

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT) held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon PE29 6DB on Tuesday, 10 February 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor J A Gray – Chairman.
Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker,
P H Dakers, 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.

APOLOGY An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor J T Bell.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor P L E Bucknell

Prior to the arrival of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman took the Chair.

Councillor P M D Godfrey, Vice Chairman in the Chair.

75. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 13th January 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

76. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

77. 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.

In so doing, the Panel were advised of ongoing progress with regard to a number of forthcoming items in the Plan, together with the likely timescale for their consideration by the Cabinet.

Councillor J A Gray in the Chair.

78. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest, summarising the Council's decisions since the

previous meeting.

In so doing, the Panel commented on the recent presentation to all Members on the proposals for the future governance and operation of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital by the Strategic Health Authority. Panel Members reiterated the need to continue to monitor developments and the Chairman explained that it was envisaged that both Scrutiny Panels would adopt a joint approach to scrutinising any forthcoming proposals.

An update was provided in respect of the improvement works at Huntingdon and St. Neots Rail Stations and Members were advised that a decision on the issue of permitted development rights was still awaited. Councillor P L E Bucknell reported on the outcome of his recent discussions with Stagecoach on bus timetabling matters and Members were advised that a report would be circulated to those who previously had expressed concerns over the matter.

Following the distribution to Members of a recent update on enforcement action undertaken within the Planning Division, questions arose with regard to the length of time taken to resolve a number of outstanding cases. Members were invited to direct any specific concerns to the Head of Planning Services and advised that this was the subject of consideration by the Executive Councillor for Planning and Transportation and the Head of Planning Services with regard to the allocation of resources in the current economic climate.

79. REGIONAL SCALE SETTLEMENT STUDY

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

The Chairman welcomed the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transportation, together with the Head of Planning Services who had been invited to the meeting to discuss the Regional Scale Settlement Study which had been published recently by the East of England Regional Assembly.

Members were advised that a review of the 2008 East of England Plan which set out growth targets for 2000 to 2021 was being undertaken by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) which would forecast the growth required in the region to 2031. As part of the review, EERA had commissioned independent consultants who had now published their Regional Scale Settlement Study which had analysed various potential levels of future growth suggested by the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit. The study had identified potential locations for regional scale growth and regional scale new settlements within the East of England. The consultants had proposed three inter-related strands of growth – continued large scale growth in Cambridge, Norwich and Chelmsford, additional regional scale growth in Ipswich, Colchester and Bury St Edmunds and potential regional scale growth in a number of new growth locations,

the strongest of which options were identified as Braintree and Huntingdon / Alconbury. Members were informed that the latter would comprise a minimum of 20,000 new homes.

In discussing the content of the study, the Panel noted concerns in relation to the timing of the study, its overall robustness and its lack of analysis and justification for the preferred locations. The County Council, in partnership with the district councils in the County had commissioned consultants to prepare a Cambridgeshire Development Study to establish the sustainability of different levels of growth and the Head of Planning Services added that the District Council also would be commissioning its own independent consultants to inform the Council's response to the proposals and evidence at the subsequent Examination in Public of the Regional Plan proposals.

The Head of Planning Services pointed out that the Regional Scale Settlement Study had itself queried whether the sub region of Cambridge and Peterborough should or physically could accommodate growth over and above that contained in the existing Regional Spatial Strategy. He suggested that growth on the scale envisaged at Huntingdon/Alconbury would not be sustainable and that there was concern generally at the scale of growth being proposed by the Government in the current economic climate.

Members acknowledged that a development of the size identified at Huntingdon/Alconbury would alter significantly the character of the District and would further exacerbate the imbalance between housing growth and a shortfall in local employment which had led to out-commuting from the District and congestion on both road and rail links.

The Panel therefore agreed in principle with proposals to rebut strongly the findings of the EERA study and a need for the Council to invest in commissioning its own consultants to provide evidence for the response.

RESOLVED

that the Executive Councillor for Planning and Transportation and the Head of Planning Services be requested to attend a future meeting of the Panel to report on the outcome of the Cambridgeshire Development Study and the District Council's response to the Regional Scale Settlement Study.

80. LOCAL INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK

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

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel considered the content of a Huntingdonshire Local Investment Framework which had been compiled by the Council to determine the level of local and strategic infrastructure required to meet the target of new homes identified for Huntingdonshire in the Core Strategy up to 2026.

The consultants commissioned by the Council to produce the study had identified the infrastructure needs of the growth locations in the District and analysed what contributions developers could make by way of Section 106 planning obligations. A projects database model had been drawn up to deliver the required infrastructure which would be updated in line with changing circumstances. Evidence from the study would be used in the preparation of a supplementary planning document for planning obligations which would link to the Core Strategy and produce a total figure for planning obligations expressed as a tariff per dwelling.

Members were informed that later in the year, regulations were anticipated on the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy under the Planning Act 2008. It was anticipated that the Local Investment Framework would provide evidence in producing a charging schedule for developers under the Levy regulations which would be the subject of debate in due course.

RESOLVED

that the Panel endorse the recommendations contained in the report for submission to the Cabinet.

81. SECTION 106 WORKING GROUP

Further to Minute No. 08/81, Councillor D Harty introduced a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) by the Section 106 Working Group which had been established to investigate the Section 106 process adopted by the Council.

In considering the Members' report, attention was drawn to the key issues that the Group had addressed and its recommendations for change. At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor P L E Bucknell, as the Executive Councillor for Planning and Transportation welcomed the report and expressed his support for the proposal that future monitoring of Section 106 receipts would be undertaken by the Section 106 Advisory Group. In response to a suggestion that the District Council should collect and allocate money to partner organisations, the Head of Planning Services explained that this would require a fundamental change in procedure and introduce unnecessary complications to the present arrangements.

Arising from a question as to whether lessons from the review could be shared with the County Council, it was agreed that Councillors Harty and Downes should deal with this informally with relevant County officers.

Having regard to comments made by Panel Members and a number of minor amendments suggested by the Head of Planning Services, it was

RESOLVED

- (i) that the Panels' appreciation be expressed to the Members of the Working Group for the extensive nature of their review;
- (ii) that subject to a number of minor changes, the Working Group's report and recommendations be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet; and
- (iii) that Councillor D Harty be requested to present the report to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

82. 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 was advised that the report on the social consequences of alcohol abuse had been endorsed by the Cabinet at its meeting on 29th January 2009.

83. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (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 on issues that had been previously discussed.

In so doing, the Panel were pleased to note following earlier discussions on the problems of heavy goods vehicle parking in the District, that the Alconbury Truck Stop was scheduled to re-open shortly.

Councillor J W Davies, reported that he had received recent correspondence from a resident of St. Audrey's Lane concerning ongoing problems with the foul sewerage system in that area of St Ives. Members were reminded that further information was due from

Anglian Water reviewing the situation following action that they had taken and that this would be presented to the Panel shortly.

With respect to the petition concerning commuter parking in the Longsands area of St. Neots, Councillor Bucknell reported that County Council officers had been asked to undertake further investigative work and it was hoped that a report would be forthcoming in April.

Chairman