Councillor De Savage declared a personal interest in Item 5, "Working Draft Spatial Portrait, Vision and Objectives", insofar as any discussion might relate to the Groundworks Trust of which he was a member.
5. County Councillor Smith declared a personal interest in Item 5, "Working Draft Spatial Portrait, Vision and Objectives", insofar as any discussion may relate to the Anglian Flood Defence Board of which he was a member.

4. MATTERS OF URGENCY

None.

5. WORKING DRAFT SPATIAL PORTRAIT, VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The Interim Head of the JPU submitted a report that sought approval to use the Spatial Portrait, Vision and Objectives for inclusion in the Joint Core Strategy up to the production of

the emergent strategy. She referred to the two appendices, which were working documents, and which set out a spatial portrait and emergent spatial vision respectively. She reminded Members that these were high level strategic documents and should not refer to finer detail; they would need to reinforce the links with the University of Northampton; and to include the latest information of national indicators. She advised that these documents would need to be made more concise and strategic and the number of objectives reduced.

A discussion on Appendix 1, the West Northamptonshire Spatial Portrait, ensued it being noted:

- That although the figures for jobs had been taken from the 2005 RSS8 this was considered to be too low and might lead to a dormitory town situation and that more recent evidence from SNEAP indicated the need for jobs to be in excess of fifty thousand. The need for compliance with the RSS was an issue and the number of jobs would need further consideration.
- Where lists of places were shown, and deemed necessary, these should be clarified as examples as opposed to being assumed to be inclusive.
- That the reference to canals be amended to include “canal corridors” so as to refer to the canals themselves, towpaths and any immediate hinterland.
- That it be made clear that it is considered that there is an existing infrastructure deficit even before the effects of any growth are taken into account.

A discussion ensued upon Appendix 2, Emerging Spatial Vision, it being particularly noted:

- That the Spatial Objectives needed to underpin the Vision and that impact on other objectives needed to be appreciated.
- Further consideration needed to be given to including a list of places requiring regeneration and, if required, Northampton East to be identified.
- That the Emerging Spatial Vision must be a high level strategic document where layers of documentation beneath it and other DPDs would set out details.
- That the evidence base for the places named in paragraph 8 be confirmed.

RESOLVED: That subject to the amendments as accepted, the draft Working Spatial Portrait, Vision and Objectives be agreed with further consideration being given to those issues identified.

6. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Interim Head of the JPU submitted a report and noted in paragraph 1.4 the references to “preferred strategy” should read “emergent strategy”. She highlighted paragraph 1.17, Northamptonshire Strategic Employment Land Assessment and slippage, reported by the consultants contracted by NEL, and paragraph 1.20, West Northamptonshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment, and ongoing discussion as to the need for primary research. She informed Members that recent Counsel’s advice was that the evidence base generally speaking was robust.

Comment was noted that the CACI report on the West Northamptonshire Retail Study was now available online and was clear in its conclusions.

The Interim Head of the JPU referred to the key milestone of the programme set out in Appendix 1 of the report and the Chair referred to discussions at the Business Sub-Group in respect of the planned meeting of the Joint Committee on 2 June 2009 to consider for approval the emergent strategy for the sole purpose of public consultation. The Business Sub-Group had concluded that as the report was to require approval for consultation only and so as to avoid any unnecessary delay in the publication of the pre-submission Joint Core Strategy in November 2009 that the meeting on 2 June 2009 should go ahead. The Interim Head of the JPU confirmed that the Joint Committee would be asked to approve an emerging strategy that would set out options and indicate preferred approaches as supported by the evidence base. This would comply fully with requirements of Regulation 25. It was also noted that two workshops would be held before the proposed meeting on 2 June for members to discuss and understand the criteria for the selection of strategic sites and the options for consideration.

Concern was expressed that agreeing a preferred approach to the locations of development growth even for the purpose of consultation was likely to be politically controversial. Further concern was made that policy positions should not be perceived to have been agreed ahead of the County Council elections or for these matters to become a focus for electioneering.

The Director of Planning and Regeneration commented that any rescheduling of the Joint Committee meeting to a date after 2 June 2009 would have consequences for the Programme, and place at risk the delivery of the LDS timetable. Officers assured Members that they would seek to minimise any impact on the programme. The importance of good Member attendance at the arranged workshops and positive outcomes from those workshops before the next Joint Planning Committee meeting was even more critical.

The Joint Planning Committee discussed the issues. Consequences and risks. A view was advanced by Councillor Church that the meeting on 2 June should go ahead as originally discussed at the Business Sub- Group. The majority of Members did not favour such an approach.

RESOLVED: That the proposed meeting of the Joint Planning Committee on 2 June 2009 be rescheduled to 25 June 2009 by virtue of the exceptional circumstances caused by the County Council elections on 4 June 2009.

7. CONSULTATION STRATEGY

The Interim Head of the JPU submitted a report and made particular reference to paragraph 1.4.1 in terms of the identification of key audiences and paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7 in terms of engagement with Councillors. It was noted there would be regular briefings for Councillors and all stakeholder groups.

Comment was made that communication was very important and it was noted that each of the constituent authorities' communications teams were working alongside the JPU to ensure timely and consistency of the public message.

A discussion ensued in respect of the likely timing of the Inspector's decision on the Daventry appeals and that it may coincide with the submission of the Joint Core Strategy in March 2010 and its possible impact and how it might be dealt with.

RESOLVED: That the Consultation and Communication Strategy and Consultation Action Plan be agreed in principle.

8. RISK REGISTER UPDATE

The Interim Head of the JPU submitted a report and commented that an appointment of a Head of the JPU had not been made. The post would be re-advertised with the assistance of consultants and a targeted search process. However, successful appointments had been made to the positions of DPD Team Leader and Senior Planner. It was also noted that some of the people employed on a temporary basis were also applying for permanent positions.

The Interim Head of the JPU also drew attention to the issues raised in the discussion on the evidence base in respect of the Northamptonshire Strategic Employment Land Assessment and the slippage reported by the consultants contracted by NEL. Every effort was being made by NEL's project officer to accelerate the work. Mr Dickinson offered to speak to NEL direct which was accepted.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 20.20 hours