

Report for Resolution

Report to Local Development Framework Working Party
24 February 2010
Executive 10 March 2010

Report of Head of Planning and Regeneration

Subject Northern City Centre Area Action Plan

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Purpose

To provide an update on progress with the northern city centre area action plan which has recently been found to be 'sound' by a public examination, and to recommend that Council resolves to adopt the plan. The report also sets out the new delivery arrangements that have been established to implement the policies and proposals in the plan.

Recommendations

That Executive recommends that Council resolves to adopt the northern city centre area action plan at its meeting on 30 March.

That Executive notes the delivery arrangements for the area action plan.

Financial Consequences

There are no financial consequences to this report.

Risk Assessment

The area action plan currently has considerable weight as a material planning consideration, as it has been found 'sound' by the Inspector's report of the recent public examination. Failure to adopt the area action plan would weaken the council's position when determining planning applications in the northern city centre and could have a negative impact on the area's regeneration.

Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priority "Strong and prosperous city – working to improve quality of life for residents, visitors and those who work in the city now and in the future" and the service plan priority "Deliver the range of planning policy projects identified in the approved Local Development Scheme including the Northern City Centre Area Action plan".

Executive Member: Councillor Morrey - Sustainable City Development

Ward: Mancroft

Contact Officers

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Background Document

Inspector's report, dated 18 January 2010

Report

Introduction

1. The northern city centre is one of the most deprived areas in the city and is the council's prime target for regeneration. The completion of the area action plan for the northern city centre is a Corporate Plan priority.
2. Once adopted the area action plan will be a statutory document looking ahead to 2016, and will be part of the development plan alongside the existing Replacement Local Plan and the Regional Spatial Strategy. The area action plan and the emerging joint core strategy complement each other and are both important to achieve the council's regeneration objectives. The area action plan reflects the vision and priorities of the Sustainable Community Strategy for Norwich and will help achieve the wider spatial aspirations of the city's communities.
3. The area action plan has now been found to be 'sound' following a public examination by an independent planning inspector appointed by the Secretary of State. The purpose of this report is to ask that Executive recommends to council that the area action plan is approved for adoption. The report also feeds back on progress made with delivery of the plan's policies and proposals.

Development of the plan

4. The area action plan has been in development since 2006, and has been subject to several stages of consultation at Issues and Options, and Preferred Options stages. Its development has been informed by the parallel process of sustainability appraisal to ensure that policies and proposals will encourage and promote sustainability.
5. In October 2008 Executive approved the draft plan for a consultation on its 'soundness' which took place from December 2008 to February 2009 (the tests of soundness require plans to be justified, effective, and consistent with national policy). Following receipt of a small number of representations (24), some amendments were made to the plan ('focussed changes'), which were then subject to consultation in May and June 2009. None of the respondents found the amended plan to be unsound. The amended plan was then submitted to the Secretary of State in July 2009. This triggered the process of independent public examination into the plan's soundness.
6. The Secretary of State appointed an independent inspector, Mr. Eric Searle, to conduct the public examination. A pre-hearing meeting was held in September 2009, and the public hearings took place on 3-5 November. The Inspector's report of the public examination was received in January 2010. This found the plan to be sound and legally compliant. A series of minor amendments to the plan (minor editorial changes, clarifications and factual updates) is included in the Inspector's report, all of which were proposed to the Inspector by the planning authority.

7. Inspectors' reports of public examinations are now legally binding on local planning authorities. Therefore there is no scope for any further amendments to the area action plan and it must be adopted as submitted to the Secretary of State, subject only to the minor amendments agreed by the Inspector in his report.
8. The Planning Inspectorate has advised that the plan now has 'considerable weight' as a material planning consideration now that the Inspector has found it to be sound. However it is important that the council now formally adopts the area action plan so that it gains the status of a statutory plan against which planning applications are considered, to guide regeneration in the northern city centre. It is recommended that the council resolves to adopt the plan at its meeting on 30th March 2010.

Delivery of the area action plan's main policies and proposals

9. As the area action plan has been approaching the end of the statutory planning process, the council has given consideration to the practicalities of implementing the plan's policies and proposals. The plan has a challenging timescale for delivery given its end-date of 2016. Its vision for the area to 2016 is as follows:

"The future northern city centre area will have a distinctive identity, including a developing strength in locally based cultural and arts activities, and a safe and attractive public environment that encourages people to walk and cycle around the area. This will enable the area to attract investment in jobs and in the district centre services, which will sustain a vibrant economy and employment base. The regeneration of Anglia Square and other parts of the core of the area, combined with the conservation and enhancement of the historic built environment, will contribute strongly to that economic vibrancy. This will create a strong district centre function, serving the wider suburban areas of North Norwich, while providing excellent accessibility by all modes of transport both for movements from that catchment area and for movements within the wider city centre."

10. The key policies and proposals that will help to achieve this vision are set out below. Please [click here](#) (11.9 MB pdf) to see a copy of the draft plan on the council's website .
 - Promotion of a mix of uses (including residential, leisure and cultural, community, and employment) on key sites, to promote regeneration and a distinctive identity. This includes the proposals for the comprehensive redevelopment of Anglia Square, phase one of which received planning consent in October 2009. Other major mixed use development schemes include St Mary's Works, St Crispin's/Pitt Street, and land west of Whitefriars.
 - Improvement of the area's shopping offer by new retail development at Anglia Square and by encouragement of small specialist shops;
 - Provision of new housing (approximately 900 residential units will be

provided in the plan area to 2016) to include an element of family housing.

- Promotion of sustainable transport throughout the northern city centre, including a new one-way gyratory system for vehicular traffic on St Augustine's Street, Magpie Road, and Edward Street, and improved pedestrian and cycling facilities throughout the area. Construction has now begun on the gyratory scheme and should be complete by late 2010.
- Enhancement of the public realm by the creation of new or enlarged squares at Anglia Square, St Mary's Plain, land west of Whitefriars, Muspole Street / St George's Plain. The plan also proposed a new public open space in front of the Playhouse, which was completed in late 2008.

Delivery arrangements

11. Most of the sites allocated for development in the area action plan are privately owned. Therefore the plan's delivery is dependent to a significant extent on the private sector, and on the state of the property market and wider economy. Despite the current economic circumstances and depressed property market there is much that the council can do in a pro-active way to encourage regeneration in the area.

- A programme of council led activity has been developed to co-ordinate a number of projects including pedestrian and cycle improvements, completion of the riverside walk, open space and playspace improvements, and heritage improvements. These in addition to the ongoing construction of the St Augustine's gyratory scheme (led by the County Council), and improvements to the Gildencroft Park which are currently underway.
- A Programme Board has been established to oversee delivery at a strategic level, meeting two to three times a year. The first meeting was on 11 February 2010. The Board comprises relevant city council officers, and representatives from Norfolk County Council (highways), the East of England Development Agency, the Greater Norwich Development Partnership, and representatives of local stakeholders (residents, businesses and landowners). A summary of progress on individual projects will be reported to the Programme Board at each meeting. The Programme Board is not decision-making but has an advisory and co-ordinating role. It will report to the Local Development Framework Working Party following each meeting. Monitoring of progress on the programme of delivery will be through the Annual Monitoring Report, which is reported annually to Executive.

Next Steps

12. The next steps are:

- (a) Adoption

- Recommendation by Executive to Council that it resolves to adopt the northern city centre area action plan;
- Send adoption statement and the development plan document to the Secretary of State and make available for inspection, as soon as practical after adoption.
- There is a six week period for legal challenge following adoption.

(b) Delivery

- Continue to make progress on delivery with the new Programme Board.