

REPORT TO: Northstowe and New Communities Portfolio Holder

25 January 2012

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director (Operational Services) / Planning & New Communities Corporate Manager

REVIEW OF JOINT URBAN DESIGN TEAM

Purpose

1. This report is based on a review of the Joint Urban Design Team conducted with Cambridge City Council. The report proposes changes to the arrangement of the joint urban design that are intended to ensure the continued provision of a responsive, resilient and customer focussed service.
2. This is not a key decision but has been brought to the Portfolio Holder because the Joint Team has been a high profile service. It was first published in the November 2011 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that
 - (a) the secondment arrangements for the Joint Urban Team are not renewed beyond the end of March 2012, and are replaced with collaborative joint working. See Option 4 in paragraph 21 – 26.
 - (b) the revised working arrangements should be underpinned with a written protocol.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. A collaborative approach including informal secondment arrangements and matrix management has worked successfully for other parts of the service including the New Communities Planning Team. The new arrangements are expected to maintain a resilient and customer focussed urban design service providing advice on growth sites and other major developments.

Background

5. The Joint Urban Design Team (JUDT) was established in July 2008 for a three year period. The arrangement, including formal secondments of South Cambridgeshire employees to Cambridge City Council, was extended to 31 March 2012 pending a review. Cambridgeshire Horizons provided funding for two posts in each Council to 31 March 2011. The joint team was established to create a critical mass of urban design capacity for the major growth sites and to provide a single approach to the major sites bisected by the District and City boundary. The Director of Joint Planning played a strong role in leading the Urban Design Team although line management was provided by the Director of Planning at Cambridge City in liaison with the Corporate Manager at South Cambridgeshire.

6. The team currently comprises 5.5 posts reporting to the Head of JUDT. (4 Cambridge City Posts and 2.5 SCDC posts) Both councils have made small reductions to the team as part of restructures.
7. The JUDT provides urban design advice in respect of planning applications, pre-application enquiries and master plans prepared for major sites; formulates urban design concepts, frameworks, briefs and guidance; and delivers urban design training, including 'Building for Life' components, to Councillors, officers and others.
8. Since its formation, the JUDT has worked particularly closely with the Major Development Planning team at the City Council and New Communities at SCDC. The JUDT has provided urban design advice on all on the major sites in the City and South Cambridgeshire including Northstowe, Cambourne, Orchard Park, the City Fringe sites and the Bayer site in Hauxton, Ida Darwin site at Fulbourn. Advice is also provided on selected smaller housing schemes in the District as requested. The Urban Designers also support policy work and will help to assess sites submitted through the SHLAA – Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.
9. In 2011, Cambridge City Council restructured its Planning service to bring its conservation service together with urban design. The changes deleted the post of Head of Joint Urban Design Team and created a new post to lead the Urban Design and Conservation teams at the City Council. This appointment is pending.
10. Between October – December 2011, a review of the JUDT was carried out for both Councils to assess working arrangements and current needs, and consider options for the future.

Considerations

11. Central Government continues to assign weight to design aspects of development, for example, with the introduction of a requirement for Design and Access statements for most planning applications. The Draft National Planning Policy Statement (NPPS) continues this theme and the Localism Act includes increased neighbourhood and parish level engagement and greater emphasis on local choice in place shaping.
12. Both Councils recognise the importance of urban design advice and the benefit that it brings to ensuring the creation of successful places that function well and that are attractive and meet the aim of building successful sustainable developments.
13. The JUDT comprises qualified and experienced team members. Since its formation in 2008, it has established a strong reputation as a unit set up to promote excellence. The team has performed to very high standards on a variety of growth sites in the sub region and has successfully addressed a wide range of urban design challenges.
14. Views obtained from a number of external customers and clients produce a positive picture. JUDT members are seen as helpful; positive; able to compromise; and solution orientated to the extent that they are recognised as considerably raising the quality of developments
15. It is appropriate to consider the working arrangements at this time because:

- (a) The agreement between the Councils was due to be reviewed after three years
- (b) External funding is no longer available to support the team
- (c) Many of the growth sites, including those on the southern fringe and north-west of Cambridge, Cambourne and Orchard Park, are now at or approaching the delivery stage
- (d) The City Council's restructure has introduced new responsibilities for the manager of the urban design service.

Options

16. The review presented a range of options for the provision of urban design advice:

Option 1: External consultancy support

17. External consultancy support would carry a prohibitive cost. Maintenance of close working relationships with other Council teams and Design Review Panels would become more difficult.

Option 2: Continuation of current arrangements

18. Continuation is not a straightforward option in that the City Council has, as part of a restructure, deleted the Head of Urban Design post that has since 2008 fulfilled the role of Head of JUDT. The establishment of a new post managing both urban design and conservation functions in the City Council means that the management arrangements of a continuing JUDT would inevitably have to be different in the future.

Option 3: Expansion of the functions to include Conservation work

19. The skills deployed in Conservation and Urban Design work are closely aligned, and this may be something that could be explored in the future however, at present, the new arrangements are in their infancy at the City Council. It is only after the new working arrangements in the City have been sustainably secured that the option to pursue the creation of a joint urban design and conservation centre across the two Councils could realistically be considered.

Option 4: Revised working relationship between officers from each of the Councils in a modified shared service arrangement

20. A fourth option would be to maintain close co-operation between the urban designers within each Council but move away from the current formal JUDT arrangement with team members instead reporting to management structures within both authorities. This would allow greater integration and joined-up working within each council including at South Cambridgeshire with new communities, development control and conservation teams and specialist staff including ecologists and landscape designers.
21. In a more informal collaborative-based arrangement the urban design function would operate in the same way that the major applications teams and the planning policy

teams operate within the two Councils, where officers from the two teams work closely together, leading on the sites that fall predominately within their District and reporting to a Joint Development Control Committee.

22. Collaborative work could continue in respect of several other areas of work including:
- Design advice on specific projects including joint review of major schemes
 - Design training and briefings to include training support for officers and Members of both councils
 - Personal development and mentoring of team members
 - Flexible deployment of staff resource to reflect peaks and troughs of work.
23. There would remain the potential to offer staff a career structure and variety of high profile work as a positive factor in attracting and retaining quality specialists.
24. Additionally there would not be a need to address issues regarding the ongoing apportionment of Head of JUDT costs, although a service level agreement or written protocol would be desirable to underpin the revised arrangements and act as a basis for compensating any net imbalance in work contributions.
25. Option 4 is the recommended option.
26. The Head of Urban Design has provided a strong contribution to the Northstowe project over the last nine months, and it is intended that this input will continue until determination of the Phase 1 application.

Implications

27. Financial	The posts are already within the establishment and thus within existing staffing budgets.
Legal	Secondment arrangements will cease.
Staffing	Consultation has been undertaken with those within the team who will return to their substantive posts within SCDC.
Risk Management	It is considered that the recommended option represents the best option to the Council. Withdrawing from this area of Council business would represent a serious threat to the quality of the District for existing and future communities.
Equality and Diversity	Agreed changes will be carried out in line with the Council's equality and diversity policies.
Equality Impact Assessment completed	Not relevant at this stage.
Climate Change	No Direct implications

Consultations

28. Consultations have been carried out with officers within the JUDT, Head of Planning and Executive Director at the City Council, Planning & New Communities Corporate Manager and Head of New Communities at SCDC and other senior and service managers. All support the recommended arrangements.
29. Views of the service provided by the JUDT were also obtained from a number of external customers. Developers and agents have praised many aspects of the work

of JUDT staff including sensitivity to the changing needs of clients including commercial constraints; production of high quality design advice; and communication skills. Scheme promoters have highlighted the development of long-term productive working relationships as well as the professional expertise and experience of team members. JUDT members are seen as helpful; positive; able to compromise; and solution orientated to the extent that they are recognised as considerably raising the quality of developments. It is anticipated that these qualities will remain within the proposed arrangements.

Consultation with Children and Young People

30. Not relevant.

Effect on Strategic Aims

31. The urban design service enables the Council to continue to enhance the quality of the district and meet the needs of existing and future communities.

Conclusions / Summary

32. The current formal joint team model of working arrangement has been reviewed, and a number of options considered.
33. The 'lead authority' model (option 4) has been successfully demonstrated by the way the two Planning Policy teams and the two Majors/Strategic Sites teams have operated in recent years, and moving to a collaborative flexible form of joint working is appropriate for our urban design service.
34. It is therefore recommended that the secondment arrangements are not renewed beyond the end of March 2012, and are replaced with collaborative joint working, underpinned by a written protocol similar to that for the Joint Planning arrangements.

Background Papers: None

Contact Officer: Jane Green – Head of New Communities
Telephone: (01954) 713164.