

CABINET

2ND OCTOBER 2003

**THE VISION FOR RAMSEY AREA AND THE WAY FORWARD
A Joint Report by the Heads of Planning Services and Policy**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report is to update Members on the progress with the “vision” project for Ramsey and surrounding villages and to suggest the structure and process required to produce an action plan to take the project forward.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Over the last few years, the Council has been working with the local communities to produce Vision Strategies for our market towns. Strategies now exist for Huntingdon and St Ives and work is underway in St Neots.
- 2.2 It was felt that Ramsey should be tackled in a different way as it is affected by different social, economic and environmental issues, due to its rural locality, and should cover a wider area than just the town centre. This viewpoint is reflected in the recent consultations of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership ‘Shaping Our Future’ document and the Local Plan Key Issues Paper, both of which refer to the need for measures to regenerate Ramsey and the surrounding area. Policy P10/2 in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 also recognises Ramsey as a priority area for social and economic regeneration. The Draft Community Strategy highlights as a priority action for the Strategic Partnership the completion of the Vision Strategy and action plan.
- 2.3 In December last year, with the support of Sir Brian Mawhinney, a visioning event was held in the town facilitated by the Civic Trust Regeneration Unit. Its purpose was to explore ways in which Ramsey might capitalise on its assets and strengths to revitalise as a service centre for local communities. Approximately 40 people attended representing a wide range of public services, voluntary and community groups and local businesses. One of the outcomes of the event was to establish a Ramsey Vision Co-ordination Group comprising representatives of four key groups - the Ramsey Action Group, the Ramsey Area Community Safety Task Group, Ramsey Town Council and the Ramsey Town Centre Partnership. It was intended that the drawing together of this group from existing groups would build on the work already underway and increase communications and the exchange of ideas between the four constituent groups and others.
- 2.4 However, it was recognised at that time that there would be a need to expand the membership and remit of the group to ensure it was representative of many interests if it were to fulfil a role in supporting the regeneration of the wider Ramsey area.

3. AN ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP

- 3.1 A wider partnership is now being proposed, representing the Ramsey area, which will lead the Vision project. Based on school, health, community safety and current initiative catchment areas, it is proposed that the Ramsey Area Partnership will encompass the parishes of Ramsey, Bury, Upwood & the Raveleys, Wistow, Warboys, Holme and Woodwalton.
- 3.2 A new Board is being established that is more representative of communities, using guidance from the Countryside Agency Market Town Initiative, which includes public,

private, voluntary and community sectors as well as traditionally 'hard-to-engage' sectors as shown in Appendix A. It is also proposed that a member of the Huntingdonshire Branch of the Cambridgeshire Association of local Councils represents Parish Councils in the wider Ramsey area, for the purposes of this project or that a nomination from one of the surrounding parishes represents them all. The Ramsey Area Partnership Board will, nonetheless, work closely with all Parish Councils, existing groups, and the wider communities, to bring about a cohesive approach to regeneration. This will enable the partnership to grasp opportunities available to improve the quality of life for those who live, work or visit the Ramsey area as well as ensuring existing groups, or where necessary other groups working together to deliver schemes, contribute to the delivery of the action plan for the area. A 2-way flow of communication is also set in place between the Board and existing groups due to the fact that at least one Board member also sits on each of the existing delivery groups. In addition forums will be held every 6 – 12 months so that all with an interest in the partnership can voice their opinion and be a part of the development and delivery.

- 3.3 An officer group has also been established to work with local communities to take forward this partnership work. The group includes colleagues from across all directorates in the District Council along with support from Cambridgeshire County Council. Other officers will participate as and when required.
- 3.4 At this stage this will be a non-executive partnership and Board and, as such, no constitutional issues arise. The Board will be the decision-making body for partnership wide issues. Proposed roles and responsibilities are outlined in Appendix B.
- 3.5 The Ramsey Area Partnership will have a close working relationship with the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership. It will have a key role in promoting and delivering actions that tie in with the objectives and priorities in the Community Strategy for the Ramsey area. Appendix C shows the proposed structure for the Ramsey Area Partnership and the direct links with the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership. It is envisaged that a representative from the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership Executive will sit on the Board of the Ramsey Area Partnership so that there is a direct flow of communication between the two partnerships. The structure of the partnership will be continually monitored and reviewed as changing circumstances dictate.

4. THE WORK TOWARDS A VISION

- 4.1 The Countryside Agency has now invited the Ramsey Area Partnership to submit a bid for funding and support to undertake a Market Town Health check for Ramsey. This will firstly provide financial assistance to take forward work on identifying the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the area and, with community engagement, produce an agreed action plan. Most importantly it will improve the knowledge and evidence necessary to identify priority issues for potential support from regional funding agencies, such as the Countryside Agency, East of England Development Agency/Local Economic Partnerships, English Heritage and the Lottery Funds, who are working together to support the Market Town Initiative, originally proposed in the Rural White Paper 2000.
- 4.2 The Council has made provision in the Medium Term Plan to provide pump-priming monies needed to assist initiatives to help regenerate the Ramsey area arising from the healthcheck process and associated action plan or other initiatives which might be identified in consultation with local communities and other agencies. The District Council will administer this funding.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Council and the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership have identified the Ramsey area as a priority for support and the programme of work set out in the action plan to be

agreed by the Ramsey Area Partnership would enable the economic, social and environmental well-being of the locality to be addressed in a structured and strategic manner that can be sustained in the long-term.

6. RECOMMENDATION(S)

6.1 Cabinet are recommended:

- 1 To note the current position with regards the development of the Ramsey Area Partnership and endorse the proposed structure and relationship with the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership
- 2 To support the submission of a bid for participation in the Countryside Agency Market Town Initiative for Ramsey
- 3 To nominate a representative to sit on the Board of the Ramsey Area Partnership

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Rural White Paper – Our Countryside: the future

Countryside Agency – Market Towns Toolkit

EEDA Best Practice 2002 – Market Towns in the East of England Sharing Ideas & Initiatives

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