

CABINET

17TH DECEMBER 2009

ST NEOTS HEALTH CHECK (Report by Head of Planning Services)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In order to support the on-going growth and regeneration of St Neots a market town 'health check' was carried out by consultants between September 2008 and July 2009 in partnership with a stakeholder group formed from a variety of local organisations including the Town Council, Little Paxton Parish Council and others. The purpose of this report is to outline to Cabinet, its findings and a future programme of action.

2. SUPPORTING/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The 'health check' was commissioned by the Council in order to assist in the planning for the continued growth of the town and in particular with regard to the sustainable urban extension to the east of the town. A growth figure of approx 2200 homes and some 25ha of employment land, in addition to the Loves farm commitment of approximately 1400 homes, is anticipated to be developed up to 2026. Beyond 2026 and assuming necessary improvements are made to the A428, a further development around 1400 homes could be envisaged.
- 2.2 It was considered that such growth should be accommodated without detriment to existing communities but it was also important to ensure that the growth should also be a mechanism to provide additional infrastructure, community facilities and employment opportunities for the benefit of the existing population.
- 2.3 The health check process consisted of three distinct stages: establishing a stakeholder partnership group and compiling the health check; creating a vision and; preparing an action plan.
- 2.4 The process enabled a full assessment to take place in which the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities facing the town could be identified and an action plan produced so that any new growth can help in its implementation.
- 2.5 Three workshops were held with a wider stakeholder group during this process. The first was held shortly after the start of the project to test the emerging health check baseline exercise. The second workshop was to agree a vision and objectives for St Neots based on the outcomes of the health check exercise and the third workshop held at the end of the study agreed an action plan and who was to deliver it.

3. THE ACTION PLAN

3.1 The emerging 'action plan' set out in the final report is divided into four themes: economic and retail; environment; social, community, leisure, and transport.

3.2 Chapter 15 of the document attempts to summarise by highlighting some of the actions listed under the four themes representing the most significant of the perceived opportunities for St Neots. It provides a list of significant development sites which could deliver these projects and lists some of the key assets that are able to deliver the health check objectives. In addition it lists the key projects as follows:-

- improved secondary school provisions for existing and new communities
- the delivery of a new community hub in Eynesbury
- creation of Henbrook linear park
- delivering low carbon opportunities in new developments
- a bolstered retail offer at the eastern end of the High Street
- improvements to the Priory Quarter and Market Square
- improved river crossings
- consideration of interceptor car parks and a park and ride facility
- campaigning for an improved A428 and appropriate use of the existing road infrastructure

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The contents of the Health Check will:

- be of use in developing our ideas and a master plan for land east of railway
- act as the issues and options stage for the Area Action Plan (AAP) for the Town centre
- enable better prioritisation for sustainable travel initiatives
- be useful evidence for promoting the construction of an enhanced A428 in order to achieve the completion of the eco quarter and growth targets of Sub region

4.2 In addition the establishment of a partnership representing stakeholders will provide a means of engaging with local groups in the development of the master plan and the AAP as they progress through various stages towards approval.

5. RECOMMENDATION(S)

5.1 That Cabinet note the work undertaken to date with the production of the Health Check and the benefits of this exercise.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

St Neots Healthcheck stage 3 Final report

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