SYNOPSIS

This report seeks Member approval to support a collaborative bid for a University presence in North Northamptonshire as part of the Government’s University Challenge programme.

It also summarises progress on the plans to build a new £20m Tresham College.

1. Relevant Background Details

In early March the Government announced plans to generate a University presence in up to 20 new Towns and Cities across the UK as part of a £150m programme that runs until 2011. The programme is seen as a means to unlock and retain the talents of local people, promote economic regeneration and growth, and enhance the cultural life of the places concerned.

2. The case for Corby/North Northamptonshire

The four Boroughs in the North Northamptonshire Development Area – Corby, East Northamptonshire, Kettering, and Wellingborough are among the fastest growing in the UK. Already they have a combined population comparable to Derby, Leicester or Nottingham and at the current rate of growth they will match Bradford, Bristol and the larger provincial cities by 2021. The rate of population growth is outstripping the rate of economic and employment growth and the investment in cultural and sporting infra-structure to support it. A University presence would be a significant step to redress this balance. Behind the scenes both Corby and Kettering have been striving to secure University presences of their own. Both have forged links with University of Northampton, who currently deliver a foundation level degree course in (primary school) education in Corby at Lodge Park Technology College.

We could continue to pursue our independent paths and compete for the limited funds available but a collaborative effort, bringing together Tresham Institute, North Northants Development Company (NNDC), Northamptonshire Enterprise Ltd, the four Boroughs, the County Council, and the University of Northampton is considered to provide a more compelling way forward; one that is more likely to succeed; and one that will ultimately have greater impact. This could also harness the influence and support of the respective local M.P.s, who are already very active on this issue. The Evening Telegraph is proactively supporting the case for a North Northants wide initiative and has launched an internet based petition.

In Corby the timing of this Government initiative could not be better. Due to a concerted behind the scenes effort, we have secured agreement for Tresham Institute to acquire the whole 16 acre site of the Community College, south of the proposed Corby Walk as the location for its new £20m campus. A funding bid will be submitted this month, with a decision expected in July 2008. 4 acres of the site, immediately alongside the new Railway Station has been earmarked as University land. NNDC have commissioned EDAW to draw up a Masterplan for the whole of the Corby Central site to maximise its use for business and educational use – a so called ‘Technology Realm’. This is expected to accommodate in excess of 300,000 sq. feet of office space when fully developed.
Plans are also emerging for a rebuild of Tresham's Wellingborough campus. This will bring the total investment in new campuses in Kettering, Corby and Wellingborough to around £50m. The incorporation of a university presence into or alongside these facilities would provide a huge boost in educational, cultural and economic development terms. It would facilitate higher rates of staying on and provide a focus to encourage adult returners to achieve a degree level education.

Subject to Member approval the next steps will be to:

- sign a joint concordat or statement of intent committing us to work together;
- present a united front in presentations to the Minister during mid-May; and to
- commission/prepare a University Business Case under the umbrella of NNDC and Tresham Institute.

3. Options to be considered

Members could decide to pursue a Corby specific approach, in which case we would need to collaborate very closely with Phil Hope MP to maximise the impact of our efforts.

4. Issues to be taken into account:

Policy Priorities

Establishing a University presence is a priority in the Council’s new Corporate Plan for 2008 to 2013. It will have a huge impact on the achievement of other priorities relating to improving skill levels, increasing investment, creating higher paid jobs and enhancing the quality of the cultural life of the area.

Financial

The preparation of the Business Case is likely to involve match funding contributions at levels yet to be determined by each of the contributing partners. We shall, however, endeavour to secure this from sub-regional partnership budgets including those of NEL.

The development of the Community College site will release the land currently under option to Tresham Institute at St James, providing the opportunity to realise an increased capital receipt. This would be used to offset downward pressure on anticipated housing land receipts.

Legal

There are no implications directly arising from this report. The Council’s pro-active work on the Tresham Institute and wider University projects falls within our general power of well-being derived from the Local Government Act 2000.

5. Conclusion

This report provides a brief but compelling case to support the pursuit of a collaborative campaign/project to secure a significant university presence in North Northamptonshire. Together with the rapid recent progress on the new Tresham Institute campus and Corby Central/Technology Realm this provides a potentially huge boost to Corby’s longer economic and growth prospects.

6. Recommendation

i) That Members support a collaborative approach to secure a University presence for North Northamptonshire, capitalising on the investment opportunities offered by Tresham Institute’s ongoing rebuilding programme in Corby Central, Kettering and Wellingborough.
Background Papers

External Consultations
Extensive informal consultations with all the potential partners listed above.

List of Appendices
None.

Wards Affected
All

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