

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT) held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 10 June 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor J A Gray – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker, J T Bell, J W Davies, P J Downes, A N Gilbert, P M D Godfrey, D Harty, Ms S Kemp, M F Newman, R G Tuplin and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P H Dakers and L W McGuire.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor P L E Bucknell.

7. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 14th May 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

8. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered and noted the current Forward Plan of key decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet, which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council.

Members requested that the reports by the Planning Policy Manager on Parish Plans and Local Plan Policy, the Preferred Options for Development Control Policies and the Huntingdon West Area Action Plan be submitted to future meetings of the Panel.

10. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: THE CORE STRATEGY SUBMISSION DOCUMENT

(Councillor P L E Bucknell, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport was in attendance for this Item).

A report by the Head of Planning Services was presented (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the stages in the process towards approval of the Core Strategy by the Council in June 2008. Members were informed that since the despatch of the agenda

there had been a number of minor amendments to the wording of the Strategy to incorporate the comments of the Development Plan Policy Advisory Group.

The Head of Planning Services explained that the Core Strategy was the primary, over-arching document that guided and enabled the strategy for the future growth and development of Huntingdonshire. Planning strategy at a regional level was set by the East of England Plan which had recently been published. Once the Core Strategy had been submitted to the Secretary of State, it would be subject to examination by an independent Inspector to assess whether it met the tests of soundness.

In discussing the report, the Panel expressed their support for the proposed policies within the submission document. However concerns were expressed that insufficient importance had been paid to the role of agriculture in the local economy and as a local land use. Members referred to recent world food shortages and a growth in the use of bio-fuels which had increased the demand for agricultural crops. Members were of the opinion that the Core Strategy had failed to recognise the emergence of these trends in recent months, for example by referring within the Core Strategy to the historic role of agriculture and food production in Huntingdonshire. Although the Strategy placed emphasis on the need for strategic green space enhancement, concerns were expressed at the possible implication that access and enjoyment of the countryside might be regarded as more important than the contribution that agriculture made to the local economy and wider market. With this in mind, Members suggested that a change in wording and emphasis to retain the value of local agriculture in the Core Strategy would be advisable and helpful.

In response to a number of questions, the Head of Planning Services explained that environmental limits might need to be introduced at a later date for the market towns and some of the key settlements to indicate areas of significant change. Members were also informed that the future potential of Alconbury Airfield would need to be considered in the longer term as part of the next review of the Regional Spatial Strategy. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the report be endorsed and the Cabinet be informed of the Panel's views on the matter as outlined above.

11. CYCLING

(Councillor P L E Bucknell, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport was in attendance for this item).

Further to Minute No. 07/78 and with the assistance of a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel was acquainted with details of progress being made in the development of a revised action plan for safe cycle routes, including a revised list of cycle schemes for Huntingdonshire.

Whilst the Panel was pleased with the action that had been taken to

date, Members recognised that the funding allocated for cycleway development in the District meant that little progress would be achieved in the delivery of new cycle routes in practice. Comments were made about the desirability of ensuring that, where possible, any funding for transportation arising from Section 106 Agreements was site specific.

In response to questions by Councillor M G Baker as to whether there was any evidence available to suggest that providing cycle routes encouraged people to change their mode of transportation, the Transportation Team Leader was asked to provide details of cycling trends, specifically in relation to the route from Brampton to Huntingdon. Members also suggested that, to Brampton being regarded as part of the wider Huntingdon area for development planning purposes, consideration should be given to cycle schemes in Brampton being incorporated into the Market Town Transport Strategy for Huntingdon which would release more resources for rural areas.

Having been advised that a revised list of cycle routes was to be submitted to a forthcoming Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee meeting for prioritisation, the Panel questioned whether ward members had been consulted before the revision and updating the list which originated from the Cycling Strategy last approved by the Council in 2000. Having regard to the Panel's concerns about the need to ensure that the list of schemes was up to date and that there were no new potential routes that had been omitted, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Transportation Team Leader be requested to invite Members to identify any additional routes within their wards; and
- (b) that the draft report on the prioritisation of schemes be considered by the Panel prior to its submission to the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee.

12. PARKING FOR HEAVY GOODS VEHICLES

(Councillor P L E Bucknell, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport was in attendance for this item).

Further to Minute No. 07/41 and with the assistance of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), Councillor P M D Godfrey acquainted the Panel with the outcome of the deliberations of the Working Group which had been established to review the issue of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) parking throughout the District. The matter had been raised initially by Councillor P H Dakers in response to the closure of the "Night Owl" lorry parking facility at Alconbury and his concerns relating to a reduction in overnight parking facilities for HGVs across the District.

The Panel acknowledged that there was a clear need to provide suitable parking on the trunk road network to avoid the problems which arose from a lack of provision which was being exacerbated by the rationalisation of the lay-bys along the A14. However, Members recognised that there was little that the District Council could do in isolation to tackle a national problem and that the Council's main influence on the provision of lorry parking facilities in Huntingdonshire would be through the Local Development Framework in terms of the identification of sites for HGV parking and opposing the redevelopment of closed sites for alternative uses. The Panel also noted that the Alconbury site was now being advertised for sale again.

Subject to minor amendments to the Working Group's recommendations, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Working Group's report and recommendations be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet, subject to the addition of the words "Cambridgeshire Constabulary" after the word "Parliament" in recommendation (a) and the substitution of the words "trunk roads across the District" in place of the words "conjunction with the A14 realignment scheme in recommendation (c); and
- (b) that Councillor P M D Godfrey be requested to present the report to the Cabinet for consideration.

13. MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS (PLANNING OBLIGATIONS)

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel was updated on the receipt and expenditure of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements by the Council.

Having commented on the significance of the sums of monies contained within the reports, Members agreed to note the quarterly report.

14. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel considered the performance of the Council against the priority objectives identified in "Growing Success", the Corporate Plan adopted by the Council in April 2007.

Having noted that most of the targets were being met or exceeded, the Panel expressed some concern about the failure to achieve the target relating to the objective of ensuring that the Council was an employer that people wished to work for. As the measure of satisfaction was derived from a staff survey, the Head of

Administration was asked to provide further details of the analysis of the staff response to ascertain whether there were any particular reasons that could be identified for the failure to meet the target and whether any measures had been or needed to be introduced to address this issue.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be informed of the Panel's views on this matter.

15. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's programme of studies. In doing so, the Panel noted that the final report on the Parish Charter would be submitted to its July meeting.

In discussing potential future studies, the Panel was informed that work was already underway to review internal communications with Members as a result of which there was little purpose in the Panel pursuing its own review. The Chairman indicated that he initially wished to discuss the Housing Needs Assessment with the Head of Planning Services before considering whether a full review was necessary. Having noted a suggestion by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) that a review of the process for handling planning applications be undertaken, it was agreed that suggestions for future studies would be discussed further in July 2008.

16. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT)

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's progress to date on issues that had been discussed previously.

In referring to the recent study of the Council's Travel Plan, the Chairman asked the Head of Administration to ascertain the position with regard to the Panel's recommendation which had been approved by Cabinet concerning concessionary parking rates for members of staff who car shared and parked in Bridge Place Car Park.

The Panel noted that a report summarising in the comments received on the operation of the procedure for public speaking at meetings of the Development Control Panel would be considered at its July meeting.

Following a recent countywide conference, the Head of Administration was asked to make arrangements for a briefing session for all Members on the Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement and its operation.

17. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest, summarising the Council's decisions over the past month.

18. COUNCILLOR M G BAKER

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel, extended his gratitude for the contribution and commitment given by Councillor M G Baker as Vice-Chairman of the Panel over the past four years.

Chairman