

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT PLANNING GROUP

Wednesday, 7 February 2007

PRESENT:	Councillor Hadland (Chair)	NBC
	C Berry	NBC
	R Boulton	NCC
	Councillor J Caswell	NBC
	M Chant	NCC
	Councillor S Clarke	SNC
	R Fox	SNC
	G Hughes	GOEM
	S Kelly	WNDC
	Councillor C Millar	DDC
	J Morgan	SNC
	S Pointer	NBC
	R Pulling	WBC
	Councillor B Smith	NCC
	R Strugnell	SNC
	C Thomas	NBC
	Councillor J Townsend	SNC
	R Wood	DDC

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from C Cavanagh, W Amos, S Barnes, M Hayes, S Bovey, J Harker and D Brennan.

2. NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2007

These were accepted as a true record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

There were none.

4. PROGRAMME DIRECTOR'S PROGRESS REPORT

C Thomas circulated his report and drew the meeting's attention to the fact that there were now fully functioning team facilities at the Cliftonville site. A further report was expected on the onsite diagnostic pilot of the approach within the planning services. Concerns at a high level had prompted GOEM to offer support from the Planning Advice Service.

R Wood reported on advice recently received by the DDC from Counsel, giving categorical advice that all documents had to be prepared in accordance with the Local Development Strategy and no progress could therefore be made with Issues and Options for the Joint Core Strategy until an agreed LDS was in place. There was discussion about the need for other documents to be in line with the Core Strategy and concern that progress might have to be limited. It was felt to be vital that all processes were correctly adhered to in order to avoid the danger of high court challenges in the event of unlawful publication of documents.

G Hughes advised that, to move forward, the holding direction could be amended, under delegated powers, to see if that part of the LDS could be continued. It was agreed that, in order to issue the paper within 10 days, all aspects needed to be watertight. C Millar

commented that, with the more complicated planning system, legal advice had to be followed because of the danger and cost implications of delays to the large developers involved.

After further discussion, it was established that the best outcome, given the legal advice above, would be to amend the LDS under the recommendations of the Planning Advisory Service and submit them to GOEM for approval. Appeals were made for a representative of GOEM to be present and involved in the consultation to assist with the prioritisation of documents and resources. G Hughes agreed to be present and create an appropriate programme for a workshop session. Concern was expressed about the short timescale required and it was agreed that a workshop would take place within the following five days in order to maintain momentum. A special meeting for members to consider the outcomes of the workshop should then follow.

There was an enquiry as to the moves being made to appoint an officer to head the group. C Thomas advised that a CV was being considered from an experienced candidate who would be able to join at short notice as an interim officer. Members would be consulted before a more permanent member of staff was sought.

5. JOINT PLANNING STUDIES PROGRESS REPORT

C Berry referred to a report that had been distributed at the meeting. The importance was stressed of the study being published to members before being distributed and there was concern that underlying work had not been seen. C Berry commented that the intention was to publish long-term option studies at the same time as the Issues and Options, which might then be delayed by the need to go before each separate Council for consideration. It was accepted that a preliminary discussion had taken place and that EDAW was proposing to prepare a draft-scoping document for consultation to meet collective needs.

6. JOINT CORE STRATEGY ISSUES & OPTIONS DISCUSSION PAPER

C Berry presented the report, the main content of which was complete but with minor amendments anticipated in the wording. The deadline for printing was two days hence in order that the consultation period could be completed before the pre-election purdah period. There was concern that this was too short a timescale and that there might not be adequate opportunity for all authorities to make their amendments; however, it was felt that if the workshop went ahead as planned, pertinent questions could be addressed within the required time limit. S Pointer expressed concern that some of the information in the document, particularly in relation to WNDC processes, was very sensitive and advised that more time was taken to discuss costings so that benchmarks were not set.

Given the QC's advice that Issues and Options should not be progressed without an agreed LDS and the amount of time needed to remove sensitive issues and complete the document, there followed discussion on the wisdom of the consultation period overlapping into the purdah period. It was generally felt that it would be inappropriate to have consultation during purdah owing to the danger of some sensitive matters becoming election issues. However, it was suggested that there was insufficient time to have the workshop to agree the LDS and then to go back to the various authorities for approval. R Boulton warned that delaying the process could mean waiting up to 12 months, with the risk of then operating illegally and he pointed out that North Northants was ready to go ahead with their document by summer 2007. From further discussion, a consensus was reached in which it was agreed that every effort would be made to complete the process of achieving an agreed LDS before Easter. G Hughes agreed that decisions regarding the LDS could be made at the workshop, with salient issues being agreed by GOEM. With all officers working together, it was then considered feasible that the target could be achieved within the timescale (i.e. 31st March 2007).

Councillor Hadland thanked all present for moving the matter forward and expressed his appreciation for the burden that the officers were taking on to achieve completion of the document.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The meeting on 20th February had been cancelled.

The meeting arranged for 13th March was to be re-arranged in order that all authority leaders were available to attend.

It had been agreed previously that SNC was to take over Chair of Steering group, Programme Director's function and meeting administration from 31st March 2007 to 31st March 2008. A request was made that dates of future meetings be brought to the next meeting for consideration. It was suggested that the group continued to meet in Northampton, as a central location, although it was felt that meetings in South Northants would also be appropriate.

The meeting concluded at 19:35