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PLANNING BRIEFING - MAY 2009

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT PLANNING UNIT

Update on Development Plan Documents

Introduction from the Interim Head of the Joint Planning Unit: You will no doubt be aware that things have been quiet from the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (WN JPU) for a little while. Work has however been continuing and progress is being made.

You will receive briefings from your officers at the partner authorities (Northampton Borough, Daventry District and South Northamptonshire Councils) or West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) and the Northamptonshire County Council, and you can view progress on the Joint Planning Unit's website www.westnorthamptonshire.jpu.org.

In addition, to reinforce what is already happening, we will publish a regular briefing note (this is the first one) to provide you with updates on progress and provide notice of forthcoming meetings, workshops and decisions.

A 'new' statutory Committee - background refresh

The inaugural meeting of the Joint Strategic Planning Committee (JSPC) was held on 21 October 2008. This Committee meets in public and holds the statutory **policy-making** powers, under the planning acts, for all policy making planning matters in Northampton Borough, Daventry District and South Northamptonshire Councils. It does not deal with planning applications.

One of the first decisions taken by the JSPC was the approval of a new Local Development Scheme (the plan making timetable) in October 2008, which was then published in November 2008. This Local Development Scheme sets out descriptions of the policy documents that will form the Development Plan and their delivery timetables.

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This JSPC is made up of Councillors from Northampton Borough, Daventry District, South Northamptonshire Council, and Northamptonshire County Council. These Councillors have voting rights on the Committee. There are also some official observers to the Committee from West Northamptonshire Development Corporation, Wellingborough Council and a labour party representative - but they do not hold voting rights. The four partner organisations and observers are working closely to ensure that the future strategic planning of the area is compliant with the Regional Spatial Strategy, focused on the needs and aspirations of West Northamptonshire and is sound and coherent.

The JSPC Committee Agenda, Reports and Minutes can all be found on the WN JPU website www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org.

A new 'Spatial' Plan

The Development Plan (under the old system - the Local Plan) is produced under the 'Local Development Framework (LDF)'. The LDF is designed to ensure that plans are produced altogether as a suite of documents, rather than in isolation.

The Development Plan is being produced jointly by Northampton Borough, Daventry District, South Northamptonshire Councils, and Northamptonshire County Council. There is also close collaboration with WNDC and many other partners.

The new Development Plans aim to concern themselves with a wide range of matters - this is greater than just the use of land which was previously dealt with under the Local Plan system. Importantly, Development Plans are accompanied by a delivery plan - this should ensure that the facilities and infrastructure required for development, actually happens.

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Next Steps

In January 2009, we re-consulted everyone on our database asking for any further thoughts on the content of the Joint Core Strategy. We had to carry out this additional consultation because there were some changes to government regulations with respect to plan making - called Regulation 25.

Since the original Issues and Options paper was published in 2007, a lot of necessary evidential material has been collected and background studies completed. These are listed in the 'Evidence' section below.

Officers from the partnership have met and reviewed the evidence that supports the development of the approach to managing regeneration and growth in West Northamptonshire. They are engaging with statutory service and infrastructure providers such as the Police, Environment Agency and Highways Agency to ensure the plan is robust and deliverable. The Joint Planning Unit is also working with Officers from a range of Services in each Council to endeavour to join up programmes and strategies. Progress is reported regularly to the Joint Strategic Planning Committee.

Joint Planning Unit Officers are currently working to produce an 'Emergent Strategy' for the future of West Northamptonshire's towns and countryside to the year 2026. This document will consider all of the realistic strategic options for growth to meet the scale of new development laid down by the Regional Spatial Strategy. The working objectives and vision for the area were published in papers for the JSPC on 21 April 2009.

The JSPC will be considering the draft emerging plan for West Northamptonshire in early July 2009 and subject to approval it will be **published for public consultation**. Included in the 'Emergent Strategy' will be the emerging preferred locations for future strategic growth in the area and those which have, at this time, been rejected, together with the reasons for the choices made.

There will be briefing meetings held with Councillors to inform them of the content and process which the Emergent Strategy will follow.

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Evidence Studies

There is a huge amount of technical evidence being gathered to use in developing the Plan. However, some key studies have recently been completed and are listed below. You can find these on the WN JPU website www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org by following the link to Documents and then Evidence Base.

- **West Northamptonshire Retail Study**

The 'West Northamptonshire Retail Study' has been carried out for the whole of West Northamptonshire. It is a background evidence-based document, which will inform the Local Development Framework.

The Retail Study includes an analysis of current and future patterns of retail spending; a performance review of the network of retail centres; future retail patterns, an assessment of the comparison and convenience goods capacity, and confirms the prime importance of Northampton Town Centre for new retail investment.

- **Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study**

This study provides a sensitivity analysis of the landscape within, and surrounding Northampton. It also analyses and defines the existing landscape and green infrastructure assets and highlights opportunities at a strategic level for both new and existing communities within and surrounding Northampton.

- **West Northamptonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) - Level 1**

The Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) has been carried out for the whole of West Northamptonshire and provides the background evidence-base, which will inform the Local Development Framework.

The report includes a series of maps, and defines areas of flooding within West Northamptonshire according to various levels of risk and the source of flooding. The SFRA is required by Central Government Guidance (PPS25 Development and Flood Risk).

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- **West Northamptonshire Sports Facilities Strategy**

The Sports Facilities Strategy for West Northamptonshire has been prepared by Syzygy Leisure, on behalf of the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit. It is a background evidence-based document, which will inform the Local Development Framework.

The Strategy provides information about the current provision levels of sports facilities such as: tennis courts, cricket pitches, swimming pools, sports halls etc. It also identifies any deficiencies and provides a plan for developing sports facilities in the future, whilst taking into account the growth proposed for West Northamptonshire.

Staffing

Karen Moore joined the Joint Planning Unit from Addison & Associates to act as Interim Head, until a permanent member of staff is appointed. The interview for the post of 'Head of Unit' has been held, but no appointment has been made. All partners agree that 'the right person' must be appointed and a new recruitment process has commenced.

The Joint Strategic Planning Committee approved a new structure for the unit in December 2008. A recruitment process is underway to fulfil the remaining permanent appointments. In the meantime, consultants are being used to reinforce the team and keep the Local Development Scheme to timetable.

The Plan Programme

The programme of work for the plan was set, through the approved Local Development Scheme, and the milestones are outlined below. Meeting these milestones is a key requirement of Government and represents a major challenge to the members of the Joint Strategic Planning Committee and officers. All partners remain committed to achieving the Local Development Scheme.

A full consultation and communications plan is to be published shortly. This will outline the key times and dates that the unit is consulting with the public and providing briefings to all Councillors on the emerging work.

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Key Dates for the Future

District / Borough Councillors Emergent Strategy Briefing Workshops - 15 & 16 June 2009

Monday 6 July 2009 - Joint Strategic Planning Committee - Emergent Strategy to JSPC for approval for consultation

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