

Report of	Strategic Director – Commercial and Place	Author: Chris Outtersides
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Title	North Essex Garden Communities – Kerslake Peer Review	
Wards affected	All	

This report concerns the Peer Review led by Lord Bob Kerslake into the North Essex Garden Communities Project

1. Decision(s) Required

- 1.1 To note the Kerslake Review Report provided at Appendix A; and
- 1.2 To note the North Essex Garden Communities' partnership initial response provided at Appendix B and the intention of the partnership to draw up actions to address the Report's recommendations.

2. Reasons for Decision(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet has previously supported the programme to investigate the potential of Garden Communities across North Essex. The purpose of this report is to brief Cabinet on the outcome of the Lord Kerslake led Peer Review, to note the partnership's initial response and the next steps in responding to the recommendations of the Review.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 No alternative options are presented.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 A Peer Review process was instructed by the NEGC Programme in November 2016. This review was led by Lord Bob Kerslake. Lord Kerslake is the Chair of Peabody, Chair of the IPPR London Housing Commission and Chairman of King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.
- 4.2 In addition to Lord Kerslake, the review team comprised the following members:
 - Lord Jamie Borwick, Chairman of Countryside Properties (Bicester) Ltd, developer of the Kinsmere scheme of 2,600 houses in Bicester and an investor in property in the UK;
 - Trudi Elliott CBE, Chief Executive of the Royal Town Planning Institute;
 - Eugene Dreyer: founder of ystudio ltd, masterplan and design consultancy;
 - Malcolm Sharp MBE, Planning and Local Government consultant advising on all aspects of delivering planning services; and

- Graham Hughes, Executive Director of Economy, Transport and Environment at Cambridgeshire County Council.

The Brief

- 4.3 The Review Brief was agreed by the Shadow Delivery Board at its meeting on the 3rd November and included the following:

- Are we ambitious enough (place shaping);
- How do we maintain quality and pace of build development;
- Are we maximising our position with Government in terms of support and funding;
- Are we positioned to exploit any commercial income streams which could come from the development;
- What's the best vehicle for managing the opportunity; and
- Do we have the capacity and capability to oversee the developments effectively?

- 4.4 A Self-Assessment was undertaken by the lead Directors from the partnership in advance of the review commencing.

Review Process

- 4.5 Members of the review team met with the lead Directors from the partnership on the 9th November. This meeting involved a tour of the three Garden Community sites and a presentation. Lord Kerslake then met with the four authorities' Leaders and Chief Executives on the 10th November 2016.

- 4.6 Following these initial meetings, follow up sessions were held between members of the review team and various members of the project team to discuss specific issues including Local Plan process and infrastructure. In addition, Lord Kerslake also spoke with one of the landowners involved.

Review Report

- 4.7 A copy of the final report prepared by Lord Kerslake is provided at Appendix A of this report.

- 4.8 In summary, the report commended the partnership on the following:

- The councils' ambition for this project is impressive;
- This is an excellent example of cooperation between councils;
- Considerable progress has been made; and
- The initiative could be of strategic national importance.

- 4.9 In terms of the key challenges, the report recommends the following items for action:

- There are significant differences between the three sites which have implications for the pace of delivery. So the councils should look at the phasing of the development and be prepared to differentiate their strategy for each site.
- The timetable for the Local Plan is ambitious given the scale and complexity of the garden communities. The councils should take action to ensure local plans can have the best chance of being found 'sound' in an appropriate timescale
- The project team needs to build capacity and increase its development expertise in order to deliver the councils' ambitions
- The councils are committing to a significant level of exposure and should explore ways to spread their risk that do not sacrifice their ambitions for these communities
- The councils should maintain some flexibility on the delivery model for each site.

- The three sites for these communities are dependent on some major infrastructure commitments. It is important to be very clear about these dependencies.
- The councils will need to raise the profile of North Essex Garden Communities with government - and be clear what they need from government - to deliver development on this scale. Councils acknowledge the project has not been sufficiently on the radar of senior government officials and ministers.
- The councils need to be able to articulate a strong strategic narrative for these developments

4.10 The report concludes with the following recommendations:

- Develop a clear, differentiated strategy for each site
- Resource up accordingly. You need a full time Director and a dedicated project team
- Explore development partners and finance partners
- Build a much stronger, high level conversation with government
- Revisit the delivery timetable
- Revisit the Local Plans timetables with the aid of the 'PAS toolkit' to ensure the Plans are likely to be found 'sound' and discuss implications with The Planning Inspectorate and Highways Agency.
- Clarify the position on local plan timetabling with DCLG.

Partnership Response

4.11 The Review Report has been placed on each of the partner Council's websites. To accompany the review, the partnership has prepared an initial response. This is provided at Appendix B and, in summary, sets out the following in relation to the recommendations:

- **Develop a clear, differentiated strategy for each site** - Work is already underway on an 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 the end of March 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 this 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.

- **Resource up accordingly. You need a full time director and a dedicated project team** - We have secured substantial funding from Government for this project and have each added additional sums. While recognising the substantial cost of developing this programme it is paramount that we apply the right resources at each stage to deliver quality schemes. It is recognised 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.
- **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.

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

- **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.

Action Plan

- 4.12 In addition to the public response, a more detailed Action Plan is being prepared by the partnership.

Next Steps

- 4.13 Following further consideration of the final Peer Review report and the Action Plan, the partnership will prepare an Annual Plan setting out key deliverables and milestone dates.

5. Strategic Plan References

- 5.1 The Strategic Plan Action Plan includes a commitment to make Colchester a vibrant, prosperous, thriving and welcoming place. The consideration of Garden Communities forms part of the new Local Plan process which, in turn, will contribute to the attainment of this commitment through new development, conservation and regeneration.

6. Publicity Considerations

- 6.1 The partnership's public response provided at Appendix A has been uploaded to each of the partnership's websites. In addition, a press release setting out the Review recommendations was released before Christmas.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The Peer Review was undertaken pro bono.

8. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 8.1 No direct implications.

9. Risk Management Implications

- 9.1 The NEGC Programme Team maintains a Risk Register. The recommendations of the Peer Review, along with those set out in the public response and the proposed Action Plan will be added to the register. Risk management will continue to be considered by the partnership as the programme is developed.