

Prepared by: Natalie Beal

Title: Thetford Area Action Plan (TAAP) – Breckland Council and Norfolk County Council commitments.

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 To get acknowledgement from Norfolk county Council, Breckland Council and Thetford Town Council to the direct policy consequences included in the Thetford Area Action Plan (TAAP) on respective authority resources.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. The Thetford Area Action Plan is a Development Plan Document that contains policies and land allocations to guide the growth and regeneration of Thetford.
- 2.2. It is about to start a 4 week consultation period on the Final Draft in January 2011, with the start of the final submission process soon after.
- 2.3. The Draft Final TAAP suggests future work and tasks that both NCC and BDC should undertake. These are detailed below.
- 2.4. Such tasks would appear in the Implementation Framework for the TAAP which sets out who is responsible for what and when it will be done. The aim of this report is to start the process of securing commitment from the councils to completing those tasks in advance of the TAAP being finalised.
- 2.5. It is important through MTF and the formal consultation process that wider resource commitments are understood and acknowledged and potential problems addressed.

## 3. Proposed commitments

### 3.1. Setting up of a Smarter Travel Thetford Team

- 3.1.1. Transport models show that even without the planned growth of Thetford, roads and junctions will experience congestion by 2026. Five Thousand dwellings and 40Ha of employment land and associated jobs will exacerbate the issue and as a result, achieving modal shift is key to a transport solution that will work for the town
- 3.1.2. One way to achieve modal shift is forming the Smarter Travel Thetford Team and this is identified in the Thetford Transport Study work.
- 3.1.3. A well developed, fully integrated Smarter Travel programme can deliver real benefits in bringing about lasting behaviour change. Such a programme could not only help accommodate the Thetford Area Action Plan but could also improve travel options and overall connectivity for the wider area. Smarter travel programmes have already demonstrated good results both in the UK and further afield
- 3.1.4. The overarching responsibility of the STT is to co-ordinate Town wide smarter travel measures. The STT will be responsible for the overarching communications and awareness campaign to promote the smarter choices measures on a town wide basis. The STT will also be responsible for ongoing monitoring of the delivery and impact of the Programme

3.1.5. Smarter travel will require a dedicated team to work on the smarter travel measures will be essential.

The engagement of the local community within this programme is critical to its success and this will only be possible with the input from a strong and dedicated team.

3.1.6. It should be noted that such work could start now, rather than waiting for the growth.

**3.1.7. It is recommended that NCC, BDC and NHS as well as monies from the developer (to be justified through future charge work) contribute to this team annually.**

- When: ongoing.
- Potential cost: Officer time, office accommodation and promotional material.

## 3.2. Reviewing External Bus Services

3.2.1. The getting more people onto buses is seen as a key element of a deliverable Thetford Transport Strategy. A review is needed of the existing bus services that travel to surrounding urban areas such as Bury St Edmunds and Brandon. The review should look at the frequency of the services as well as the last bus in either direction. Taking Bury St Edmunds as an example, it is likely that Thetford residents travel there for the cinema and hospital as well as students for College.

**3.2.2. It is recommended that NCC liaise with all bus operators in the area and review the external bus services and subsequently promote implementation of the recommendation.**

- When: 2012 - 2013
- Potential cost: Officer Time. LTP3.

## 3.3. Cemeteries

3.3.1. As the town grows, the demand on burial will increase.

3.3.2. The Town Council is the burial authority.

**3.3.3. It is recommended that the Town Council investigate options for Cemetery Land.**

- When: 2011 onwards.
- Potential cost: Officer Time. Experienced consultant to study land.

## 3.4. Retrofitting bus facilities to the rest of the town.

3.4.1. The TAAP sets the following bus facility design infrastructure for the Urban Extension:

- Bus priority measures at all junctions;
- Bus boarders;
- A bus stop within 400m of all properties;
- Provision of service related bus information at all stops;
- At least 50% of all stops within the Thetford area will have shelters, preferably more; and
- Real Time Information at all stops.

3.4.2. The existing town would benefit greatly from such provision. This is linked to the review of existing bus services and would help attain modal shift to more sustainable modes of transport – increased use of the improved services would be helped by improved facilities.

3.4.3. There is also the potential to retrofit technology in existing buildings, of all types, that helps commuters to use the bus by providing up to date information to help make the bus an attractive alternative to single occupancy car use.

3.4.4. **It is recommended that NCC and BDC retrofit quality bus facilities to the existing town to a similar standard as the Urban Extension.**

- When 2011 onwards.
- Officer time cost, capital cost of implementation.

## 3.5. **Wayfinding and De-cluttering**

3.5.1. Thetford lacks an obvious signing strategy to help residents and visitors get around the town, be they on foot, on cycle or in the car.

3.5.2. In order to improve the townscape, a Thetford theme of signing and street furniture could be agreed. The agreed style could be retro-fitted to the town and be used by future developments.

3.5.3. De-cluttering the town by removing or repairing signs or street furniture and removing obsolete aspects of the townscape can have a real positive effect on the appearance of the town.

3.5.4. **It is recommended that NCC, BDC and Thetford Town Council:**

- **investigate and subsequently improve the directional signing around the town**
- **produce a Thetford theme for signing and street furniture; and,**
- **undertake an exercise in de-cluttering the town.**
- When 2011 onwards.
- Officer time cost, capital cost of implementation.

## 3.6. **Thetford's Rail Service**

3.6.1. NDC and NCC responded to the recent Greater Anglian Franchise consultation asking for increased carriage capacity as well as better separation between the trains/improved frequency – ideally every 30 minutes.

3.6.2. Anyone wanting to travel from Thetford to either London or Stansted is discouraged by the lack of an early morning or late evening ability to use the rail Network. If the Norwich Cambridge Service became Norwich Stansted this would provide an effective link to national and international travel without the necessity to use long distance car travel.

3.6.3. **It is recommended that NCC, BDC and Thetford Town Council commit to working together to improve the train services serving Thetford.**

- When: ongoing.
- Potential cost: Officer time.

## 3.7. **Education**

# CAPITA SYMONDS

3.7.1. The TAAP addresses the requirements of NCC in terms of the number of schools required as well as setting aside land for other education uses. NCC have suggested that they will monitor pupil numbers generated by the development as well as consider a review of the school organisation of the existing primary schools as well as their catchments.

3.7.2. **It is recommended that NCC commit to the monitoring and reviews as set out above.**

- When: ongoing
- Potential cost: Officer time.

## 3.8. River Valley Park (RVP)

3.8.1. The RVP concept includes river and wetland habitat restoration and landscape enhancement projects, multifunctional routes connecting within Thetford and out to the wider GI of the region. The aim would be that the river corridor becomes a focus for recreation within Thetford and access out from Thetford to surrounding countryside sites.

3.8.2. The River Valley Park will fulfil many functions of a Country Park and due to its central location has the advantage of integrating existing and new communities. It will potentially alleviate visitor pressures on Barnham Cross Common SPA through enhanced links and links to Nunnery Lakes, in addition to potential new links to the disused railway line at Arlington Way. It will also be accessible from the potential growth area at the Thetford Northern Extension.

3.8.3. In essence, it has 4 aspects:

- Improving access to various places and attractions, such as Thetford Forest.
- Water based recreation
- Habitat restoration
- Protecting this area from urbanisation.

3.8.4. **It is recommended that MTF works with partners to commission a study and implementation plan on the River Valley Park concept and explore the potential for local business investment or sponsorship.**

- When: 2011-12
- Potential cost: £30,000

## 3.9. Greening Thetford Project

3.9.1. The project aims to 'green' Thetford's existing major transport routes such as the Norwich Road and Mundford Road and existing network of paths and bridleways and the Thetford Loops. It will create a continuous green network of pedestrian and cycle routes and help improve the environment along roads and pavements extending from the town centre and major transport hubs out into the countryside, Thetford Forest and Brecks beyond. Trees could also be planted at car parks and open spaces, where appropriate, to provide shade to users.

3.9.2. By concentrating planting along these routes, the project will contribute to making Thetford more visually attractive, help make it a more pleasant place to live and work and reinforce its uniqueness. Visitors will

be able to walk or cycle along uninterrupted newly 'greened' routes from the town centre, train station or bus interchange out into the countryside beyond. Alongside major roads, tree planting will help to reduce traffic noise, improve air quality, reduce light pollution and create a safer pedestrian environment without the need for less sensitive measures such as metal guard railing.

3.9.3. The origins of this project concept come from the Draft Thetford Prospectus Work by Urban Deliver.

3.9.4. **It is recommended that MTF works with partners to undertake the necessary work required to plan and plant more trees in Thetford with potential for funding under a CIL or similar mechanism.**

- When: ongoing
- Potential cost: Project planning and purchase of suitable trees. Potential officer time to supervise. Potential for the BCTV and other similar voluntary groups to be involved in the delivery.

## 3.10. Play Equipment

3.10.1. According to the 2010 Open Space survey, Thetford is deficient in children's play areas by 19.73Ha in comparison to the National Play Field Association standards. For every 1,000 people, the NPFA standard states there should be 0.8Ha of children's play - the standard used in Policy DC11 of the Core Strategy.

3.10.2. New development cannot be expected to meet the existing shortfall. As such, Breckland Council and Thetford Town Council will work together to look at ways of increasing the provision of play equipment. This could be through improving the variety of equipment in place, replacing broken equipment or looking at areas of open space suitable for play equipment.

3.10.3. Such equipment includes swings and roundabouts, basket ball hoops and MUGAs (Multi Use Games Areas).

3.10.4. In the main there is also a lack of variety in the play equipment. There is the potential to provide different types of play equipment for different ages.

3.10.5. An adequate and varied provision of play equipment will help tackle anti-social behaviour and would help people move more – one of the aims of Thetford Healthy Town.

3.10.6. **It is recommended that BDC and Thetford Town Council commit to investigating where a varied provision of play equipment can go and try and meet existing shortfalls in provision. This work should be undertaken in close partnership with Registered Social Landlords as part of estate regeneration proposals.**

- When: 2011 - 2012
- Potential cost: Officer Time. Purchase and installation of equipment. Ongoing maintenance.

## 3.11. A11/London Road Junction

3.11.1. Transport models show that all the junctions around the A11 will experience peak time congestion, to varying degrees, by 2026, even without the proposed growth of the town. Adding 5,000 dwellings and more jobs exacerbates the issue.

3.11.2. All of the junctions therefore need some improvements, be it at different scales.

3.11.3. The A11/London Road junction will see improvements if the A11 dualling goes ahead. But these improvements, as currently planned, do not necessary meet the needs resulting from the growth, resulting in the likelihood that the junction will need to be improved on two separate occasions.

3.11.4. **It is recommended that BDC and NCC work with the Highways Agency to ensure that any changes to the junction as part of the A11 dualling are competed to a junction form that is compatible to the plans for both parties.**

- When: 2010-11
- Potential cost: Officer time.

### 3.12. **Bring Recycling Centres**

3.12.1. In order to help Thetford's residents to recycle and divert waste from landfill, the Council expects new Bring Recycling Facilities will be provided as part of the Thetford Urban Extension. These sites would have bottle banks or textile collection points for example.

3.12.2. **It is stated in the Policy that land for this use will be handed over to Breckland Council at nil charge who could subsequently hand over to the Town Council or community groups for management to potentially benefit from any funding the use of the bring recycling centres could bring.**

- When: After 2012
- Potential cost: Officer Time.

### 3.13. **Town Centre Masterplan**

3.13.1. At the broadest scale, Thetford town centre is now in direct competition with web-based retail and consumer services, larger out of town stores and other regional towns and cities all of which are vying for a finite supply of shoppers and visitors. At the more local level there are a number of physical issues that have contributed to this decline such as the ageing of poor quality buildings and public spaces creating an unpleasant and unwelcoming environment. As well as the physical improvements to the town centre, there is potential for other non-physical measures such as improving the offer of the market, having farmers markets or local stores which would add another visitor element to the town centre, aiding the revitalisation of the town.

3.13.2. **It is recommended that MTF commission and produce a Town Centre Masterplan. The content would range from car parking review, to the production of a Surface Water Management Plan from riverside regeneration to looking into any redevelopment opportunities. It will help to reverse the decline in the historic heart of the town and create a sustainable retail, leisure and residential environment for future generations. The fundamental aim will be to revitalise the town centre.**

- When: 2010-11
- Potential cost: £80,000

## 3.14. Walking and cycling network

3.14.1. As mentioned previously, modal shift is key for Thetford, even without the growth; the need is made more essential as a result of the growth. A walking and cycling network is proposed for Thetford.

3.14.2. Pedestrians and cyclists use any and all routes. The routes identified in the network are more strategic ones and ones where there will should be signage and improved provision of suitable and useful facilities.

3.14.3. Some routes are currently an adequate standard; others however will need a range of works to make them more useful to pedestrians and cyclists.

3.14.4. **It is recommended that NCC, supported by MTF, investigate and subsequently provide or ensure provision of the necessary improvements to the walking and cycling network.**

- When: ongoing
- Potential cost: potential for a detailed feasibility study. Officer time to ensure provision and co-ordinate. Capital contributions to provide.

## 3.15. Thetford Loops

3.15.1. The Loops offer considerable potential to enhance the walking and cycling network in Thetford by providing convenient and attractive paths for pedestrians and cyclists which improve access to the surrounding countryside. They will also augment the existing urban path network helping to further facilitate and encourage local journeys on foot or by bike – to school, to work and to the shops; achieving high levels of 'utility' walking and cycling trips is seen as a vital element in how local travel is undertaken.

3.15.2. The Loops are largely based on existing networks, but some improvements to most sections are required - be it improved surfacing or changes to the status of the route and ongoing maintenance.

3.15.3. Whilst some sections could be implemented as part of developments (for example the section of the Northern Loop that travels through the Urban Extension) and other parts could be delivered as part of improvements to the walking and cycling network, there are other parts of the concept which require attention. For example the branding and marketing as well as the co-ordination and maintenance of what is provided. MTF and its partners may also chose to deliver some improvements to some sections as one of its projects. NCC, as the local highways authority, would seem the obvious body to adopt and maintain the Loops.

3.15.4. **It is recommended that BDC and NCC and their partners (MTF) work together to ensure the Loops are implemented, promoted and maintained.**

- When: ongoing
- Potential cost: Officer time to coordinate. Potential capital funding to deliver some sections. Maintenance, promotion and branding.

## 3.16. Reviewing the Thetford Area Action Plan

# CAPITA SYMONDS

3.16.1. As is recommended with all Development Plan Documents, a review approximately every 3 years is recommended. This would involve an assessment of how the TAAP has been performing and whether any new or refreshed evidence is required. If changed, the TAAP would require adopting again and as such the related public consultation and examination in public will be required.

- When: approximately every 3 years after adoption.
- Potential cost: officer time, evidence base production and examination in public.

3.16.2. **It is recommended that BDC review the TAAP, once adopted, every 3 years.**

## 3.17. **Updating Evidence Base/Background**

3.17.1. Further to the above section on reviewing the TAAP, some evidence base would require regular updating and refreshing. Some is Thetford specific, others are district wide:

- Habitats Regulation Assessment: every 3 years (to accompany the TAAP review)
  - Education: every 3 years (to accompany the TAAP review)
  - Health: annually: every 3 years (to accompany the TAAP review)
  - Employment Land Review: every 5 years
  - Retail: 3 years
- When: see above
  - Potential cost: Officer Time and employment expert consultants.

3.17.2. **It is recommended that BDC, NCC and NHS Norfolk review evidence base regularly.**

## 3.18. **Serving the new community and integration between the new and existing community**

3.18.1. All parties involved in the growth and regeneration of Thetford are keen to ensure the new development is fully integrated into the existing town.

3.18.2. The approach to transport and education as well as improving the town centre could aid integration and are covered in the TAAP. The better use of the existing community facilities will also assist in this regard.

3.18.3. BDC, NCC, TTC and other partners on MTF are all service providers and could start gearing up for providing the necessary services to the new community, be it their day to day role, or specific programmes to aid integration.

- Planning could start in 2011, with services rolling out in line with development.
- Potential cost: Officer Time

3.18.4. **It is recommended that BDC, NCC, TTC and other MTF partners consider how best to ensure that services are provided in a timely manner and other programmes they can run or influence to support the integration between the existing and future communities and residents.**

## 3.19. **Existing Employment Estates**

3.19.1. There are many vacant units of varying quality in the existing employment estates in Thetford. The environment of the employment estates could be detracting further investment. Furthermore, there is heavy reliance on single occupancy car use in the town and the employment areas and their surroundings might be conducive to walking, cycling and service by public transport if improvements are secured.

3.19.2. Concept Statements/Spatial Framework Plans would investigate the following issues:

- access and connection/integration - both the ease of access to and from the area by vehicle and its integration with the rest of the town, particularly for local access on foot and cycle for people working in the employment areas and living in the town.
- image and quality of place as a working environment - looking at visual and experiential impacts.
- how efficiently the land is being used - are the current units the right type and size of units or do they need to be smaller - or larger.

3.19.3. **It is recommended that BDC produce concept statements/spatial framework plans to act as a catalyst for change in the existing estates.**

- When: 2011-13
- Potential cost: Potentially employing consultants to undertake work. Officer time to supervise. Implementing any subsequent recommendations.

#### **4. The role of a charge/Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**

4.1. The Council could use a per unit development charge to contribute to infrastructure improvements – for example the CIL. Such charges, however, are to plug any deficit and not replace public funding. It is also worth noting that there will be many interested parties expecting and wanting a share of any charge. Furthermore, CIL funding is for capital costs rather than revenue costs. The majority of the issues raised in this paper require officer time in the main.

#### **5. Next steps and Conclusion / recommendation**

5.1. This report is for information at this stage, to help the Council and its partners understand the implications on their resources as a consequence of the TAAP policies. The report could be circulated to other organisations (notably NCC) to aid their understanding as well. A number of these issues should be well understood as a result of collaborative working on evidence base behind the policies and the joint preparation of policy together with early consultation. Most of the actions involve a resource of officer time and this paper is intended to help the Council manage this resource.

5.2. This report is at this stage for information but Capita Symonds would welcome an initial steer from the Council on any area that requires further work/justification.

5.3. Please note that this is professional, impartial advice from Capita Symonds. Whilst Capita Symonds have the know how and expertise to deliver many of the projects identified in this paper, there is no binding on the organisations identified as potential lead organisations to use them; there is the likelihood that a quotation or tendering process would need to be undertaken.