

Draft Response to Henry Cleary, CLG, on Northstowe Eco Town and bid for support for studies and a demonstrator project v6 17 Feb 2010

Dear Henry,

Northstowe Eco Town proposal

Following our various discussions and earlier correspondence on this issue, this letter seeks to take the work on Northstowe forward so that we can give clarity to its status and progress a number of studies that are key to successful delivery.

This letter and its appendices covers the following key issues:

- a) the conclusions of the first stage of the “gap analysis” work we have undertaken to compare Northstowe as currently proposed with the standards set out in the Eco-Town Planning Policy Statement (“the PPS”);
- b) proposals for a number of studies to develop deliverable and financially viable solutions for key areas such as homes and transport, economic development, and climate change adaptation and “zero-carbon”, and a formal bid for financial support for these studies, and;
- c) proposals for demonstrator projects, along with a bid for financial support for these will follow by 26 February 2010

The local development framework

In summary, the results of the first phase of the analysis that we described in our letter of 23 December 2009 have been extremely encouraging. In particular, in relation to the planning policy “base” for Northstowe, we believe that what is in place already is largely sufficient for the purposes of achieving the PPS standards. The existing Local Development Framework, Core Strategy and Area Action Plan all put Northstowe at the centre of the development strategy for the area, and all confirm that the new development will have enhanced environmental standards.

Whilst the results of some of the further work we are proposing could require some necessary amendment or enhancement to the policy position, and we would need to leave this option open, on the whole we believe we already have a strong platform on which to build in moving towards delivering Northstowe as a fully fledged eco-town.

A summary of our initial assessment of Northstowe against the PPS is at Appendix 1.

Member level support

The establishment of joint planning arrangements by South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge City Council in 2008 is evidence of the local authorities' commitment to working together to achieve the delivery of good quality new communities in the Cambridge sub region.

This development was based upon the foundation of collaboration between elected members in all the Cambridgeshire local authorities which established Cambridgeshire Horizons in 2004.

The more recent establishment of a Northstowe portfolio within the Cabinet at South Cambridgeshire District Council illustrates the authority's commitment to the Northstowe project and the first portfolio holder, Cllr Tim Wotherspoon, is supportive of this bid for eco town related resources. This proposal has also been discussed at the Northstowe Parish Forum which comprises elected members at County, District and Parish levels within the area.

Since the launch of the Eco town prospectus in July 2007, elected members of both South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridgeshire County Councils have been championing its potential as a full eco town rather than a prototype. This position is supported by the local Member of Parliament, Andrew Lansley MP.

Deliverability and private sector commitment

The more challenging questions posed by moving Northstowe towards eco-town status relate more to deliverability and viability issues, rather than the planning policy framework. Crucially, solutions to these questions will also depend upon the extent to which the local authorities and the promoters of Northstowe can find ways in which to work innovatively and collaboratively to deliver a shared ambition.

We believe that the position in Cambridgeshire is very advanced compared to other locations, given the length of time that local partners have been planning for Northstowe, the strength of the delivery arrangements already in place, and the sound relationship that is building between the HCA and local partners.

The context for Northstowe is also extremely good, with a wide range of positive aspects working in its favour, including:

- Established joint planning arrangements between South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council, including the Northstowe Joint Development Control Committee;

- A well-established local delivery vehicle in Cambridgeshire Horizons with strong joint delivery arrangements;
- The strong track record and good practice of the local authorities in delivering growth, and a wealth of experience based on the lessons that have been learned from delivery of new settlements and urban extensions such as Bar Hill, Cambourne and Orchard Park, which can be applied to improve the quality of Northstowe;
- Extensive experience of working with developers on the sub regional strategic sites to address viability issues, in challenging economic circumstances.
- The commitment from a wide range of partners to the principles set out in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth which puts community and cultural development, good quality design, accessibility, and addressing climate change and environmental concerns at the heart of planning new communities;
- A vibrant local economy based on the hi-tech and bio-tech clusters around Cambridge, with the potential to create many new jobs over coming years, as recognised by its designation as an 'engine of growth' within the Regional Economic Strategy;
- Important infrastructure already in place, in particular in the form of the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway, and plans for upgrading the A14 as part of a comprehensive planning and transport strategy for the A14 corridor ;
- Substantial work already completed by Renewables East and Cambridgeshire Horizons on a site-wide renewable energy solution for Northstowe (through a biomass Combined Heat and Power plant)
- Well-established community engagement processes with the Northstowe Parish Forum, stakeholder workshops and youth projects
- A proven level of market and affordable housing demand as set out in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment;
- Innovative arrangements for affordable housing delivery through the Cambridge Challenge project, with Cambridgeshire Partnerships Limited appointed to provide affordable housing on strategic growth sites;
- Excellent Beacon Council accredited performance in local waste collection/management, with an Innovative Waste Study already commissioned for Northstowe, and planning guidance included in the forthcoming Minerals and Waste Development Plan Document and approved supplementary design guidance;

- Substantial analysis already undertaken on appropriate governance structures for Northstowe as part of the Northstowe Community Development Trust work;
- A water cycle strategy for the Northstowe area that is almost complete, and an innovative land drainage solution to serve both Northstowe and the proposed expansion of Cambourne also nearing completion.

Notwithstanding these strengths, the challenge of ensuring that we can put in place arrangements that enable Northstowe to be delivered to the standards required, and within the envelope of what is financially viable, remains an acute one. To this end, we would hope that you can set aside sufficient funding support for Northstowe through this round of funding, and from the wider eco-towns funding pot.

Specific Proposals for Studies

The detailed proposals for studies, and our estimated costs for these, are attached in Appendix 2 to this letter.

We believe that all of these studies will build upon our existing evidence base and help to identify how we can ensure that we deliver the higher standards for Northstowe to meet the various elements of the PPS and strengthen a revised planning submission.

Whilst we are proposing studies to cover a fairly wide range of issues, it will be important to ensure that the connections between the various elements are recognised and taken fully into account. We therefore propose an overarching study to pull all the strands together, using a 'master consultant' who will work with our existing consultants where they are already in place, with South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and the Northstowe promoters working together, with Cambridgeshire Horizons coordinating consultancy input. By doing this, we can ensure we take full advantage of the detailed work already undertaken for Northstowe (much of it funded with Housing Growth Fund support).

Embedded within this work will be the crucial analysis of viability – as we need to ensure that whatever elements of the development we can push to higher environmental standards do not threaten the overall viability of Northstowe. This in turn will link to the delivery model that is developed, and where we have already begun some encouraging conversations with the HCA, and will continue these in the parallel process on the Single Conversation for Northstowe that will begin in earnest in the coming weeks.

The estimated total for the studies is £365,000.

Demonstrator Projects

We will also be putting forward demonstrator projects for funding support. The most promising projects we have been developing revolve around maximising the benefits to the new community of the Guided Busway, and retrofitting some of the existing housing stock in the Northstowe area to deliver low carbon benefits. We will continue to work these up over the next week, and will submit a demonstrator project bid to you by the deadline of 26 February.

We remain confident that Northstowe provides the best opportunity to show that a new type of development can be delivered in the UK, one that demonstrates all the facets of the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth, and that can be a beacon for developments elsewhere in the UK. We seek to meet the critical policy aims of delivering sustainable new communities whilst reducing our carbon footprint, whilst playing a key part in facilitating the future economic growth of one of the most important business clusters in the UK.

However, we can only do all of this if the public sector partners pull together. We hope that you can respond positively by confirming Northstowe's eco-town status and ensuring adequate funding support to reach the standards that we all aspire to.

Yours sincerely,

Greg Harlock
Chief Executive, South Cambridgeshire District Council

Brian Smith
Deputy Chief Executive, Cambridgeshire County Council

Alex Plant
Chief Executive, Cambridgeshire Horizons

Summary of gap analysis against eco town planning policy statement

ET1	Principles	No Gap
ET2	Locational Criteria	No Gap
ET3	Regional Spatial Strategies	No Gap Recommend: complete study and then amend in future if necessary.
ET4	Local Development Frameworks	No Gap SCDC has an approved Core Strategy and Northstowe AAP
ET5	Determining Planning Applications	No Gap
ET6	Monitoring	No Gap AAP includes monitoring, however recommend review and refresh within the Eco-town study
ET7	Zero Carbon in Eco Towns	Renewables East study (funded by Horizons) has proposals to bridge the gap including CHP. Issue is deliverability Recommend key area for Eco-town study
ET8	Climate Change Adaptation	Small Gap Recommend include in study
ET9	Homes	a) Issue is bringing forward Code Level 4 + ahead of building regulations. Links with ET7. Recommend key area for study to solve deliverability b) Not all homes will meet Lifetime Homes – may be small gap c) Digital technology – work has been done by the County Council but jointly agreed plan is needed. Recommend include in study.
ET10	Employment	Small Gap Recommend refresh and review in the study
ET11	Transport	Some gap regarding modal share and travel plans. Recommend refresh and enhance in the study.
ET12	Healthy Lifestyles	No gap. Recommend review and refresh in the study.
ET13	Local Services	No gap. Recommend refresh and review in the study.
ET14	Green Infrastructure	No gap because PPS standards

		includes private gardens. Recommend refresh and review in the study partly due to unresolved local concerns (to produce new Green Infrastructure Masterplan)
ET15	Landscape and Historic Environment	No gap Could review in the study
ET16	Biodiversity	Some gap because further work was required. Recommend update in the study, and link to ET14
ET17	Water	Some Gap Water Cycle Strategy due to be completed summer 2010. Recommend include in study particularly to focus on deliverability
ET18	Flood risk management	As ET17 above Northstowe sits in area of severe water stress.
ET19	Waste	Innovative waste study has been completed. Cambridgeshire is highly performing area with RECAP Waste Strategy 2008 –22 and high local targets. Issue is jointly selecting preferred system and ensuring deliverability. Recommend inclusion in study.
ET20	Master Planning	No Gap – unless we extend the area of Northstowe to include the reserve land
ET21	Transition	Some gap – mainly so we take advantage of the bid to strengthen our planning for delivery. Recommend include in the study as key area for developing the joint approach with HCA
ET22	Community and Governance	Small gap – good groundwork on Northstowe Community Development Trust. As ET21, recommend include in the study as key area for developing joint approach with HCA

Appendix 2 – Northstowe eco town proposal – summary of studies and cost estimates

Study	Estimated Cost
Over-arching study Consultants responsible for the overarching study.	£50,000
Monitoring Monitoring Frameworks to be reviewed and refreshed	£5,000
Delivering Zero Carbon It is recommended that further work be commissioned as part of the eco-town study to revise the assessment so that code level 6 may be delivered across the site. This will include update of the business case and financial model, and detailed work regarding deliverability and financing in order to find a means for the preferred delivery model to use the Low Carbon Development Initiative (LCDI) to deliver the renewable energy infrastructure for the development site to achieve the zero carbon standard	£50,000
Climate Change Adaptation It is recommended that further work be commissioned as part of the eco-town study to bring tailored adaptation measures to become substantive elements of the planning proposals.	£30,000
Homes Study looking at appropriate Code level for housing and how this affects deliverability - in terms of costs and funding.	£30,000
Employment Review and Up-date Economic Strategy.	£15,000
Transport Refresh and enhance transport work previously carried out. Consider a low emissions strategy and explore best practice for public realm and street design.	£50,000
Healthy Lifestyles Study looking at delivering healthy lifestyles. Refresh application; take advantage of recent health policies including the Growth Areas JSNA, NICE guidance, the County Obesity Strategy and the policy requirement for Health Impact Assessments.	£10,000
Local Services Review and refresh local service provision to ensure that Northstowe is developed in a way that takes advantage of the new proposed delivery mechanisms.	£15,000
Green Infrastructure Develop a Green Infrastructure Masterplan for Northstowe, integrated with public realm and development patterns, including ordnance removal work	£25,000
Landscape and historic Environment Review and up-date the Landscape and Historic environment work - may feed into GI Masterplan. HGF Rev project on Historic environment will also inform this work	£5,000
Biodiversity It is recommended that the previously drafted Biodiversity Strategy be reviewed, and repeat ecological surveys be completed to inform the environment strategy	£15,000
Water and Flood Risk management A study costing the technical recommendations of the Water Cycle Strategy, including delivering water neutrality and strategy for maintenance and adoption of SUDS	£25,000
Waste Pull together a waste strategy for Northstowe - feeding in the Waste Audit (If complete) and the innovative waste study	£20,000
Transition Work with the HCA to develop plans to manage the transition.	£10,000
Community and Governance Develop community development and governance model, including revisiting Community Trust analysis; work with HCA/RSLs to develop acceptable model.	£10,000
Total	£365,000