

## **Consultants Brief:**

### **TASK: Technical evidence gathering on potential development sites in the Desborough Neighbourhood Plan area.**

#### **Introduction:**

The Neighbourhood Plan project steering group appointed by Desborough Town Council (DTC) is looking to appoint suitably qualified consultants to help in the preparation of technical evidence to inform the development of the Desborough Neighbourhood Development Plan (hereinafter known as the Neighbourhood Plan). DTC and the project steering group have already undertaken early community engagement and are developing an understanding of the shared community priorities for the future of Desborough.

A consultant, suitably experienced in spatial planning, planning policy preparation and preferably site promotion, with a good working knowledge of neighbourhood planning, is required to collect technical evidence on the potential development sites within the Neighbourhood Plan area. This includes the sites included in the draft site allocations work prepared by Kettering Borough Council, at the very least the category 1 to 3 sites of the North Northamptonshire Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) as well as any other potential development sites identified by the Neighbourhood Plan steering group.

It should be noted that a final document will be expected to be submitted to DTC by mid-December without slippage. A generous budget has been identified to cover what may prove to be an intensive project with a short turnaround.

This brief sets out the requirements of this work and how this will fit into the ongoing strategy and methodology / programme developed by the steering group. It also sets out the background to the project and the area.

Any instruction at this stage may also lead to instructions to undertake further work at a later date during the neighbourhood plan period.

#### **Overview:**

DTC has been working on the delivery of a neighbourhood plan for Desborough since September 2013. The Local Planning Authority, Kettering Borough Council (KBC) designated the area on 16th. October 2013 in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012.

The Neighbourhood Plan is currently being delivered by a steering group made up of ten councillors, representatives from local organisations and businesses and local residents.

The steering group is nominated by the qualifying body, DTC under the attached terms of reference.

Since designation the following work has been undertaken:

- Early community engagement with the community on key issues and concerns
- Establishment of the steering group to bring the Neighbourhood Plan forward
- Training on the necessary steps required to deliver the Neighbourhood Plan
- Development of a detailed project plan
- Some early work on developing a vision and spatial objectives to underpin the neighbourhood plan.

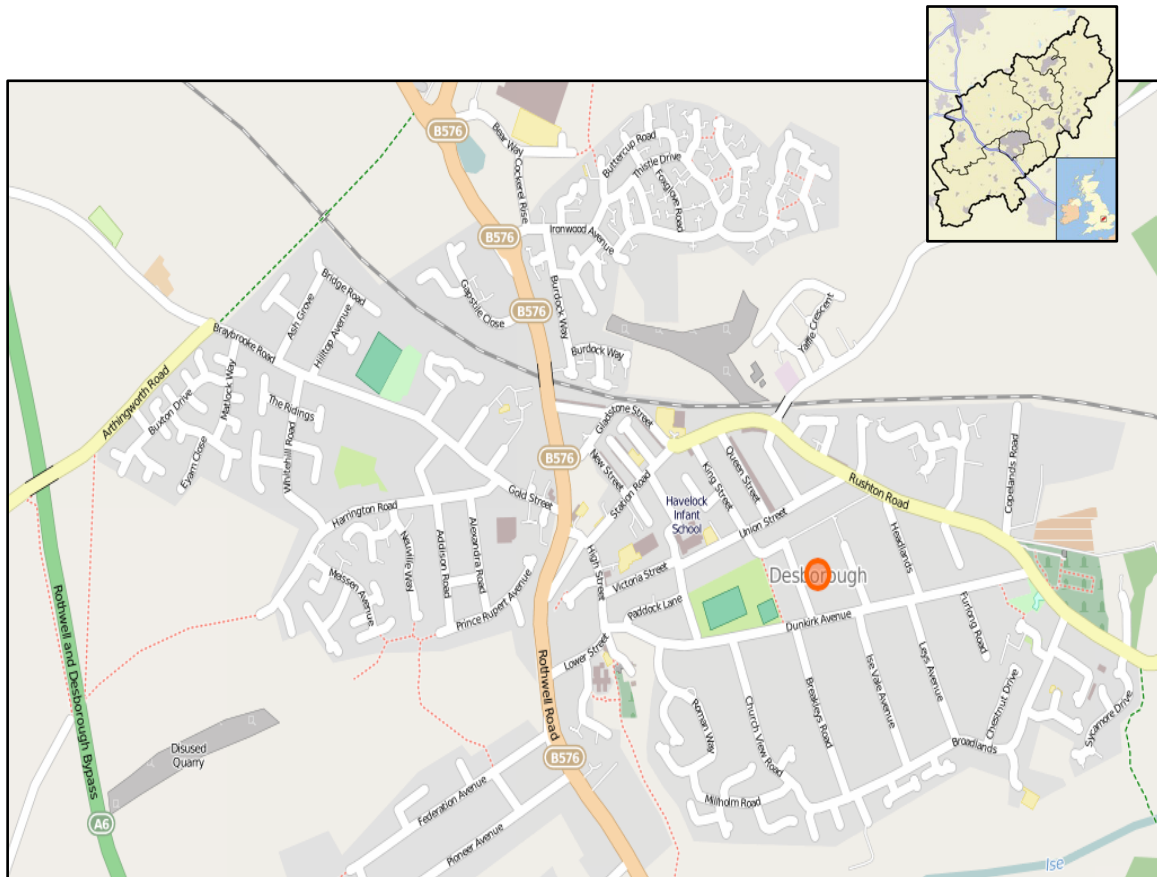
An overall vision for the Neighbourhood Plan is at the early stages of development and will be subject to further community engagement work in the latter half of 2014.

The steering group seek assistance in the collation of technical evidence on potential development sites in the Desborough Neighbourhood Plan area. The following sites should be included:

- All sites which fall within the KBC emerging site allocation document
- All category 1 to 3 sites in the SHLAA, details of which can be found at <http://www.nnjpu.org.uk/publications/docdetail.asp?docid=1371>. This link points to the SHLAA as updated in 2011. The 2009 SHLAA was used as the main source of housing sites in the Site Specific Proposals LDD Options Paper - <http://www.nnjpu.org.uk/news/newsdetail.asp?id=5>. The Site Specific Proposals Options Paper can be found here [http://www.kettering.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents\\_info.php?categoryID=494&documentID=1409](http://www.kettering.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?categoryID=494&documentID=1409).
- Any other sites identified as a result of the work of the NP steering group (which may include discounted SHLAA which may require undertaking a call for sites by the qualifying body)

## About Desborough:

Desborough is located in the county of Northamptonshire, in the East Midlands.



Map of Desborough with inset map showing position of the town in Northamptonshire and England

The town developed because of the spinning and weaving industries and had a large silk manufacturing base in the early 19th century which switched to footwear when the silk industry declined in England. This was enabled by the coming of the railway and the town had an operational railway station until the 1960s.

Desborough has only one remaining footwear manufacturer, however there are many other manufacturing companies, including Rigid Containers, one of the largest corrugated cardboard makers in the UK, and Albany Sheds, a leading company in garden shed manufacture. In the distribution industry, the UK's largest refrigeration warehouse, Great Bear is also located in the town. Together with farming and retail, Desborough has a better employment opportunity than many other towns of a similar size. Desborough currently has a population of around 11,000. The town's population is expanding at a fast rate as it is earmarked as a growth area for the North Northants region with planning permission for 940 houses already for completion by 2031. This will lead to a total increase in population in the order of 3,500 and all in one area to the north of the railway line.

The town has its own fire station with retained fire fighters, a library, a dental practice, Desborough and Rothwell Health Care Group surgery, veterinary practice, public houses and clubs - both sporting and social, and four churches. The town has a council with councillors representing it at borough level. Kettering is the borough town (KBC) with Desborough being the borough's second largest town.

It has one primary and one infant/junior school - Loatlands Primary School, Havelock Infants and Havelock Junior. Both Havelock schools have been extensively modernised and expanded in recent years and there is development currently underway at Loatland School which will double it in size. Secondary education is provided at Montsaye Community College in Rothwell, 2 miles away.

The River Ise runs between Desborough and neighbouring Rothwell and the Ise Valley is an area of green infrastructure in the borough. There is also an area known as the Plens which along with the nearby Wildlife Trust reserve is being purchased by KBC to be kept as a greenspace. The Wildlife Trust also maintains Tailby Meadow which is situated behind the Hawthorns Leisure Centre on the south eastern outskirts of the town.

The town has very good traffic links, with the A14 a mile and a half to the south, the A6 half a mile to the west and the M1 and M6 motorways within half an hour's drive. It has a frequent bus service to Kettering and Market Harborough (a busy market town in Leicestershire) with one bus per day on Wednesdays and Saturdays to Northampton, but no direct service to Corby. Kettering and Market Harborough (both around 6 miles distant from Desborough have railway stations on the Midland Mainline route into London St. Pancras to the south, and Leicester, Derby and Nottingham to the north.

### **Background to the Neighbourhood Plan:**

In September 2013, DTC decided to work with local organisations and members of the public to bring forward a Neighbourhood Plan for the town, known as the Desborough Town Plan. A Working Party was set-up to get the process going and decide the format of the Steering Group. In March 2014, the first consultation event was held to enlist Steering Group members and people who would be interested in taking part in discussion groups.

The Working Party held further public events in May and June 2014 asking the town's residents what they felt was 'good', 'bad' and 'ugly' in Desborough and also 'what needed to change'. These events were very useful and enabled the Steering Group members to start planning with the help of Planning Aid in a series of training sessions held throughout the summer.

The outcomes at a high-level were as follows:

- 'Bad' - 'the state of the roads' and 'derelict sites around the town'
- 'Ugly' - 'the old Co-op Dairy site' and the 'Lawrence Factory Site'
- 'Good' - 'the strong sense of community' and 'people are friendly'
- 'Need to Change' - 'the look of the town and parking issues' and 'the infrastructure not keeping pace with the growth of the town'

The Steering Group met officially for the first time in September 2014, discussing the first draft of the detailed project plan and allocating roles for the members.

## **Requirements of the consultant**

### Background

One of the key issues that the plan is seeking to action is the allocation of appropriate development sites in and around the town to accommodate the level of growth proposed for Desborough within the emerging North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (NNJCS).

(Note: at this stage, the precise housing figure required for Desborough is not yet in the public domain, pending the next round of consultation on the NNJCS in early 2015. At the same time, it is currently expected to be in the region of 700 homes.)

There has recently been an impasse between DTC and KBC as to whether the neighbourhood plan or Kettering's Site Allocations plan should be the most appropriate vehicle for the delivery of sites in the town. This uncertainty is in part the result of the lack of a clear strategy at Town Council level as to exactly how the neighbourhood plan should approach the allocation issue. This has not been helped by a number of complicating factors, one of which is the relatively slow pace that the NNJCS is moving forward providing an absence of clarity on exactly what housing figure the council should base their plan on. Kettering's own allocations plan is emerging only very gradually, with the most up-to-date indication suggesting the submission document will only be made available in Spring 2015. Once again this is not helped by the NNJCS timescales and there are already signs of further slippage in the delivery of the DPD.

In addition, there are two key sites in the town with local sensitivities central to the aspirations of the neighbourhood plan that the successful consultant should be aware of. Both have development potential but both will also require a level of additional work at town council level to ensure they come forward in a way that benefits Desborough:

#### **1: The Hawthorns Leisure Centre Site (SHLAA Ref 1165)**

The site of a now vacant KBC-owned leisure centre, it is the current intention of KBC to allocate the land for more than 100 homes within its emerging Site Allocations DPD. It is the strong will of the town to restrict the level of development on this edge of the town to as

low and as sensitive form of development as possible to protect the character of the adjacent Ise Valley. To this extent, they are seeking to undertake a level of viability work to support a proposal on site comprising a much reduced housing figure. This work is ongoing.

## **2: The Lawrence Factory Site (SHLAA Ref 680)**

The site of a vacant factory, amongst other derelict structures, the Lawrence Site comprises a plot of land in multiple ownership right at the heart of Desborough. The site was subject of a KBC-prepared planning brief for a mixed use development, prepared prior to the economic recession, that proposed a scheme that would have given a central core to Desborough. Due to issues of viability the scheme never came to fruition and it is now hoped that the neighbourhood plan can provide fresh impetus for the promotion and subsequent regeneration of the site.

It is likely that the neighbourhood plan will seek to allocate both of these sites in the final document. It is recommended that the successful consultant holds early discussions with the Town Council in relation to these sites to identify the more detailed aspirations moving forward.

To date an extensive SHLAA has been prepared covering the NNJPU area, including for Kettering borough and Desborough town. It was first produced in 2009 although was most recently updated in May 2013 using a 2011 database. To this end, however, the most recent update to the SHLAA is now based on an almost 4 year old position. The site database will therefore need updating for any new permissions, refusals, constraints or material changes in circumstance in or around the land submitted for consideration.

### What is required

In light of the current indecision around the correct platform for the allocation of sites in Desborough, it has been decided by the Town Council that the neighbourhood plan should seek to take the initiative and begin to develop a range of site options that are underpinned by up-to-date and robust evidence. Indeed, the suite of National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) is unequivocal that neighbourhood plans have the power to allocate development sites, albeit a qualifying body should carry out an appraisal of options and an assessment of individual sites against clearly identified criteria when doing so.

In the context of this work it is important to remember that neighbourhood plans are not subject to the tests of soundness. Instead they are subject to the basic condition tests that do not require the most sustainable option to be selected but still require plans to demonstrably achieve sustainable development. To this extent, it is not expected that the final report will seek to recommended sites for allocation and instead will simply indicate the full list of site options in the town that are deemed to support the delivery of sustainable development.

**To this end, the successful consultant will firstly be required to work/liaise with the steering group to identify the full list of sites that are realistically available to the town for the purposes of the plan and that should be subject of the study.**

**They should then recommend and then apply an appropriate locally specific site assessment process to provide an updated list of sites that are realistically deliverable over the period of the neighbourhood plan.**

**The final output should be the updated position of all of the available and deliverable sites in the town, setting out an understanding of any key constraints, necessary mitigation and the site's indicative yield.**

#### Likely order of tasks

- Award of preferred tenderer status by DTC;
- Initial meeting with the steering group to agree the long list of sites that will be subject of review and to discuss way ahead;
- Critique of existing SHLAA methodology to identify whether a more bespoke site assessment process should be identified and applied;
- If so, demonstration of revised site assessment methodology to the NP steering group;
- Site assessment work, including site visits (potentially accompanied by steering group members or town councillors), desktop assessment of relevant evidence, liaison with external bodies and use of sub-consultants to produce original analysis where necessary;
- Production of final sites review report.

#### Information that should be referred to (as a minimum)

- The most recent SHLAA report (May 2013) including all appendices and site assessments relevant to Desborough;
- Other relevant evidence developed in support of the emerging KBC Site Allocations DPD; and
- Draft North Northamptonshire Urban Structures Study 2013.

#### What the steering group will supply to the preferred consultant (as required)

- A single point of contact;
- Any necessary information or data gathered to date around the sites in the town;
- A physical base within the town when undertaking work on site;
- Contact details for any key local stakeholders; and
- Additional capacity to help undertake any necessary background tasks relevant to the assignment, including help on the ground.

### **Indicative Timescales and Programme:**

The Steering Group aims to appoint a planning consultant by 24th. October with interviews taking place from 21st -23rd. October. A draft of the report is required by 5th. December to allow for any revision work to be completed and resubmitted by 12th. December.

### **Tendering Requirements and Selection Process:**

1. The Steering Group will invite 5 consultants to submit proposals.
2. Consultants need to submit proposals by **17th. October 2014**, which will include:-
  - . A document setting out concisely what work will be undertaken and how;
  - . Any issues that are identified with the brief that may impact on the scope of work;
  - . A draft programme to meet the above timescales;
  - . Their inclusive charges for completing the project;
  - . The proposed team and their CVs;
  - . Where it is proposed to subcontract any element of the work, details of the company concerned together with relevant staff;
  - . Information on similar work undertaken;
  - . Names of two referees;
  - . Confirmation that no conflict of interest would arise in the event of being appointed; and;
  - . Proposals should be limited to five sides of A4 excluding appendices.
3. If necessary, the Steering Group may invite consultants for interview with the partner organisations.
4. Appointment of a consultant will be based on a price, understanding of the requirements, the quality and scope of the proposals and previous experience. The Community Group is not bound to accept the lowest tender nor does it undertake to make an appointment from this exercise.
5. Any interviews will be scheduled for 21st.-23rd. October 2014 with the selected Consultant being confirmed by 24th. October 2014.
6. Before a contract is signed, the Consultant to be appointed will be expected to submit their Environmental & Ethical Policies and safe working practices which will be followed during the project.

Please submit Tender documents to:

By the 17th. October 2014



**Further Information included with this Brief:**

Steering Group Terms of Reference