

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 On 27th February 2012, Gallagher Estates and the Homes and Communities Agency submitted an outline planning application for phase 1 of the proposed Northstowe development, comprising 1,500 homes. A Development Framework Document (DFD) was also submitted, in order to provide the vision, design rationale and principal themes for the entire Northstowe development of 9,500 homes.
- 1.2 The County Council has an important role in relation to Northstowe planning applications and associated submissions, as a statutory consultee on a wide range of matters.
- 1.3 The EGCI OSC convened a meeting on 10th May 2012 to focus on the Northstowe Phase 1 planning application and the DFD. The purpose of the meeting was to comment on the proposed responses to the planning submissions (referred to from this point on as the 'Council's response'), which had been prepared by the Cabinet Member for Growth and Planning and officers within Economy, Transport and Environment Services, so that these could inform the final responses determined by Cabinet on 22nd May 2012.
- 1.4 The Committee invited the Chairman of all the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees to join the meeting, in recognition of the importance of the Northstowe development to all service areas. Councillor Fred Brown, Resources and Performance OSC Chairman, and Councillor Shona Johnstone, Children and Young People OSC Chairman (also Local Member for Willingham), were able to attend.
- 1.5 The Committee discussed the topic with the following:
 - Councillor Ian Bates, Cabinet Member for Growth and Planning
 - Graham Hughes, Service Director: Strategy and Development
 - Juliet Richardson, Project Lead
 - Local Members:
 - Councillor Mandy Smith, Member for Papworth and Swavesey
 - Councillor John Reynolds, Member for Bar Hill.
- 1.6 The minutes of the meeting, available from the Scrutiny and Improvement Officer, provide a full record of the discussion. However, there were four particular issues which the Committee collectively agreed to bring to Cabinet's attention, which are summarised in the remainder of this report.

2. EDUCATION PROVISION

- 2.1 The Committee were advised that the Northstowe development proposals include provision for a primary school in phase 1 and the allocation of land for a secondary school, to be built in a later phase.
- 2.2 The primary school will act as a community hub, providing early years and primary education, services similar to those found in children's centres, family health services and library services. It is also envisaged that there will be small numbers of children at secondary school age educated within the

primary school premises until the secondary school is built. These students will be taught separately from the primary age students by secondary school teachers working to the Key Stage 3 Curriculum. In effect, the primary school will be a satellite of the nearby Swavesey Village College. Where necessary, students in Northstowe will have access to facilities at the Village College.

- 2.3 However, the Council's response recognises that a secondary school will be required for Northstowe and stresses the importance of ensuring that the school is ready to be occupied by year 4 of the development.
- 2.4 The Committee heard from Local Members that nearby schools are already facing significant pressures (leading to temporary accommodation of students in mobile classrooms, for example) which are projected to get worse in the near future. These Members did not believe that any additional students from Northstowe could be accommodated.
- 2.5 The Committee supports the need to establish a secondary school in Northstowe and agree that it is important to clarify when this will be ready for occupation. Members also recognise that a balance has to be struck between public service provision and the financial viability of the development, which means that in this instance, it is not practicable to establish a secondary school for a small number of students from year 1 of the Northstowe development. However, they had concerns about secondary pupils being present on the primary site. The Committee are therefore not persuaded to support this element of the Council's response, and believe that alternatives should be investigated.

3. BUILDING STANDARDS AND ENERGY EMISSIONS

- 3.1 Members recalled that expectations were raised in recent years that Northstowe would be a pioneering development that would deliver zero or low carbon emissions, through the use of renewable energy sources and energy efficient buildings designed to very high standards.
- 3.2 The Council's response notes that an independent review of the proposed energy strategy has been conducted, which stated that there are several aspects within the proposals that could be enhanced. The Council's response therefore concluded that 'as they currently stand the energy proposals for Northstowe are not considered to be ambitious enough. The Council therefore requires that the proposals are refined and improved'.
- 3.3 Members fully support this response and would like to emphasise the importance of delivering the developments to the highest possible standards, in terms of energy emissions and building quality, in line with the high expectations originally envisaged.

4. LIFETIME HOMES

- 4.1 Members agreed that Northstowe should provide a spectrum of accommodation to meet the needs of the entire community. In particular, Members noted that that Council's response refers to forecasts that predict increases in the number of elderly people, and that it is therefore important to provide Lifetime Homes along with appropriate nursing and caring facilities. Members particularly support this aspect of the Council's response.

5. COMMUNITY FACILITIES

5.1 The Committee were in agreement that it was crucial that Northstowe should incorporate community facilities at an early stage in the development in order to help generate a sense of community that will make Northstowe an attractive place to live. Particular reference was made to:

- The importance of pubs. The Council's response refers to a hotel, but there is no mention of pubs, which have an important role to play in communities
- The location of supermarkets and shops in general
- The location of surgeries.

5.2 Members recognise that there are also many other community facilities and services that it is important to be included within Northstowe, such as cafes, community centres and a library, for example.

6. TRANSPORT

6.1 Members noted that additional funding for improvements to the A14 is currently under consideration at the national level and that the outcome will have a crucial bearing on whether the full development can be delivered. Members therefore agreed to return to this topic later in the year when further details are made available.

7. COUNTY COUNCIL INVESTMENT

7.1 The Committee noted that £25 million had been allocated in the Integrated Plan to enable the Council to obtain an equity stake in the Northstowe development. Members spoke positively about this as they felt that it would enable the Council to exert greater leverage and control in respect of the quality of all aspects of the development. Members urged the Cabinet Member and Officers to accelerate their investigations into the possible use of this funding, and agreed to 'overview' the proposals at a future meeting.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Cabinet is recommended to consider the Committee's comments when submitting its response to the Northstowe Development Framework Document submission, paying particular regard to the Committee's emphasis on the:

- a) Need to reconsider how to provide satisfactory secondary education during the early years of the Northstowe development
- b) Importance of high quality building standards and low energy emissions
- c) Adequate provision of Lifetime homes
- d) Early introduction of community facilities such as pubs, supermarkets, shops and surgeries.

Source documents

Enterprise, Growth and Community
Infrastructure Overview and
Scrutiny Committee minutes and
reports from the meeting held on
10th May 2012

Location

Shire Hall, Room 116.
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