

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Council	23 November 2006
AUTHOR/S:	Chief Executive / Executive Director	

JOINT PLANNING ARRANGEMENTS

Purpose

1. This report informs Members of the progress of local discussions about joint planning arrangements following Cambridgeshire Horizons' meeting with the Minister for Housing and Planning at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on 11 October 2006.

Background

2. The Leader of the Council was invited, along with other Cambridgeshire local authority leaders to meet the Minister for Housing & Planning, Yvette Cooper MP, on 11 October 2006 to review progress on housing delivery and sustainable communities in the Cambridgeshire sub region, focusing on four key areas (see **Appendix A** attached):
 - a) Resources for growth – making the best use of available resources from public and private funding.
 - b) Recent progress on delivery in terms of (a) small sites; (b) medium sites up to 500 dwellings; and (c) the four or five major schemes.
 - c) Progress in strengthening capacity to deal with major housing applications in the local authorities as well as Cambridgeshire Horizons
 - d) Projected ability to deal with major planning applications over the next 5 years
3. At the meeting the interim findings of the review of Cambridgeshire Horizons were presented by consultant to the DCLG, John Walker. He identified three locally based issues for further consideration:
 - a) Lack of capacity and suitably focussed processes in South Cambridgeshire District Council when measured against the scale of the task ahead;
 - b) Shortages of resources and integrated processes between stakeholder authorities, particularly South Cambridgeshire District Council, but also English Partnerships; and
 - c) The need to be able to forward fund infrastructure commitments in advance of S106 receipts through a 'banker' mechanism.

The report goes on to identify seven options for action, ranging from the provision of additional resources, through to the imposition of an Urban Development Corporation.

4. Following the meeting the Minister wrote to Cambridgeshire Horizons on 20 October and said (see **Appendix B** attached):

' We will need to give further thought to how we achieve the quality and pace of delivery that will be needed. I want to be confident that we have the necessary structures, capacity (for example in progressing major schemes) and commitment to a shared leadership agenda...it is particularly important that we create arrangements

that allow public/private investment streams to be maximised...I recognise that authorities would prefer not to move to a statutory development corporation. The challenge...is for you and your colleagues to propose an alternative that is fit for purpose.'

5. The Leader of the Council subsequently received a set of proposals from Cambridgeshire Horizons for joint decision-making and joint working involving the Council, Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridgeshire Horizons. Those proposals were circulated to members by e-mail w/b 6 November 2006 and were referred to at the Cabinet meeting on 9 November 2006.
6. The Leader of the Council, Planning Portfolio Holder, Chair of Planning Committee, Chief Executive and Executive Director met informally with the City Council's Leader, Executive Councillor for Planning and Transport, Chief Executive and Director of Environment and Planning on 8 and 15 November 2006 to identify a number of mutual concerns with the Cambridgeshire Horizons proposals. These meetings and subsequent discussions and work by officers led the two district councils to present to Cambridgeshire Horizons' and Cambridgeshire County Council's Chief Executives a number of principles and objectives which any new joint arrangements must achieve. These are set out below:
 - a) The overall aim is to deliver the sustainable development strategy on time to achieve improvements to the quality of life in the district areas, by focusing development in strategic locations with key planning gain benefits such as affordable housing and sustainable transport.
 - b) The achievement of this aim is predicated upon there being sufficient resources available to facilitate and deliver growth, not only in relation to the planning process but also in relation to infrastructure and ongoing service delivery, with resources being drawn from both public and private sectors.
 - c) There must be democratic control and accountability not only in relation to development control decisions but in shaping the delivery of the whole growth agenda.
 - d) Joint working must offer the potential to use resources in the most cost effective and focussed way, based upon the skills and experience that exist within the district councils, especially those accrued as a result of planning previous new settlements.
 - e) Any new arrangements must ensure continuity of delivery and avoid uncertainty and disruption that could create delays in the implementation of imminent schemes.
7. In addition to these objectives and principles, there has also been discussion about the potential benefits of the County Council's engagement in joint planning arrangements. The nature of this engagement would depend upon the extent to which the County Council's planning powers could be brought into the arrangements. Further, it is recognised that Cambridgeshire Horizons have a valuable role to play as a non statutory local delivery vehicle, particularly in respect of coordination, commissioning and banking, and that those activities which add value to the growth agenda locally should be developed.

Implications

8.	Financial	The Council's medium term financial strategy sets out the current and future projected financial impacts of growth in the district. The successful conclusion of local discussions may lead the Minister 'to commit Government to provide greater certainty of support on investment for the future'
	Legal	Any changes to the decision-making structures of the Council will have to be agreed by the Council. S101 (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and article 11 of the Council's constitution allows the establishment of joint arrangements with one or more local authorities and/or their executives to discharge non executive functions in any of the participating authorities. Under The Local Government Act 2000, the discharge of functions by another local authority are, in certain circumstances prohibited where that function is the responsibility of the executive. The Local authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Modification of Enactments and Further Provisions)(England) Order make the position clear.
	Staffing	Any proposals for joint working will have implications for the Council's staff in the Planning and other service areas.
	Risk Management	The delivery of growth in the district is a major challenge for the Council and is identified in the corporate risk management matrix. In respect of the current negotiations with Government there is a risk that the Government might impose a development corporation type model and relieve the Council of its development control functions in the growth areas.
	Equal Opportunities	None

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

9.	Affordable Homes	Future joint planning arrangements will have fundamental impacts upon all of the Council's annual priorities and corporate objectives
	Customer Service	"
	Northstowe and other growth areas	"
	Quality, Accessible Services	"
	Village Life	"
	Sustainability	"
	Partnership	"

Recommendations

10. Council is recommended to:
- a) note the contents of correspondence from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) at appendices A and B, and to note that discussions with Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, and Cambridgeshire Horizons are ongoing and that any formal proposals arising from those discussions in relation to joint planning arrangements will be referred to the Council for decision.
 - b) delegate to the Leader, Planning Portfolio Holder and Chairman of Planning Committee the authority to continue discussions with the above partners, in consultation with the Leaders/Convenors of opposition groups and with all members of Cabinet.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Letters from DCLG attached as appendices

Contact Officer: Steve Hampson – Executive Director
Telephone: (01954) 713021