

# Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1

PARTNERSHIPS, REGENERATION,  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT  
AND SAFETY

West Northamptonshire  
Emergent Joint Core Strategy

Published for Consultation July 2009



## Scrutiny of the WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE EMERGENT JOINT CORE STRATEGY

September 2009



**NORTHAMPTON**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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## Foreword

Cabinet, at its July 2009 meeting, resolved that the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy be referred to Overview and Scrutiny for immediate scrutiny with a view to bringing a report to full Council in September 2009. Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 agreed to this request and invited all Members of the Council to have an input into the Review, which was held over three meetings during August 2009.

The purpose of the Review is to report to full Council with recommendations for Northampton Borough Council's formal response to the consultation on the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy by the West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee.

I must emphasise that due to the short timescale available to undertake this Review, the Committee acknowledged that it could not undertake a full comprehensive piece of scrutiny work and therefore identified four key issues contained in the Emergent Joint Core Strategy to be examined. It was acknowledged that these could only be examined at a very strategic level.

In the short time available to us I hope the findings and recommendations we have established are beneficial to full Council in respect of Northampton Borough Council's formal response to the consultation on the Emergent Joint Core Strategy.

I would like to thank all those people acknowledged below who gave up their time and contributed to this Review.



*AS Simpson*

### **Councillor Andrew Simpson**

Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

### **Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review: -**

- Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Regeneration, Partnerships, Community Safety and Engagement) who sat with me on this Review
- Sue Bridge, Head of Planning, and Paul Lewin, Planning and Conservation Manager, Northampton Borough Council, for providing technical information to the Committee
- Councillor Richard Church (Portfolio Holder, Planning and Regeneration) for providing evidence to inform the Review
- Jennifer Dean, Principle Planning Officer, Environment Agency, for providing evidence to inform the Review
- Claire Berry, Team Leader, Joint Planning Unit, and AJ Gray, Consultation Officer, for providing evidence to inform the Review
- Mr Roger Kingston, (Northants Residents' Alliance), Mrs Patricia Ann Jones, Bob Jones (Churches Office for New Communities), Bob Convery, Rod Sellers (Hunsbury and Collingtree Residents' Alliance), Owen Coop (Collingtree Park Residents' Association), Paul Hobden, Mr Major and Christopher Davidge for submitting evidence to inform the Review
- Councillor Tony Woods, Leader of the Council, for submitting both verbal and written evidence to the Review
- Councillors Malcolm Mildren, Paul Varnsberry, Scott Collins, Councillor Andrew Simpson and Brian Hoare for submitting evidence to the Review

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee One (Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement) undertook a Review of the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Review is to recommend to full Council, Northampton Borough Council's formal response to the consultation on the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy.
- 1.3 Due to the short timescale available to undertake this Review, the Committee acknowledged that it could not undertake a full Comprehensive piece of work and therefore identified four key issues contained in the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy to be examined:-
  - The Consultation Process
  - Visions/Options
  - Impact on Northampton
    - Sustainable urban growth
    - Regeneration
  - Delivery of Infrastructure

## CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Committee established that: -

- That the Committee had very limited time to undertake a full, comprehensive Scrutiny Review. Given that it had just three meetings allocated, it was agreed that four key issues of the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy would be investigated: -
  - The Consultation Process
  - Vision/Options
  - Impact on Northampton
    - Sustainable urban growth
    - Regeneration
  - Delivery of Infrastructure
- It was agreed that the Council should undertake further scrutiny work at the Pre- Submission stage of the Joint Core Strategy.
- The Council has in the past, and should continue to question the validity of the Government's growth figures that are being imposed on Northampton as part of the Regional Spatial Strategy. In particular in relation to:
  - the number of houses being proposed being in excess of what Northampton requires to meet local needs

- the target number of houses being undeliverable in the timescales provided
- From the evidence gathered by the Committee it is apparent that there is currently an excess of flatted accommodation in the town and that no further such accommodation is required, there is, however, a need for more houses. The Committee therefore feels that the figure of 35% for affordable housing is still appropriate.

### **The Consultation Process**

- That the consultation process has been inadequate to fully engage with people because of the fixed 6-week period and it being held over the summer holiday period.
- The Committee strongly believes that the six-week consultation period was inadequate and would have recommended that the period should be extended. The Committee therefore considered that further consultation periods avoid key holiday periods. It also recommends that exhibitions are held at times when working people can also attend and that use is made of fixed exhibitions at key venues in the town such as The Grosvenor Centre. The Committee further recommends that the next stages of consultation - Pre Submission and Submission be extended as they are over public holidays, namely Christmas and Easter.
- It was concluded that the Emergent Joint Core Strategy contained jargon and use of plain English should be recommended in future consultation documents.
- It would be beneficial to seek confirmation regarding the progress of Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk for Northampton be ascertained before a full response to the Consultation is given.
- The Committee acknowledged that the lack of an Equality Impact Assessment for the Emergent Joint Core Strategy could mean that the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy might have an unintended adverse impact on any particular sector of the community.

### **Vision/Options**

- The Spatial Vision – Where we want to be - contained in the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy has evolved over many years and covered the period up to 2026. Strategic objectives by which the four Local Authorities (Northampton, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley) would deliver that Vision are also contained in the document. The Committee notes that as an aspirational Vision it reflects what the Council would like to see for the town.
- Following consideration of Option A and Option B in relation to the distribution of development, the Committee concluded that: -

- Option B concentrates on developments in and around existing settlements. The Joint Strategic Planning Committee chose Option B as the preferred option for reasons as set out on page 18 of the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy. This approach would also include urban development sites in Northampton.
- Existing un-built Local Plan Allocations are highlighted in blue on the plans contained in the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.
- Brownfield sites should be completed first before consideration is given to development on Greenfield sites.
- Option B – was supported as development can be focused in a small number of large development areas

### **Impact on Northampton**

- The Emergent Joint Core Strategy relates to an area defined as West Northamptonshire and focuses particularly on Northampton as the county town, but there is no evidence that the proposals relate to the whole of Northamptonshire. The Emergent Joint Core Strategy needs to sit alongside plans for the rest of the County and this needs to be evidenced.
- The Committee noted that the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy in relation to Daventry, Towcester and Brackley is a countywide issue and recommends it should be referred to the Northamptonshire Countywide Scrutiny Forum for review.
- Affordable housing should also take into consideration provision for older people. There is a requirement for a more defined rationale of what denotes affordable, possibly the need for a local definition. The current criteria set for affordable housing is very broad and requires challenging.
- There is a need to find a location for growth that will sustain the infrastructure. It is accepted that growth needs to happen but Policies must be in place that allow growth but not under Developers' terms.
- The Committee confirmed the need to know the types of houses proposed for development, together with the numbers before consideration can be given to the location of developments. Such developments should be built on Brownfield sites before consideration is given to building on Greenfield sites.
- The Committee agreed that comment cannot be made on each individual proposed sustainable urban growth areas as there is inadequate detail concerning the infrastructure required to support these areas. There is also little information about how these growth areas relate to the town centre in terms of transport links and regeneration initiatives.
- 5,400 housing units are proposed for Northampton North – 50% of which will be family accommodation. The figures indication there could be a lot of children to be educated in two or three Primary Schools and a Secondary School, therefore, there is a query regarding the adequacy of the proposed

infrastructure. This is one example within the Strategy, which can be seen in other proposed growth areas.

- Based on the evidenced provided by the Environment Agency the Committee shared residents' concerns regarding flood risks.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations.

- 1) That full Council be informed that the Committee did not have adequate time to undertake a full, comprehensive Scrutiny Review into this issue and it is recommended that further scrutiny work is conducted as the Strategy develops.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Regeneration, Planning, Community Engagement and Safety) recommends to full Council that Northampton Borough Council's response to the consultation of the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy contains the following comments and observations: -

For ease of delivery, the following series of comments and observations are grouped in specific areas: -

### **The Consultation Process**

- 2) Confirmation regarding the progress of Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk for Northampton be ascertained before a full response to the areas of growth is given.
- 3) That disappointment is expressed that the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy contains jargon and plain English should be used in the next version.
- 4) The six-week consultation period was inadequate, especially as it took place over the summer holidays.
- 5) That it be recommended that the next stages of consultation - Pre Submission and Submission be extended as they are over public holidays, namely Christmas and Easter.
- 6) That an Equality Impact Assessment of the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy is carried out by the JPU and any actions arising out of this are linked.
- 7) That the pre-submission consultation stage of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy be referred to the Northamptonshire Countywide Scrutiny Forum for review.

### **Vision/Options**

- 8) That the Council agrees with the Vision as set out in the Emergent Joint Core Strategy.



- 9) That Option B – *it can be focused in a small number of large development areas* - be the preferred Option.

### **Impact on Northampton**

- 10) The Council has in the past and should continue to challenge the validity of the Government's growth figures that are being imposed on Northampton as part of the Regional Spatial Strategy. In particular in relation to:
- the number of houses being proposed being in excess of what Northampton requires to meet local needs
  - the target number of houses being undeliverable in the timescales provided
- 11) The figure of 35% for affordable housing is still appropriate but there is a need for more houses rather than additional flatted accommodation, subject to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.
- 12) That affordable housing should also take into consideration provision for older people and those with disabilities.
- 13) The Council needs to be satisfied that a robust definition of affordable housing is in place.
- 14) That developments on Brownfield sites should be completed first before development on Greenfield sites.
- 15) It is accepted that growth needs to happen but Policies must be in place that allows growth provided that the infrastructure is delivered in a timely manner. It will be necessary to ensure that Policies are in place to require developers to make the necessary contribution to the cost of providing infrastructure.
- 16) That It must be clear within the Joint Core Strategy that the planned development growth will not be allowed without all the necessary infrastructure. Policies within the Joint Core Strategy should identify the key pieces of infrastructure required for each growth location
- 17) That all proposed development sites should have clear access to the town centre, and detail is required as to how this would be achieved.
- 18) The Council cannot comment at this stage on each individual proposed area for development or growth, as there is not enough infrastructure detail provided in the Plan for each site.
- 19) The overall aims and objectives for transport are not contained in the Emergent Joint Core Strategy and this is a key issue for the plan to address.
- 20) That the Council agrees with the comments of the Environment Agency that developments should avoid flood risk areas and the proper mitigation be put in place.

- 21) That the Council needs to ensure that it fulfils its responsibilities regarding preventing flood risks.

### **Delivery of Infrastructure**

- 22) That the Council comments that the Joint Core Strategy must provide a clear and robust framework for infrastructure, including transport, that allows the Central Area Action Plan to be delivered.
- 23) The Joint Core Strategy should provide a policy framework to enable the provision of employment opportunities within the town centre so that employment growth is achieved. These policies must ensure that employment growth is aligned to the Central Area Action Plan.
- 24) The Joint Core Strategy must provide a clear policy framework to ensure that the Council's strategy for the regeneration of Northampton as set out the Economic Regeneration Strategy 2008 – 2026 is deliverable, not only in so far as these relate to the Central Area Action Plan but also for the rest of the town, including those areas for regeneration identified in the EJCS.
- 25) That any regeneration of existing areas must be undertaken with the full involvement of the Community.

### **Further Scrutiny**

- 26) That Overview and Scrutiny undertakes further Scrutiny work at the Pre-Submission stage of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.

## **Northampton Borough Council**

### **Report of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement)**

#### **Consultation – West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy**

## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement) undertook a Review of the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Review is to recommend to full Council, Northampton Borough Council's formal response to the consultation on the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy.

## **2. Context and Background**

- 2.1 Cabinet resolved that the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy be referred to Overview and Scrutiny for immediate scrutiny with a view to bringing a report to full Council in September 2009. Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 agreed to this request and invited all Members of the Council to have an input into the Review, which was held over three meetings during August 2009.
- 2.2 Due to the short timescale available to undertake this Review, the Committee acknowledged that it could not undertake a full comprehensive piece of scrutiny work and therefore identified four key issues contained in the Emergent Joint Core Strategy to be examined. It was acknowledged that these could only be examined on a very strategic level: -
  - The Consultation Process
  - Visions/Options
  - Impact on Northampton
    - Sustainable urban growth
    - Regeneration
  - Delivery of Infrastructure
- 2.3 It is a requirement for a sound Core Strategy to demonstrate how who will deliver the Vision, Objectives and Strategy for the area, and when.
- 2.4 The Core Strategy must therefore:
  - Be based on sound infrastructure delivery planning particularly in the early years with longer-term infrastructure being seen to

be reasonable in its ambition with a more pragmatic test of delivery.

- Ensure that partners who are essential to the delivery of the plan are signed up to it. The plan should identify who is intended to implement the different elements of the Strategy.
- Be coherent with the plans of neighbouring authorities and compliant with the regional plan.

2.5 The nature of infrastructure delivery planning, particularly given the amount of growth planned for West Northamptonshire, requires that the areas, which are to take the most growth, are identified so that the necessary infrastructure can be identified, costed, programmed and the delivery partner identified. It is also necessary as part of this process to prioritise the areas of growth, particularly what can be delivered early, and their infrastructure delivery. For example, the development of Area A may deliver infrastructure components to allow the development of Area B.

2.6 It is clear is that without a plan, creating an infrastructure programme, and securing funding from private and public investment necessary to deliver the growth required is simply not possible. Without a plan the risk of 'planning by appeal' increases. What must be equally clear within the plan is that the planned development growth will not be allowed without all necessary infrastructure. Policies within the plan will identify the key pieces of infrastructure required for each growth location.

## **2.7 Council's Corporate Priorities**

2.7.1 This Review links to the Council's corporate priorities as it demonstrates further working with the community, partnership working and being citizen focussed.

## **3. Evidence Collection**

3.1. In scoping this Review it was decided that evidence would be collected from a variety of sources: -

### **3.2 Portfolio Holder (Planning and Regeneration)**

3.2.1 Councillor Richard Church, the Portfolio Holder (Planning and Regeneration), attended the meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2009 and provided evidence to inform the Review.

#### **3.2.2 Key points of evidence**

- The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council could challenge the growth figures contained in the Spatial Strategy. This Authority has

carried out a Housing Needs Assessment that is currently being revised and updated and will reflect the current position. The Assessment is looking at issues such as whether the figure of 35% for affordable housing is still appropriate.

- Current growth figures are unlikely to be met. Growth figures as indicated will need to be referred to in relation to the consultation for the submission of the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.
- Should Northampton's population stay static, the town would need 10% more homes equating to 8,000 housing units. Population growth across the country is estimated at 1 – 2%, if this were the case, more housing units would be required in addition to the 8,000 housing units.
- Growth should take place on Brownfield sites as set out in the Vision. 'Anonymous' sites that use the M1 as its high street are not wanted; the aim is to create new developments that feel part of Northampton. This is why the Emergent Joint Core Strategy does not look at creating development South of the motorway or the possibility of a 'new town'.
- If there is no infrastructure then there should be no development. If there is no plan, or no plan that meets the Government growth targets then a developer, on being refused planning permission would be able to win at an Appeal by demonstrating that the Council had failed to provide for the housing required. As a consequence growth would happen in an unplanned way without the planned infrastructure to support that growth.
- Consultation was undertaken around eighteen months ago on the issues and options regarding the growth agenda. Consultation on the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy is a six-week period. All of this process is detailed in the Local Development Scheme. In order to meet Government's deadlines by submitting the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy by November 2009, the consultation had to run over the summer months. The Joint Planning Unit (JPU) has confirmed that it would receive comments after the September deadline.

### **3.3 Team Leader, Joint Planning Unit (JPU)**

- 3.3.1 The Team Leader, Joint Planning Unit (JPU), attended the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2009 and was asked to provide details of the consultation process that the JPU is hosting in relation to the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.

### 3.3.2 Key points of evidence

- A report, which was provided to the West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee in April 2009 listing all components of the consultation process, was circulated. It provides an outline of the strategic approach towards consultation with the required outcome of shaping a robust and deliverable Plan, consulting on key partners which included: -
- Key audiences as set out in the Statement of Community Involvement:
  - 
  - Joint Strategic Planning Committee
  - Key Officers of Partner Authorities
  - Statutory Stakeholder lists that includes the Environment Agency, Natural England
  - Developers, landowners, businesses
  - The general public
- All identified stakeholder groups held on the Joint Planning Unit (JPU)'s database received notification of the start of the consultation process by letter or email. A call line has been established and leaflets and posters have been distributed detailing how to respond to the consultation and where exhibitions are to be held. At the launch of the consultation over 2,000 emails or letters were issued to stakeholders, including: -
  - All elected Members in the area
  - Members of Parliament
  - Members of the European Parliament
  - Community Groups
  - Business Groups
  - Residents' Associations
  - Government Agencies
  - Private Individuals
- Exhibitions will be held over 36 days at 18 venues around West Northamptonshire. The majority of the events are staffed and are scheduled to be held during the day, early evening and on Saturdays. Exhibitions have been worked around existing room bookings.
- A series of events are planned and public events will be held also. Material will be issued to publicise these.
- Documentation has also been provided to libraries, community centres and Local Authority receptions. Information is also

available on the JPU's website and the Unit has a telephone line for communication.

- The JPU has attended meetings of Overstone Parish Council, Wootton and Hunsbury Parish Council and Mid Northamptonshire Parishes. Representatives of the JPU will continue to attend such meetings.
- A further series of events are planned focussing on the technical audience:
  - Housing Associations and Developers
  - Businesses
  - Town and Parish Councils
- When the consultation process commenced, a press conference was held and it received extensive coverage in the Chronicle and Echo and similar press coverage was received in neighbouring boroughs. Press releases will be issued prior to exhibitions.
- The JPU has begun to receive responses to the consultation document.

### **3.4 Senior Planning Officer, Environment Agency**

3.4.1 The Senior Planning Officer, Environment Agency, provided a written response to the Committee's issues:

#### **3.4.2 Key points of evidence**

- Shelfleys Lake, located at Ladybridge Drive, is the responsibility of Northampton Borough Council (NBC).
- Northampton defences constructed post Easter 1998 provides a 1:200 Standard of Protection (SOP) (one of the highest SOPs in the country, outside of London). The SOPs are reviewed in line with Defra's 'indicative ranges' and the Environment Agency bid for Defra funding for Flood Risk Management Schemes. The 'indicative range' is determined by assessing the land use and catchment characteristics for the area and seeks to maximise the benefit/cost of the proposed scheme. There is no minimum standard nor any legal right to any standard.
- There has been a significant shift away from viewing defences as a solution to flood risk. The Environment Agency is promoting that future development, through effective planning, should avoid flood risk areas, where possible.
- The distribution and phasing of growth within Northampton is being explored through a number of different investigations. Firstly a

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) level 1 has been completed and the level 2 SFRA, project managed by the Joint Planning Unit (JPU), is due for completion shortly. Secondly a Water Cycle Strategy (WCS) phase 1 has been completed for West Northamptonshire and the phase 2 is currently underway. Together, these documents will inform plans to allocate land, set standards and inform decisions on planning applications.

- With particular regard to surface water, Planning Policy Statement 25 (PPS25) requires that flood risk assessments (FRA) take account of all sources of flood risk, including surface water. Where development is proposed on Greenfield sites, the applicant should seek to ensure that the requirements of PPS25 are met by restricting surface water to the existing rate of discharge through the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). In catchments where there are particular flooding problems downstream (identified through the afore mentioned studies) we would seek to ensure a strategic solution is proposed which would provide an improvement in the catchment. For Brownfield (or previously developed) sites, again to meet the requirements of PPS25, the applicant should seek to ensure that betterment is provided where possible for example by the reducing the impermeable area on site or restricting discharges where appropriate.
- The SFRA and WCS should identify areas of the town where there is a particular need to deal with surface water in more detail on a strategic basis rather than in the site specific FRAs alone. Following discussions with the JPU, we anticipate that a Surface Water Management Plan will need to be developed for Northampton to investigate surface water issues further.

### **3.5 Head of Planning**

3.5.1 In response to a query by the Committee, The Head of Planning, Northampton Borough Council, provided details of the Flore-Weedon By-pass following the closure of the public inquiry on the edge of Daventry.

#### **3.5.2 Key points of evidence**

- The Inquiry was into three planning applications for approximately 10,500 units plus ancillary social, community and educational facilities and employment.
- The minimum RSS housing requirement in Daventry (outside the Northampton Implementation Area) from 2001/2026 is 11,870, of which some 6,500 is planned for Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUE's) adjacent to the existing built up area to 2021 with an additional 1,700 from 2021-2026 giving a total of 8,200 during the current plan period.



- During the course of the Inquiry it became apparent that the Highways Agency and the County Council were of the opinion that in order to accommodate the amount of growth planned at Daventry, significant improvements would be required to the Strategic Road Network. The principle issues between the parties was how much growth, if any, could be accommodated without the necessary improvements and at what point would the Flore-Weedon By-pass be required, together with improvements to the M1 Junction 16 of the M1.
- The major parties did not agree on the trigger points for the various infrastructure improvements. There was, however, common agreement that without a Flore-Weedon By-pass, the amount of development, which could be accommodated at Daventry, is between 1,500 and 2,400 units. This would require junction improvements on the A45/A5 at Weedon Bec at an approximate cost of £500,000.
- Northamptonshire County Council estimated the cost of the by-pass at £49.5million for a single carriageway by-pass, which would need to be in place by 2017. No funding for this road has been identified apart from £400,000 from West Northants Development Corporation for initial feasibility studies.
- It is unclear (but unlikely) that the by-pass could be funded from developer contributions alone. A bid for funding of the by-pass was not included in the twenty-four schemes recommended for delivery through RFA2 over the period 2009 – 2019.
- There is no planning permission for the by-pass and there is no route safeguarded in the Local Transport Plan.
- Any planning application would have to be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment.
- The future delivery of the by-pass is, therefore, uncertain

### **3.6 Public Addresses**

- 3.6.1 Members of the Public addressed the Committee over the three meetings held.
- 3.6.2 These meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 were widely publicised and followed by the press with regular updates in local papers and on the radio.
- 3.6.3 The meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2009 attracted around fourteen members of the public, twelve were in attendance for the meeting of 12 August and a further 13 attended the final meeting held on 18 August 2009.

### **3.6.4 Main comments from the public attendees:**

- Concerns were raised regarding the proposed development figures
- The Government's estimate regarding growth figures should be challenged
- One addressee, in particular, welcomed the proposal for additional housing
- Concerns were raised regarding the length of the consultation period and the fact that it was been carried out over the summer holiday period
- The Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy contained jargon and contradictory statements – for example one objective is to conserve the countryside but there is a proposal to build 18,000 houses on such land.
- The length of time to complete the consultation questionnaire was emphasised
- Concerns were conveyed that the exhibitions hosted by the Joint Planning Unit were often held during working hours, over the summer holidays
- Reference was made to the apparent inadequacies town's flood defences
- The town's infrastructure requires attention for example; there can be difficulties in shopping in the town, such as congested roads and lack of car parking spaces.
- The motorways are already congested in the rush hour traffic.

### **3.7 Members of the Council**

3.7.1 Various Members of the Council addressed Committee at the three evidence-gathering meetings.

### **3.7.2 Main comments included:**

- Concerns were raised regarding the growth estimates.
- It was emphasised that there should be no development if there is no infrastructure.
- Members conveyed concerns regarding the length of the consultation period and that it was been held during the summer holiday period
- Concerns were raised regarding the proposed number of developments on Greenfield sites.
- The Joint Planning Unit's (JPU) consultation questionnaire appeared to contain leading questions with complicated language and should have been written in plain English.
- There is a need for a Policy document guiding planning in this area. The Local Plan 1997 is the current document in existence. In January 2003, this Council issued information regarding population figures. In 2005 The Government Officer for East Midlands approved the Policy –

RS8 that dictates the amount of development in this area. The Emergent Joint Core Strategy contains Policy documents.

- Concerns were conveyed about the number of houses imposed on Northampton and the urban sustainable growth areas. It is important that the Council states in its response to the JPU's consultation that the proposed figures are not deliverable for Northampton and not relating to Northampton's needs. In particular, three specific sites – Dallington Heath, Buckton Fields and the land between Overstone and Moulton – two of which were denoted blue in the Emergent Joint Core Strategy map. Given this, the plan suggests these sites are unchallengeable but previously both Dallington Heath and Buckton Fields had been rejected by Northampton Borough Council. This appears to be an inherent contradiction and the inclusion of these sites in the Emergent Joint Core Strategy should be challenged. The Emergent Joint Core Strategy does not deal with the inadequacies in the current infrastructure.
- It is right for the Committee to express its opposition to the housing figures contained in the document.
- Some of the proposed developments will become dormitory estates, as the infrastructure is not in place.
- A Plan is needed that controls the development of the town.

### 3.8 Leader of the Council, Northampton Borough Council

3.8.1 The Leader of the Council addressed the Committee at its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2009.

#### 3.8.2 Key comments:

- His comments were group into four key areas:
  1. Implications of the Vision, Objectives and Options.
  2. The need for a plan.
  3. The scale of growth.
  4. The challenge of infrastructure.
- He felt that the Committee had dismissed the Vision as aspirational and then accepted the Objectives with relatively little Scrutiny: -
  - **Objective 1** accepts the level of growth planned by government and embodied within the Regional Plan and MKSM Sub Regional Strategy. In planning terms we have to accept these targets if the JCS is to remain "broadly compliant" with these plans. This Council can and should question the assumptions behind those numbers but if we are to have a robust planning policy in place we must have a 'sound' plan and one of the

measures of soundness is broad compliance with regional and national plans.

- **Objective 2** waves in the general direction of the targets for new jobs. The targets in the Regional Plan (37,200 by 2021) are hopelessly inadequate to support the population growth targets and are substantially lower than the growth in job numbers anticipated in the SNEAP, which are closer to 60,000. The JCS should explicitly aim for a significantly higher number of jobs than in the Regional Plan. He added that there are some key objectives missing and Overview and Scrutiny might consider suggesting that they are added for example:
- The Council should explicitly say that it believes the growth of Northampton should create a compact urban form – that is that new developments should clearly be extensions to the existing town and not ‘linked settlements’, new villages or other excuses for excessive urban sprawl.
- There is clearly a desire by some (particularly those outside of Northampton) to increase the number of new dwellings built within the existing urban area. This, of course, has the advantage of reducing the amount of Greenfield development. I am not sure how we should express it but there needs to be a sensible balance struck here. We should further encourage town centre residential development. We should encourage brown field development before green. But, we must avoid town cramming and negatively changing the nature of existing communities – for example by extensive development in back gardens (which are classed as brown-field).
- There is obvious concern, particularly in Great and Little Houghton, Moulton and Overstone and in Harpole that these villages will simply be subsumed into Greater Northampton. It would seem to me that, within the plan period to 2026, there is sufficient capacity, particularly within the South East sector, to allow development to not encroach right up to the village boundaries. Again, I am not sure how to express it because some development in and adjacent to village envelopes may be required to enhance the sustainability of some of the villages of West Northants, but an objective to protect and enhance villages might provide some comfort.
- The Leader of the Council supported the Committee’s preference for Option B. It would be less damaging to Northampton and its surrounding countryside as a whole and would enable better infrastructure development.

There is a vital need for a robust Plan. Growth had been imposed by Central Government. Northampton has been growing quickly over the past few decades. If this trend continues we will reach a population of about a quarter of a million within the plan period. The challenge is not for Northampton to grow; rather it is improving Northampton so it is an economically successful, attractive place to live so that we attract people to come here, to settle down and to bring up their families here. Growth in any significant quality – even trend line growth will require

green field development and the expansion beyond NBC's current boundaries and a robust plan.

- The 'business model' assumed by Government for delivery of infrastructure is no longer valid due to the credit crunch and recession – but Government has refused to modify their position in terms of housing numbers or the 'business model'. The business model is/was that developers would fund infrastructure from of the capital up lift in the value of land. That value would be captured through S106 arrangements. WNDC has agreed a "discounted standard charge" of £20,000 per dwelling. This is of the same order as the equivalent standard charge in Milton Keynes.
- There must be a Plan. That Plan will need to be broadly compliant with national and regional planning policy or it will be judged unsound and we risk either having a plan imposed by Government Office or suffering planning by appeal to inspectors. He added that the Council should be questioning the scale of growth expected from Government. Demanding infrastructure before growth is simplistic. But there needs to be a clear understanding of what infrastructure we will need and the phasing of its construction. There also needs to be a much clearer understanding of where the money to pay for it will come from.

#### **4 Equality Impact Assessment - Screening**

4.1 Following the scoping of the Review, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) – Screening was undertaken.

4.2 This exercise identified: -

- The main beneficiaries or people affected by the Review
- The information already in existence
- Which parts of the Review have the potential for adverse impact or to discriminate unlawfully
- Whether a particular sector of the community could be disadvantaged by the Review

4.3 The Equality Impact Assessment – Screening recognised that this Review could have adverse and positive impacts on the six equality strands. However, as no Equality Impact Assessment has been completed yet for the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, its impact on these groups has not been subject to a detailed level of scrutiny. It was recognised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is unlikely to have time to consider all aspects of the document itself during the timescale set for consultation, and focuses on a relatively tight focus of specific lines of inquiry. The Committee was mindful of the six strands when undertaking its scrutiny task so that any recommendations that it makes can identify potential positive and negative impacts on any particular sector of the community. The lack of an Equality Impact Assessment for the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy could mean that the Emergent

Strategy might have an unintended adverse impact on any particular sector of the community.

- 4.4 In terms of the working of the Committee and its impact on the equality strands, paper copies of the agenda for the meetings of this Committee were issued to all Members of the Council, relevant officers and anyone else who is on the distribution list who had previously requested paper copies. Electronic versions of the agenda are issued to a wider circulation of Officers, the local press and radio, and also individuals who have requested to be kept informed of the work of this Committee. Provision has been made for members of public who have a disability, for example, the documents are written in 12 scale font with a yellow front cover for those who may suffer from a visual impairment, the blind have access to 'talking' documents, those whose first language is not English have access to translation services and the building in which the meetings will occur contain hearing loops and are accessible by those with severe mobility issues, such as wheel chair users.
- 4.5 The Action Plan as detailed in the Equality Impact Assessment - Screening includes the following details: -
1. The data gathered would be reviewed and appropriate recommendations made.
  2. If it is found that it is difficult to obtain evidence due to a lack of data, it may be necessary to consider monitoring to improve data intelligence. If required this will be undertaken using the principles set out in the Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit.
  - 3 That an Equality Impact Assessment of the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy is carried out and any actions arising out of this are linked.

## 5 Conclusions and Key Findings

- 5.1 After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn: -
- 5.2 That the Committee had very limited time to undertake a full, comprehensive Scrutiny Review. Given that it had just three meetings allocated, it was agreed that four key issues of the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy would be investigated: -
- The Consultation Process
  - Vision/Options
  - Impact on Northampton
    - Sustainable urban growth
    - Regeneration
  - Delivery of Infrastructure
- 5.3 It was agreed that the Council should undertake further scrutiny work at the Pre- Submission stage of the Joint Core Strategy.
- 5.4 The Council has in the past, and should continue to question the validity of the Governments growth figures that are being imposed on Northampton as part of the Regional Spatial Strategy. In particular in relation to:
- the number of houses being proposed being in excess of what Northampton requires to meet local needs
  - the target number of houses being undeliverable in the timescales provided
- 5.5 From the evidence gathered by the Committee it is apparent that there is currently an excess of flatted accommodation in the town and that no further such accommodation is required, there is, however, a need for more houses. The Committee therefore feels that the figure of 35% for affordable housing is still appropriate.

### The Consultation Process

- 5.6 That the consultation process has been inadequate to fully engage with people because of the fixed 6-week period and it being held over the summer holiday period.
- 5.7 The Committee strongly believes that the six-week consultation period was inadequate and would have recommended that the period should be extended. The Committee therefore considered that further consultation periods avoid key holiday periods. It also recommends

that exhibitions are held at times when working people can also attend and that use is made of fixed exhibitions at key venues in the town such as The Grosvenor Centre. The Committee further recommends that the next stages of consultation - Pre Submission and Submission be extended as they are over public holidays, namely Christmas and Easter.

- 5.8 It was concluded that the Emergent Joint Core Strategy contained jargon and use of plain English should be recommended in future consultation documents.
- 5.9 It would be beneficial to seek confirmation regarding the progress of Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk for Northampton be ascertained before a full response to the Consultation is given.
- 5.10 The Committee acknowledged that the lack of an Equality Impact Assessment for the Emergent Joint Core Strategy could mean that the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy might have an unintended adverse impact on any particular sector of the community.

### **Vision/Options**

- 5.11 The Spatial Vision – Where we want to be - contained in the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy has evolved over many years and covered the period up to 2026. Strategic objectives by which the four Local Authorities (Northampton, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley) would deliver that Vision are also contained in the document. The Committee notes that as an aspirational Vision it reflects what the Council would like to see for the town.
- 5.12 Following consideration of Option A and Option B in relation to the distribution of development, the Committee concluded that: -
  - Option B concentrates on developments in and around existing settlements. The Joint Strategic Planning Committee chose Option B as the preferred option for reasons as set out on page 18 of the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy. This approach would also include urban development sites in Northampton.
  - Existing un-built Local Plan Allocations are highlighted in blue on the plans contained in the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.
  - Brownfield sites should be completed first before consideration is given to development on Greenfield sites.

Option B – was supported as development can be focused in a small number of large development areas



## Impact on Northampton

- 5.13 The Emergent Joint Core Strategy relates to an area defined as West Northamptonshire and focuses particularly on Northampton as the county town, but there is no evidence that the proposals relate to the whole of Northamptonshire. The Emergent Joint Core Strategy needs to sit alongside plans for the rest of the County and this needs to be evidenced.
- 5.14 The Committee noted that the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy in relation to Daventry, Towcester and Brackley is a countywide issue and recommends it should be referred to the Northamptonshire Countywide Scrutiny Forum for review.
- 5.15 Affordable housing should also take into consideration provision for older people. There is a requirement for a more defined rationale of what denotes affordable, possibly the need for a local definition. The current criteria set for affordable housing is very broad and requires challenging.
- 5.16 There is a need to find a location for growth that will sustain the infrastructure. It is accepted that growth needs to happen but Policies must be in place that allow growth but not under Developers' terms.
- 5.17 The Committee confirmed the need to know the types of houses proposed for development, together with the numbers before consideration can be given to the location of developments. Such developments should be built on Brownfield sites before consideration is given to building on Greenfield sites.
- 5.18 The Committee agreed that comment cannot be made on each individual proposed sustainable urban growth areas as there is inadequate detail concerning the infrastructure required to support these areas. There is also little information about how these growth areas relate to the town centre in terms of transport links and regeneration initiatives.
- 5.19 5,400 housing units are proposed for Northampton North – 50% of which will be family accommodation. The figures indication there could be a lot of children to be educated in two or three Primary Schools and a Secondary School, therefore, there is a query regarding the adequacy of the proposed infrastructure. This is one example within the Strategy, which can be seen in other proposed growth areas.
- 5.20 Based on the evidenced provided by the Environment Agency the Committee shared residents' concerns regarding flood risks.

## **Delivery on Infrastructure**

- 5.21 The Committee queried how the infrastructure would be delivered when the budget had been reduced by 50%.
- 5.22 There is no indication of how current infrastructure deficiencies in the town will be tackled by the Joint Core Strategy.
- 5.23 The Committee felt that it was essential that the Joint Core Strategy should provide a clear and robust framework for infrastructure, including transport that allows the Vision for the Central Area Action Plan to be delivered.
- 5.24 The Committee highlighted the need for the Community to be fully involved in any regeneration of existing areas.
- 5.25 The Committee acknowledged the importance of the Central Area Action Plan. It was realised that the Joint Core Strategy should provide the Policies that will allow the Council to deliver the vision and aspirations in the Central Area Action Plan.
- 5.26 Employment for the town is of equal importance of that of the infrastructure.
- 5.27 The Committee considered and had regard to the approved Economic Regeneration Strategy for Northampton 2008 – 2026.

## 6 Recommendations

- 6.1 That full Council be informed that the Committee did not have adequate time to undertake a full, comprehensive Scrutiny Review into this issue and it is recommended that further scrutiny work is conducted as the Strategy develops.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Regeneration, Planning, Community Engagement and Safety) recommends to full Council that Northampton Borough Council's response to the consultation of the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy contains the following comments and observations: -

For ease of delivery, the following series of comments and observations are grouped in specific areas: -

### The Consultation Process

- 6.2 Confirmation regarding the progress of Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk for Northampton be ascertained before a full response to the areas of growth is given.
- 6.3 That disappointment is expressed that the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy contains jargon and plain English should be used in the next version.
- 6.4 The six-week consultation period was inadequate, especially as it took place over the summer holidays.
- 6.5 That it be recommended that the next stages of consultation - Pre Submission and Submission be extended as they are over public holidays, namely Christmas and Easter.
- 6.6 That an Equality Impact Assessment of the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy is carried out by the JPU and any actions arising out of this are linked.
- 6.7 That the pre-submission consultation stage of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy be referred to the Northamptonshire Countywide Scrutiny Forum for review.

### Vision/Options

- 6.8 That the Council agrees with the Vision as set out in the Emergent Joint Core Strategy.
- 6.9 That Option B – *it can be focused in a small number of large development areas* - be the preferred Option.

## Impact on Northampton

- 6.10 The Council has in the past and should continue to challenge the validity of the Government's growth figures that are being imposed on Northampton as part of the Regional Spatial Strategy. In particular in relation to:
- the number of houses being proposed being in excess of what Northampton requires to meet local needs
  - the target number of houses being undeliverable in the timescales provided
- 6.11 The figure of 35% for affordable housing is still appropriate but there is a need for more houses rather than additional flatted accommodation, subject to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.
- 6.12 That affordable housing should also take into consideration provision for older people and those with disabilities.
- 6.13 The Council needs to be satisfied that a robust definition of affordable housing is in place.
- 6.14 That developments on Brownfield sites should be completed first before development on Greenfield sites.
- 6.15 It is accepted that growth needs to happen but Policies must be in place that allows growth provided that the infrastructure is delivered in a timely manner. It will be necessary to ensure that Policies are in place to require developers to make the necessary contribution to the cost of providing infrastructure.
- 6.16 That It must be clear within the Joint Core Strategy that the planned development growth will not be allowed without all the necessary infrastructure. Policies within the Joint Core Strategy should identify the key pieces of infrastructure required for each growth location
- 6.17 That all proposed development sites should have clear access to the town centre, and detail is required as to how this would be achieved.
- 6.18 The Council cannot comment at this stage on each individual proposed area for development or growth, as there is not enough infrastructure detail provided in the Plan for each site.
- 6.19 The overall aims and objectives for transport are not contained in the Emergent Joint Core Strategy and this is a key issue for the plan to address.
- 6.20 That the Council agrees with the comments of the Environment Agency that developments should avoid flood risk areas and the proper mitigation be put in place.

- 6.21 That the Council needs to ensure that it fulfils its responsibilities regarding preventing flood risks.

### **Delivery of Infrastructure**

- 6.22 That the Council comments that the Joint Core Strategy must provide a clear and robust framework for infrastructure, including transport, that allows the Central Area Action Plan to be delivered.
- 6.23 The Joint Core Strategy should provide a policy framework to enable the provision of employment opportunities within the town centre so that employment growth is achieved. These policies must ensure that employment growth is aligned to the Central Area Action Plan.
- 6.24 The Joint Core Strategy must provide a clear policy framework to ensure that the Council's strategy for the regeneration of Northampton as set out the Economic Regeneration Strategy 2008 – 2026 is deliverable, not only in so far as these relate to the Central Area Action Plan but also for the rest of the town, including those areas for regeneration identified in the EJCS.
- 6.25 That any regeneration of existing areas must be undertaken with the full involvement of the Community.

### **Further Scrutiny**

- 6.26 That Overview and Scrutiny undertakes further Scrutiny work at the Pre-Submission stage of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.