

Response on findings

We are very grateful for the time Lord Kerslake and his team provided to us to take stock of what is one of the biggest projects of this type in the country.

That he was willing to give his time and undertake this review on a pro-bono basis demonstrates the significance and importance of the scheme and the principles of Garden Communities.

Within the report Lord Kerslake commends the scale of ambition and strength of co-operation between the councils in developing the proposed North Essex Garden Communities and we welcome his praise of the progress made and his comments that the initiative has “huge potential on a national scale”.

The report also highlights a number of recommendations as follows:

1. Develop a clear, differentiated strategy for each site

Work is already underway on individual ‘concept framework’ for each of the potential new communities, and we will continue to engage with local bodies and various groups and residents to bring out the individual characteristics of each proposed location. This initial stage is expected to be complete by spring and will be followed by further consultation on the ideas.

We recognise there is a need to strengthen the narrative across North Essex within which the Garden Communities programme would fit. We welcome the initial exploration by the review team of an example of how such a strategic narrative could be framed. We will now be looking to advance this work ourselves over the early part of this year.

2. Resource up accordingly. You need a full time director and a dedicated project team

We have secured funding from Government for this project and have each added additional sums to begin the first stages of the programme. This has allowed us to make substantial process.

However we recognise there is a need to resource appropriately in the future, both in terms of finance and the experience required in the team as the programme progresses, and we will ensure the right resources are applied at each stage.

We recognise that at this next stage a dedicated director and more resource within the programme team is likely to be required and this is being taken forward.

3. Explore development and finance partners

There have been initial conversations with a range of partners and it is envisaged that the Local Delivery Vehicles, who will be responsible for developing the plans for the individual communities, will want to continue these with a view to identifying the right partners which share the long term buy-in and are committed to achieving our shared vision.

While the current delivery strategy involves a Local Delivery Vehicle structure for each community, there is flexibility within this approach to allow different delivery strategies should they be considered appropriate. In addition, and in part due to the unique nature of each of the negotiations with the respective landowners, the programme team representing each of the council partners are open to other delivery strategies and opportunities across the three communities.

4. Build a much stronger, high level conversation with government

We welcome the acknowledgement that the project is potentially of national significance and recognise that success depends upon the delivery of timely infrastructure. This is something we have committed to, and the recognition that we should be doing more to engage Government at the highest levels in order to get government resources to help deliver on a significant part of their national housing strategy is supported.

5. Revisit the delivery timetable

It is recognised that individual schemes will deliver at a different pace over time, although one advantage of this work is it should allow 'smoothing' of delivery rates across North Essex over coming years. The North Essex Garden Communities (NEGC) body has been set up specifically to monitor delivery and ensure that action is taken by the Delivery Vehicles to achieve their timetables.

6. Revisit the Local Plans timetables to ensure the Plans are likely to be found 'sound' and discuss implications with The Planning Inspectorate.

We have quickly moved to review Local Plan timetables as suggested by the review, and rescheduled the timetables to allow more time to collect the appropriate evidence and to carry out the necessary analysis.

We are committed to ensuring the best position is presented at Inquiry to enable the Planning Inspector to find our Local Plans sound. We have formally now scheduled respective Local Plans so that consultation on the Submission Draft Local Plans will be in June 2017.

7. Clarify the position on local plan timetabling with DCLG.

Conversations have been held with DCLG and the Planning Inspectorate and these will continue over coming months. Focused discussions with the DCLG Local Plans

team will continue to ensure that both the Planning Inspector and DCLG are aware and supportive of the proposed Local Plan timings.

Councils in this document refers to: Braintree District Council, Colchester Borough Council, Tendring District Council and Essex County Council.