

## BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Report of:** Cllr William Nunn – Leader of the Council  
Anna Graves – Chief Executive

**To:** Council – 25<sup>th</sup> October 2018

**Author:** Phil Mileham - Strategic Planning Manager

**Subject:** Garden Town proposal – Proposed response

**Purpose:** To confirm the Council’s position on the proposal for a new Garden Town in Breckland.

### **Recommendation(s):**

It is recommended that:

- 1) The Council does not support the promoters submission of the Garden Town at North Elmham to the Government at this time.
- 2) The Council’s preference for significant and strategic scale development proposals is to be promoted through future reviews of the Council’s Local Plan in order to enable full appraisal of the issues and appropriate consultation to be carried out.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

- 1.2 In June 2018, Breckland Council was made aware of a proposal for a new Garden Town that is being promoted by planning agents Lanpro. The proposal is for 10,000 new homes in an area of land between the villages of North Elmham and Bintree.
- 1.3 In August the Government released a prospectus (see Appendix A) seeking expressions of interest for new communities to be delivered to Garden Town principles and of significant scale. The prospectus defines a Garden Village as a new settlement of between 1,500 and 10,000 homes and a Garden Town as a new settlement of more than 10,000 homes. The prospectus indicates that new garden town or village proposals are not required to fit within current housing need levels, and can be in excess of this, particularly in areas with high housing need. However, Government has not defined where these areas of high housing need might be.
- 1.4 The prospectus sets out that the Government will consider proposals against six assessment criteria, under the following themes. These are:
  - i) Scale
  - ii) Strategic Fit
  - iii) Locally-led
  - iv) Garden communities qualities
  - v) Deliverability and viability
  - vi) Delivery Timescales and accelerated delivery
- 1.5 The prospectus sets out that submissions made in response to the expression of interest can be prepared by either the public or private sector, but there remains an expectation that these are backed by the support of the local authority.

1.6 Lanpro, as the promoters of the Garden Town proposal are seeking the Council's support for it to be submitted to the Government in response to the Garden Towns prospectus. Expressions of interest in response to the prospectus must be submitted to the Government by 9<sup>th</sup> November. This report considers the issues arising and the Council's response.

## 1.7 **AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION**

1.8 New settlements continue to be supported by the Government as one of a number of methods of delivering a long-term supply of homes. However, new settlements are not without drawbacks and the location and timing of such proposals can have significant impacts on existing communities, on existing planned development for an area, but also on other authorities who may have different approaches to delivering the housing targets for their areas.

1.9 Breckland Council's Local Plan is currently at an advanced stage of preparation with the Examination in Public (EiP) hearing sessions now concluded. The proposal put forward by Lanpro has not been promoted as part of the process of preparing the Breckland Local Plan, and consequently it does not feature as part of the plan put forward for consideration.

1.10 Should the Council endorse a Garden Town proposal at this time, this would effectively jeopardise the integrity of the Local Plan process. The Local Plan has been in preparation for a number of years, and it would have been beneficial for this proposal to have been submitted and discussed at a much earlier point in time. The Council's emerging Local Plan is underpinned by work to deliver the infrastructure needed to accommodate the growth and deliver our spatial strategy. The North Elmham proposal does not align with nor support this, rather it introduces new (and potentially significant) infrastructure requirements to allow it to come forward, and would introduce a significant new location of growth that differs from the current pattern of development. Therefore, the proposal does not fit strategically with the current development strategy for the area.

1.11 In terms of the quantum of housing proposed, Breckland has no immediate need for extra housing and certainly not of this scale at this time. Under the Localism Acts' "duty to cooperate" all councils in Norfolk are currently confirming that they are able to meet their current allocations within their areas or as part of formal joint planning arrangements. The new Local Plan is expected to be adopted in spring 2019 and at that point the Council will have an up to date housing target and an identified supply to meet it. Over time housing targets will inevitably change as housing projections change and the Council will need to consider the impact of any changes through a future plan review. If there is a change in circumstances the Council would look to consult on options for the distribution of growth, which may include a new settlement, before coming to a view as a Council on any future development strategy for the district.

1.12 The prospectus set out the requirements for any proposal to demonstrate how it delivers the wider aspiration of the relevant Local Enterprise Partnership's economic growth strategy, and also infrastructure and service requirements with upper tier authorities. The Council has not been made aware that these organisations have been engaged in the development of this proposal, and in the absence of such discussion, it is unclear how the proposal may positively contribute to those organisations aspirations.

1.13 Delivery at this scale and in this complexity requires significant consideration of the type and role of any delivery vehicle. Given the timescale limitations due to the closing date of 9<sup>th</sup> November, developing an effective, legal and properly thought out delivery vehicle that can be agreed by all partners has not been considered. Furthermore, depending on the nature of what is required, (e.g. major highway infrastructure) this will affect the nature and

lead partner of any delivery vehicle. The Council would also require sufficient time to consider how within any delivery vehicle format, local decision-making would be protected as well as community requirements and whether the Council would be the correct lead partner for a proposal of this nature. Without significant further information in this regard, it is unclear how the proposal would be both viable and deliverable.

- 1.14 The proposal has not been subject to any community engagement, albeit has attracted significant attention following publication in the local media over the summer. The Council would have expected significant efforts to have been made to engagement with the community if a proposal of this nature is being pursued outside of the Local Plan process. Whilst this could come forward later in the design and delivery elements, it appears that the community have not been engaged at an early stage, as set out in the prospectus to allow proper consideration of the principles of the scheme. This has the effect of not fulfilling the Government's expectation that proposals are locally-led.
- 1.15 The Council's expectation is that engagement through the next local plan process is the most appropriate opportunity to consider the longer term growth strategy for the district and allow proposals to be thoroughly tested and subject to appropriate evidence base and consultation.
- 1.16 Therefore, the recommendation to Council is to not support the submission of the proposal to the Government's Garden Town prospectus. In light of the recommendation, it is considered inappropriate to engage in further visioning work for this proposal or to commit resources to complete further evidence base, legal and financial modelling and any work required to develop delivery vehicles at this time.
- 1.17 Members are reminded that any decision made in respect of the submission of an expression of interest is entirely separate from any subsequent decision that may be required should a planning application be submitted. Any future decision would be determined by the Council (as Local Planning Authority) on its planning merits and members of the Planning Committee would need to determine the same with an open mind and on the prevailing evidence.

## 2.0 **OPTIONS**

- 2.1 There are two options available to Members:
- 2.2 Option 1 – That members **do not** endorse the expression of interest for a new Garden Town at North Elmham in response to the Government's prospectus, and confirm the Council's preference that proposals for strategic scale development are promoted through future reviews of the Local Plan. (Recommended)
- 2.3 Option 2 – That members endorse an expression of interest for a new Garden Town at North Elmham in response to the Government's prospectus. (not recommended)

## 3.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 It is recommended that members endorse Option 1 as a consequence of the matters considered in this report, which includes lack of fit with current growth strategy, lack of community and partner engagement and the impact on the Local Plan process.

## 4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

4.1 The expected benefits are essentially to ensure that strategic scale growth proposals are considered through the most appropriate mechanism which the Council considers to be the Local Plan preparation process.

4.2 This approach allows for a holistic view to be taken on the overall development strategy for the District, allows rigorous community engagement and development and assessment of appropriate accompanying evidence base.

## 5.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Transformation Programme; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

### 5.2 **Constitution & Legal**

5.2.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report; however, it is reiterated that Members consideration of this report does not predetermine any decision of the Local Planning Authority exercising its decision in response to planning applications.

### 5.3 **Corporate Priorities**

5.4.1 This report falls within the following corporate priorities:

- Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive;
- developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth;
- providing the right services, at the right time and in the right way; and
- Enabling stronger, more independent communities.

### 5.4 **Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales**

5.4.1 The Government's Garden Towns prospectus seeks expressions of interest to be submitted by 9<sup>th</sup> November 2018; therefore a formal decision on the council's stance on this matter is sought ahead of this deadline.

## 6.0 **WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

6.1 This report concerns a proposal in Upper Wensum Ward.

## 7.0 **ACRONYMS**

7.1 N/A

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Background papers:- [See The Committee Report Guide for guidance on how to complete this section](#)

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### **Lead Contact Officer**

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**Key Decision:** No

**Exempt Decision:** No

**This report refers to a Mandatory Service**

**Appendices attached to this report:**

Appendix A Garden Communities prospectus