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Date	3RD SEPTEMBER 2020		
Report Originator	HEAD OF NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT PLANNING & DELIVERY UNIT		
Title	CLIMATE ACTION UPDATE		

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Joint Planning Committee on existing JCS initiatives regarding climate action.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting on October 23rd, 2019 the Joint Planning Committee (JPC) considered a report¹ on the climate change emergency. This recognised that the JCS approach to climate change will need to be strengthened and developed further in the NN Strategic Plan to reflect new legislation and national policy, including the national 2050 net zero target. It identified a need to implement existing JCS policies and initiatives that respond to climate change, including the Rockingham Forest for Life and other green infrastructure proposals. It was agreed that the JPC be updated on progress at its next meeting.
- 2.2 This report updates the JPC on existing JCS initiatives regarding climate action including the Forest for Life. It also provides an update on climate change evidence that could be commissioned to inform the North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan. Further details are provided over the remainder of this report.

3. EXISTING JCS INITIATIVES

Forest for Life (FfL)

- 3.1 This project is highlighted in the JCS as a special policy area (Policy 21 Rockingham Forest) where a range of environmental objectives are sought through an annual target to plant 40 hectares of new woodland each year. These objectives include increased carbon storage, strengthened biodiversity, landscape character and green infrastructure. This Policy arose from a national pilot project², supported by DEFRA/ the Forestry Commission and run by River Nene Regional Park (RNRP), looking at the potential of a carbon sink forest. RNRP has subsequently renamed the overall project 'Forest for Life'³ so that the tree planting is not restricted to the Rockingham Forest area.

¹ https://www.kettering.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/1780/north_northamptonshire_joint_planning_committee

² <https://www.riverneneregionalpark.org/publications/management-plans/forest-for-life-management-plans/north-northamptonshire-carbon-sink-forestry-feasibility-study.pdf>

³ Project was formerly known as "Rockingham Forest for Life".

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- 3.2 Initial woodland planting in respect of FfL was delivered on the Boughton Estate using a s106 funding contribution from the data centre at Priors Hall Park. Tree planting has also been taking place in connection with some developments (most notably advance planting of around 85,000 trees at the site of Tresham Garden Village⁴) and through other stakeholders such as the Woodland Trust, albeit this has not been coordinated or badged as part of the FfL project.
- 3.3 Momentum with the FfL stalled when initial s106 funding was exhausted and the RNRP was no longer able to provide project management. Projects such as FfL and the Ise Valley initiative (see below) are vital to delivering the concept of the North Northamptonshire Garden Communities and Tresham Garden Village as an interlinked network of new communities within a shared green infrastructure. On this basis, the JPDU has agreed with Homes England that Garden Community capacity funding will be used to support a dedicated project officer to reinvigorate the FfL scheme and take forward the Revital Ise project. This will be a full-time position hosted by RNRP for an initial 2 years, with the potential to extend subject to securing ongoing funding. It is hoped to have an officer in position this Autumn and the JPC will be updated on progress.
- 3.4 The JPDU now has access to new data⁵ which can be used to target specific areas for tree planting to maximise carbon capture and wider natural capital gain. Implementation will involve extensive dialogue with landowners, the town and parish councils and stakeholders such as the Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission and the National Farmers Union. This is a key role for the new project officer post.

River Ise – Revital Ise

- 3.5 This is another strategic green infrastructure project referenced in the JCS as a special policy area (Policy 20: Nene and Ise Valleys). The project was previously funded through KBC, RNRP and other partners, but this ceased several years ago and the project stalled. However, with a view to reinvigorating, a new project officer post has been created to assist in the development and delivery of the Ise Valley initiative, as outlined above.
- 3.6 Recent interest in bringing forward this project has been driven by Wicksteed Park who approached the Environment Agency to enhance some of their water features for the purpose of improving the environmental education within their site. The Environment Agency have provided some funding and expertise to bring stakeholders together to understand the vision for the Ise Valley that is primarily to seek and deliver opportunities for the benefit of local communities, biodiversity and water quality and flood risk management as well as opening up access along the River Ise between Wellingborough and Corby.
- 3.7 A River Ise Partnership has been established and funding from Kettering and Wellingborough Councils and the Environment Agency has allowed RNRP to

⁴ This is to be supplemented by a further 8,000 trees which the Deene Estate intends be plant adjacent to the site of the proposed Garden Village at Tresham - <http://deenepark.com/the-estate/forestry/>

⁵ Including National Tree Data Set, Habitat Opportunity Mapping and Ecosystem Services maps.

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be commissioned (March 2020) to produce the strategic plan to improve access and quality of habitats along the Ise Valley. The Plan will provide a framework and the tools necessary to enhance the quality of the Valley's natural capital and ensure the Ise Valley plays a central role in North Northamptonshire's sustainable and economic growth while enhancing the landscape character and sense of place.

- 3.8 Initial progress has been made to identify potential cycling routes linking the Growth Towns of Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby. This links in well with current proposals from England's Economic Heartland (EEH) to undertake a transport corridor study between Peterborough and Northampton, taking in the NN towns. The EEH draft transport strategy will be reported to the JPC in October and Members have been invited to a briefing on the 8th September.

Habitat Opportunity Mapping and Priority Sites

- 3.9 A full Habitat Opportunity Map (HOM) has been produced for Northamptonshire and Peterborough. This was based on the Ecosystem Services work undertaken through the Nature Improvement Area (NIA) partnership. This work has put Northamptonshire at the forefront of the environmental work taking place across the Ox-Cam Arc.
- 3.10 A series of maps have been produced that demonstrate locations and opportunities to mitigate the impacts of climate change, enhance biodiversity, reduce surface water runoff, reduce soil erosion, ameliorate poor air quality and increase public access to green space. The next stage of the work is to prioritise areas within each local authority area that have the potential to provide significant multiple benefits for the natural environment and the services it provides. This is due to be completed later this year.
- 3.11 This work will provide valuable evidence for the NN Strategic Plan (environmental capacity and locations for development) and inform a Local Natural Capital Plan (a plan that provides an overview for the environment including prioritisation and delivery). Furthermore, it will meet emerging national requirements relating to net environmental gain and the potential for offsetting to be undertaken in preferred locations to provide maximum benefits within North Northamptonshire and also the requirement of each authority to complete a Nature Recovery Strategy (as required in the draft Environment Bill and the 25 year Environment Plan).
- 3.12 To complement this, a Natural Capital SPD is proposed to provide further guidance on Policy 1 of the JCS (Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development) and protecting and enhancing the provision of ecosystem services. It will build on a workshop held with local and national stakeholders in 2019, and the [natural capital assessment](#)⁶ undertaken of the Tresham Garden Village proposal. The SPD is currently being drafted and will be reported to the JPC and partner LPAs for endorsement for public consultation.

⁶ <http://www.nnjpdu.org.uk/news/tresham-garden-village-natural-capital-account-and-assessment-published/>

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4. EVIDENCE BASE

- 4.1 As outlined in Section 5 of the “Climate Emergency” report to JPC on 23rd October 2019, the JCS was prepared under the legislation and policy as existed at the time. Climate change adaptation and mitigation features throughout via the objectives and policies of the plan. However, it is recognised that the NN Strategic Plan will need to be strengthened and developed further to reflect and updated evidence, policies and targets which have emerged since the JCS was prepared.
- 4.2 A key change in this respect is the 2019 amendment made to the Climate Change Act 2008⁷ which now require that the UK ends its contribution to global warming by 2050 (net zero greenhouse gas emissions). This target has far-reaching implications for local authority functions and will need a coordinated response. The unitary authority will provide opportunities to achieve this, for instance through closer integration of planning and transport functions.
- 4.3 The JPDU is working to refresh and strengthen the evidence base on climate change for the NN Strategic Plan. Central to this is identifying exactly what the NN Strategic Plan can and cannot influence in respect of carbon reductions and defining both what net zero carbon means for this and what needs to be done to achieve it. A brief for consultancy input is being prepared to develop the evidence base for the NN Strategic Plan.
- 4.4 This work will explore the potential to expediate the local contribution to tackling climate change by setting an end year carbon neutral target which is in advance of the national 2050 date. Some other Councils have done this, for example, Bristol City Council has set a 2030 net zero target and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority Area is working to a date of 2038.
- 4.5 Within work on the NN Strategic Plan, including the development of spatial options, it will be important to understand the current level and pattern of carbon emissions across North Northamptonshire. This is necessary in order to assess the potential carbon implications of these options relative to this baseline and in the context of the 2050 national net zero carbon date and other scenarios. The Northamptonshire Strategic Infrastructure Model (NSIM) should assist by providing evidence on the implications of meeting the 2050 (or earlier) net zero date.
- 4.6 Ultimately, the evidence base will need to determine how far Local Plan can go in the context of what is achievable in terms of cost implications, allied to the aspirations and actions of the new unitary authority. Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders including Western Power Distribution and the Northamptonshire Climate Change Officers Group will be key to this.
- 4.7 As set out within the October 2019 JPC Report, the local response in terms of climate change mitigation and adaptation will likely build and expand on existing

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/27/contents>

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features of the JCS and be supplemented with additional priorities as the evidence base dictates. In this respect, priority areas could include:

- increased levels of tree planting / afforestation across the area and the continued development of our Natural Capital;
- identifying further opportunities for the deployment of renewable and low carbon energy development, such as wind or solar, at all scales, from commercial to community levels;
- supporting greater take up of electric vehicles;
- a focus on improving and extending cycling and walking routes both internal and external to settlements;
- continued focus on reducing all types of flood risk and ways to alleviate, including Natural Flood Management (NFM) solutions.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Climate change is a fundamental challenge that must be addressed in development plans, development management decisions and the wider activities of local authorities. Strategic policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change will be set out in the strategic plan for NN.

5.2 Work on Climate Action is progressing with a number of key workstreams underway, as outlined in this report. Central to this will be the aspirations of the new unitary council and whether it possible to expediate the national 2050 net zero target, as this will impact on all areas of service delivery of the organisation, including the development of the NN Strategic Plan.

5.3 In the meantime, progress in the implementation of strategic projects identified in the JCS to help the area to mitigate and adapt to climate change have been reinvigorated. The new Project Officer post should help raise the profile of the FfL and Revital Ise projects with a view to securing additional funding and strengthening delivery. This will be supplemented by the pioneering Habitat Opportunity Map work and Natural Capital SPD which will both facilitate the enhancement of our natural environment and a green response to climate change.

5.4 The NN Strategic Plan provides the opportunity for North Northamptonshire to test what net zero means and establish a trajectory for how the area can attain this. In doing so this would set the framework for the local response to the climate emergency, building on existing initiatives and setting new priorities to deliver on.

6. RECOMMENDATION

6.1 The Head of the NNJPDU recommends that the Joint Planning Committee notes the content of this report.

Contact Officers: Andra Stopforth; Paul Woods tel. 01832 742359