

Agenda Item No:	11	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	27 June 2019	
Report Title:	Wisbech Garden Town update	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

- The Council and its partners have made a commitment to address the socio economic issues present in the town of Wisbech through the Wisbech 2020 Vision project.
- In 2015 the Wisbech 2020 Vision Group commissioned URBED to explore the potential for a Garden Town in Wisbech. The proposal sets out a step change regeneration project to deliver growth of 10,000 - 12,000 homes in Wisbech over a 40-year period.
- The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work undertaken since the publication of the earlier feasibility works and the previous Cabinet update in July 2017.
- Further technical, planning, delivery and viability work is now required to establish the potential identified in the feasibility study in order to identify a viable and deliverable proposition on which further design and delivery work can be based.
- This will also include the commissioning of technical evidence to inform the FDC Local Plan Review and produce a robust technical evidence base and supporting information to inform and de-risk the further development of the Garden Town.
- The commissioning of this work will be led by the CPCA, working with FDC Senior Officers, and the costs will be funded via the CPCA allocated £3.3m budget (excluding rail GRIP study) for the project.

2 Key issues

- The Wisbech Garden Town proposal has the capacity to positively impact on the social wellbeing of Wisbech by:
 - a) realising aspirations and improving educational attainment
 - b) improving health and wellbeing
 - c) developing a new branding and profile for the town
- The proposal sets out a step change regeneration project to deliver growth of 10,000 - 12,000 homes in Wisbech over a 40 year period.
- The proposal has strong support from all tiers of local government across the area, including the local MP, as well as initial support from the community.

- A submission has been made to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Garden Communities programme. As part of the submission 14 letters of support were received from various local stakeholders.
- Further work has been undertaken in order to de-risk the project regarding 2 key issues, specifically flood risk and connectivity.
- The next stage of works will further progress the design and planning of the Garden Town, and address the viability and deliverability of the proposal. This will be progressed interpedently with ongoing work around transport and connectivity.

3 Recommendations

- To note the progress to date contained in this report and the associated documents and approve the progression of further feasibility work on a Garden Town for Wisbech in order to inform the consideration and approval of the CPCA Board at its 31 July 2019 meeting.

Wards Affected	All Fenland wards but most significantly Wisbech wards.
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Chris Boden - Leader of the Council
Report Originator(s)	Gary Garford - Corporate Director
Contact Officer(s)	Paul Medd - Chief Executive Gary Garford - Corporate Director Email: garygarford@fenland.gov.uk
Background Paper(s)	MHCLG Garden Communities Bid Wisbech Garden Town - Sequential Test Evidence Base Wisbech Flood Studies - Nene Barrier Feasibility Wisbech Flood Studies - Wisbech Modelling Report Wisbech Flood Studies - Conditions for Flood Resilient Development Wisbech Flood Studies - Flood Resilient Construction Report CPCA Board 28th June 2017 (Dualling of A47 Business Case (Appendix 1), Wisbech Garden Town Feasibility Study (Appendix 4) CPCA Board 25 October 2017 (Wisbech Access Study).

Report: (delete if not required)

1 Background / introduction

- 1.1 The vision for the Garden Town is a bold and ambitious proposition to transform the fortunes of the market town of Wisbech. The Wisbech Garden Town proposal has the potential to deliver up to 12,000 new homes with strong connections existing urban form to form a community of up to 40,000 people.
- 1.2 In 2013 FDC, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), Wisbech Town Council (WTC) the local MP and other key stakeholders came together and pledged to work collectively in partnership to address the unique challenges faced by the local community, under the Wisbech 2020 banner.
- 1.3 From this collaboration, the Wisbech 2020 Vision programme was established; an initiative to improve the prospects of Wisbech and its residents, with community engagement at its very heart. The Wisbech 2020 Vision programme has maintained ongoing support from multi-sector partners, delivering a significant number of projects across the town.
- 1.4 However, there was a recognition that a 'step change' was required to reverse the fortunes of the town, and that this could only be achieved via growth of housing and the economy which could in turn contribute to the delivery of much needed housing for the wider Cambridgeshire area. It is from this that the Garden Town proposal developed.
- 1.5 Using housing growth, the strategy will transform the deprivation levels in the town and lead to improved outcomes in core determinates such as health, education and cohesion. This will result in significant benefits to both the community and the overall public purse.
- 1.6 The ultimate aim of the Garden Town is to take a place-based approach to improve social outcomes through the development of quality new housing, employment space and improved connectivity. Together these elements will raise the profile of Wisbech shifting the image of the town as a whole.
- 1.7 A spatial planning study and initial viability assessment was commissioned by FDC, and this Initial feasibility work suggested that the Garden Town has the potential to double the existing population to an estimated 40,000 people and could create approximately 11,000 new jobs. This will significantly increase the marketability and the competitiveness of the town, with the potential of making it an economic net contributor to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Area.
- 1.8 The Feasibility stage of the Garden Town project identified the potential to deliver:
 - 10,000 – 12,000 new homes over a 40-year period;
 - 11,000 new jobs across 100 hectares of employment space;
 - The garden town will generate a requirement for 4-5 primary schools, 1-2 secondary schools, and 3 health centres;
 - 259 hectares of green space including new open space, retained woodland and orchards, and a country park.
- 1.1 A key milestone in the project was achieved in June 2017 when the newly formed Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) approved £6.5m funding to take the Garden Town concept to a business case and delivery stage. This followed the inclusion of the Garden Town in the CPCA devolution deal with Government.
- 2 This approval included £3.2m for the GRIP study related to the reinstatement of the rail line between Wisbech and March, which is subsequently being separately led by the

CPCA, resulting in the residual funding of £3.3m available for the Garden Town feasibility and business case activities.

2 Progress since previous update report

2.1 A previous update regarding the Garden Town was provided to Cabinet in July 2017. Following this report and publication of the feasibility work progress has been made across a number of workstreams including:

- Further testing of the spatial planning feasibility work
- Further investigation into flood risk, and flood risk management
- Progress across various projects in relation to transport and connectivity
- The submission of a bid as part of the MHCLG Garden Communities Programme
- The approval of a review of the Fenland Local Plan.

Further detail on this work is provided below.

Spatial planning feasibility work

2.2 In 2015 the Wisbech 2020 Vision Group commissioned URBED to explore the potential for a Garden Town in Wisbech. This was done drawing upon the work URBED had done in its winning entry for the Wolfson Economics Prize, which proposed doubling the size of a fictional town to create a garden town.

2.3 A viability assessment was also undertaken of the proposals, and suggested what investment would be required to enable its delivery, including the use of land value capture. It suggested a number of first steps to take the project forward, which included further masterplanning which takes account of more evidence than was available as part of the commissions such as land ownership and a number of technical studies.

2.4 Following engagement with Government and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the feasibility proposals produced by URBED were reviewed and a Proposal Overview and Independent Technical Review undertaken through a secondment from the HCA. This review provided Government with a prospectus which it was asked to consider as part of the Garden Communities Programme. This review further scrutinised the case for change, the case for intervention, and included a review of the previous viability assessment, including sensitivity testing to compare with and challenge the initial proposals.

Flood Risk Management

2.5 Fenland District Council commissioned Royal HaskoningDHV to carry out a Flood Study for Wisbech Garden Town in October 2017. The aim of the study was to determine whether tidal flood risk would render the Wisbech Garden Town inappropriate as a matter of principle: can the Garden Town be designed to be sustainably safe from flooding, and meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), to the agreement of the Environment Agency (EA) and other stakeholders.

2.6 The technical studies sought to investigate how the development of the Garden Town can be designed to avoid the areas at highest risk of flooding and the development as a whole being made safe and sustainable in flood risk terms, in accordance with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

2.7 Active collaboration has taken place with the Environment Agency at area and national levels to inform the technical requirements of flood risk management, including learning from the Dutch government and award-winning approaches of Royal HaskoningDHV. This informed the feasibility work, and concluded that a technical solution could be provided to effectively manage the risk of flooding and create a climate resilient development model for Wisbech. In addition, these solutions could reduce the long-term

impacts of flood risk to the existing settlement and communities presenting a model for climate resilient developments elsewhere in the UK.

- 2.8 The main overall conclusion of the Flood Study is that tidal flood risk does not make the Wisbech Garden Town unacceptable as a development proposal. The modelling shows that there is a flood hazard (calculated as a combination of flood depth and velocity) in the current situation, in the prescribed 1:200 per year chance of exceedance scenario. In this scenario there is only a very small chance of significant overtopping of the defences; but when assuming that the defences might breach, as required by EA Guidance, then the modelling shows varying levels of hazard throughout the potential Garden Town area. This hazard will increase over time, considering how climate change might increase water levels and flows over the potential life of the settlement up to 200 years into the future.
- 2.9 The modelling also shows that the hazard can be addressed, in the first instance by taking a sequential approach (focusing the development away from higher risk areas, for example avoiding areas close to the River Nene to the west of the town centre and to the south near the A47).
- 2.10 Any remaining flood risk is limited and localised, and can be addressed with measures that currently seem technically and financially feasible. This could be through measures such as blue-green design, use of raised roads and conveying any flood water around the development into the existing drainage system (including potentially required increase in drainage capacity).
- 2.11 A Position Statement between the EA/Anglian Water/North Level IDB and FDC has recently been agreed accepting the technical work undertaken to date, subject to more detailed analysis and agreement linked to the next stages of the planning, flood modelling and design process.
- 2.12 Part of the flood study activity was to investigate the potential of a Nene Barrier or Barrage, which concluded that such a structure would significantly increase the flood protection to all of Wisbech (not just the Garden Town) and other settlements on the Nene upstream of the barrier, while also offering much wider potential for water resource and socio-economic enhancement. It further concluded that the barrier was not a prerequisite for the Garden Town however the project team are exploring discussions with key stakeholders such as Anglian Water and the Environment Authority to establish the merits of further feasibility work.
- 2.13 The team engaged with the Environment Agency's National Team which confirmed potential for Wisbech Garden Town to be a Frontrunner for realising shared ambitions for developing a template for climate resilient housing behind flood defences.
- 2.14 The full technical reports produced as part of the flood study work are as follows:
 - Wisbech Garden Town - Sequential Test Evidence Base
 - Wisbech Flood Studies - Nene Barrier Feasibility
 - Wisbech Flood Studies - Wisbech Modelling Report
 - Wisbech Flood Studies - Conditions for Flood Resilient Development
 - Wisbech Flood Studies - Flood Resilient Construction ReportThese reports will be made available for members to view via member services but will not be made publically available due to commercially sensitive information contained within.

Transport & Connectivity

Wisbech Access Study

- 2.15 In order to stimulate the growth in Fenland projected by the current Local Plan, and ease current congestion in the town, a number of feasibility studies were undertaken to determine where the town's transport infrastructure could be improved in order to accommodate the planned growth. The interventions identified demonstrated a very high benefit-cost Ratio and so a package of measures was proposed. Following public consultation series of five schemes was approved for development. Preliminary design work is now complete on 2 of these, and detailed design will commence shortly. The schedule of work is being phased so as to minimise the disruption multiple construction works would have on the town. The work is currently expected to complete in 2021.

Wisbech Garden Town – Transport Assessment

- 2.16 As part of the feasibility stage of the Garden Town project a high-level transport assessment was commissioned to evaluate the potential traffic impact of the Garden Town and explore mitigation measures to alleviate such impacts where necessary. A bespoke model was developed for the Wisbech-wide road network, using inputs from the Wisbech Area Transport Study SATURN model. The model included a number of network improvements that are being considered in and around Wisbech. The model then estimated the quantum and distribution of trips resulting from the additional development in the future, which included development allocated in the current Local Plan (circa 2,500 homes), plus the development proposed in the spatial planning feasibility study for the Garden Town (an additional 9,500 homes). This development was phased over a 30-year period beyond the end of the Local Plan. The report then assessed the traffic impacts and junction performance, and identified locations requiring mitigation. A high-level approximation of cost and phasing was then applied to these mitigation measures. The outcome of the study identified that with the planned infrastructure improvements and the A47 proposals shown below; transport was not a 'showstopper' to the Garden Town proposals.

A47 Dualling Study

- 2.17 The Mayor, CPCA and other organisations recognise the strategic importance of the A47 as both a transport and economic corridor. During the election the Mayor committed to a number of strategic transport improvements to the A47 including the dualling of the A47 between the A16 at Peterborough and Walton Highway, just east of Wisbech. This would provide improved connectivity to the north of the Combined Authority area and complement other projects including the Garden Town.
- 2.18 In June 2017 a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) and Options Appraisal Report was commissioned to investigate further the case dualling of the A47. The SOBC, using Local Plan growth assumptions, demonstrated a strong strategic case for dualling the A47. As the work has progressed, the full growth potential along the A47 growth corridor has emerged, which could lead to further employment and housing growth opportunities.
- 2.19 The Options Appraisal Report has assessed a number of route options, the preferred of which are to be considered for further development. These are being taken forward by the CPCA with Highways England and the DfT for inclusion into the Highways England Roads Investment Strategy 2 (RIS 2) period for development and design with a view to construction commencing in early RIS 3 (2025). Highways England are generally supportive of the project's consideration for inclusion in RIS2, and it is expected that the Department for Transport will give their decision later in 2019.

Wisbech to March Rail Link (GRIP3) Study

- 2.20 The CPCA recognise that the potential of the garden town will be greatly enhanced by the provision of restored connectivity to the mainline rail network. The CPCA are funding a GRIP3-like study into the March-Wisbech transport corridor which will develop a business case and single option design to re-instate rail services between March and Wisbech, and consider onward connections to Cambridge, Peterborough and beyond. It will also consider other viable options and the optimum location for a station in Wisbech.

The GRIP3-like Study is expected to report in February 2020 with earlier indications of station locations to inform the Wisbech Access Study work.

MHCLG Garden Communities Programme

- 2.21 As part of Government's drive to increase the quantity and quality of housebuilding the Garden Communities programme was formed, with the aim of encouraging well-planned, well-designed, locally-led garden communities that renews Ebenezer Howard's idea of a garden city for the 21st century.
- 2.22 The current Garden Communities programme supports 23 places that will deliver over 200,000 homes by the middle of the century. Each project receives a tailored package of support that includes resource funding, expert delivery advice from Homes England and cross-government brokerage to resolve barriers to delivery.
- 2.23 In late 2018 proposals were sought from local authorities and private sector partners to be part of a further round of the Garden Communities programme. As part of this a proposal was submitted in November 2018 for Wisbech Garden Town, which received written support from a dozen stakeholders including the local MP, the Mayor of CPCA, Anglian Water, the neighbouring authorities of Kings Lynn & West Norfolk & Peterborough amongst others.
- 2.24 An initial list of 5 successful bids was announced in early 2019. However, it is expected that further successful proposals will be announced during 2019. FDC officers will continue to liaise with MHCLG in relation to the Wisbech submission.

Local Plan Review

- 2.25 FDC has committed to commencing a review of its current Local Plan during 2019. An updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) was approved by FDC Cabinet in February 2019 which set out the Development Plan Documents to be produced over the next few years, namely a new Local Plan.
- 2.26 The LDS has the following timetable for the new Local Plan.
- Public Participation on options (Regulation 18) Oct 2019 & May 2020
 - Pre-Submission publication (Regulation 19) Feb 2021
 - Submission (Regulation 22) May 2021
 - Examination from submission
 - Inspector's Report issued Jan 2022
 - Adoption Feb 2022.

3 The next stage of feasibility work

- 3.1 Further technical, planning, delivery and viability work is required to establish the potential identified in the feasibility study. The CPCA previously approved an allocation of funding to progress this and other studies. A further decision is required by CPCA Board to approve the allocation of funding for this specific project, and to commence the procurement process. A report is scheduled to go the CPCA Board in July 2019.
- 3.2 The purpose of this project is to commission a multi-disciplinary team to progress the planning and design work to the next stage. FDC are working with the CPCA to manage and support the delivery of the procurement for this project.
- 3.3 The objectives of the procurement are:
- To define a brief and scope of services for the next stage of feasibility, planning and design work for the Wisbech Garden Town.

- To design and manage the procurement of a masterplanning team via the Homes England Multi-Disciplinary Framework.
- To provide support and interface as necessary to other workstreams currently being progressed by FDC, CPCA or partners.

3.4 The output of this will be the procurement of a multi-disciplinary team to undertake the next stage of work. The objectives of this commission are:

- To sufficiently progress the planning, design and deliverability of the Garden Town in order to identify a viable and deliverable proposition on which further design and delivery work can be based;
- To produce a robust technical evidence base and supporting information to inform and de-risk the further development of the Garden Town;
- To produce a masterplan framework within which subsequent phases of the garden town can be designed and delivered;
- To provide sufficient planning, design and technical evidence to inform the Local Plan review in identifying or allocating site(s) for the Garden Town and informing any potential site allocation policy;
- That the masterplanning and design to be of the highest quality in terms of setting the standard for future development and successfully interpreting garden town principles;
- That the masterplanning and design work take an innovative and integrated approach regarding place-making, sustainability, and flood-resilient development that can be applied to other places facing similar challenges;
- For consultation and engagement with residents and other stakeholders to be central to the next stage of planning and design work;
- That the masterplanning and design services are progressed alongside, and integrated with, parallel workstreams including the wider Wisbech 2020 Vision Programme which is linked to the Growing Fenland work, the Wisbech Rail Link and A47 Dualling.

3.5 The benefits of commissioning the masterplanning and design services, alongside various technical surveys and supporting studies, are that it would progress the planning and design of the garden town to a sufficient stage by which:

- Further testing of the feasibility and deliverability of the concept can be made through an Outline Business Case or similar;
- A masterplan can be adopted which will provide a framework for the whole of the garden town which will set the standard for development in terms of quality, and within which later phases can be brought forward and designed in more detail;
- It provides evidence for the Local Plan Review, allowing the garden town to be identified in the Local Plan, reducing planning risk and increasing the likelihood of delivery;
- It would further test and add detail to the existing vision and aspirations for the garden town as set out in the feasibility study, including the quantum, mix, quality and spatial layout of development;
- It will provide the technical evidence and due diligence required to progress the planning and delivery of the garden town with greater certainty and less risk;
- And it will provide further planning and design information to enable the complementary work streams to be progressed, including flood risk management, delivery models, and further consultation and engagement with the community and stakeholders.

3.6 Subject to approval by the CPCA at its Board of 31 July 2019, it is intended that the procurement process will start in early August 2019. The process will be a 2 or 3 stage procurement process in line with the requirements of the Homes England Framework. The current programme indicates that the selection of a preferred supplier could be made in November 2019, with further CPCA approvals required prior to contract signing. The project is expected to take approximately 12 months to complete.

4 Effect on corporate objectives

- 4.1 The Wisbech Garden Town proposal is a key element to local economic plans and strategies and is a significant part of a wider economic development programme for the town. It also demonstrates a strategic fit with regional economic growth strategies and plans being progressed by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority in order to meet commitments in the CPCA devolution deal to substantially increase housing delivery and economic growth.
- 4.2 There is strong support for the Garden Town from all tiers of local government across the area including the local MP along with initial support from the community. As part of the submission to the MHCLG Garden Communities Programme a number of letters of support were provided by stakeholders including the MP, Wisbech Town Council, Cambs County Council, neighbouring local authorities including Kings Lynn & West Norfolk and Peterborough, and businesses including Anglian Water and Astra Zeneca.
- 4.3 The Local Plan adopted in 2015 includes provision for 11,000 new homes, to be concentrated around the four main towns in the district; Chatteris, Whittlesey and the majority of development in March and Wisbech. The plan includes provision for 3,550 homes in Wisbech (including an allocation that straddles the boarder with Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council), 2,300 of these homes are within the current red-line of the Garden Town, and in planning policy terms could potentially be delivered within the current plan period. FDC is to commence a Local Plan review with an indicative adoption by 2022.
- 4.4 The Fenland DC Business Plan 2018-19 is a vision for the future of Fenland. It explains how its priorities support the overarching aim of improving quality of life in Fenland through addressing the social, environmental and economic needs for residents to live happy and fulfilled lives.
- 4.5 It has a number of corporate priorities under the themes of Communities, Environment and Economy. The Garden Town project will help deliver on a number of these priorities, including directly towards priorities to:
- Attract new businesses, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting existing businesses in Fenland
 - Promote and enable housing growth, economic growth and regeneration across Fenland
 - Promote and lobby for infrastructure improvements across the district

5 Community impact

- 5.1 It is expected that through improvements in community facilities, schools, accessibility to open space the Garden Town can be the catalyst for the transformation of the town and its community. This could include the effects of raising education, skills and health to reduce the impact on welfare and NHS, and increase tax income.
- 5.2 The Garden Town would provide up to five new primary schools and up to two new secondary schools. Cambridgeshire County Council are currently preparing plans for a secondary school to the west of Wisbech (on land they own) which, subject to planning, will meet current demand for school places in Wisbech with the possibility for extension to provide future capacity for early phases of the Garden Town. This may allow early

delivery of a new secondary school in the programme. The education proposals have been prepared by CCC and based on child yield figures related to the proposed homes in the initial spatial feasibility study.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The procurement of the next stage of feasibility works will be undertaken by the CPCA, with input and support from FDC Officers. This will include representation on the Evaluation Panel to ensure that the appointment and proposed approach taken by the successful bidder will meet the needs of Fenland and relate to the aims and objectives of the wider Wisbech 2020 Vision programme.
- 6.2 The next stage of feasibility works will be programmed and progressed in such a way as to integrate with the ongoing work regarding connectivity, and the wider 2020 Vision Programme. This will be particularly important to ensure an integrated design approach is taken towards land use and transport.
- 6.3 In addition, the feasibility work will build upon the significant progress that has been made in assessing the risks regarding flood risk, and managing this risk in terms of taking the project forward. There is a need to build upon this work, and integrate the findings and methodology developed as part of the previous commissions into the next stage of feasibility.