

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park on Tuesday, 9 February 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor P M D Godfrey – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker,
Mrs M Banerjee, D B Dew, P J Downes,
J J Dutton, R S Farrer, P M D Godfrey,
P Godley, J A Gray, D Harty and J S Watt.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Monk and M F Newman.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors D B Dew, J J Dutton, R Farrer and J A Gray.

80. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Mr D Hopkins and Mr M Phillips who had been recommended by the Selections Panel to be the independent co-optees to the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel. The recommendations would be submitted for endorsement by the Council at a meeting later in the month.

81. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 12th January 2010 were approved a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

82. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

83. 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 been prepared by the Leader of the Council.

84. CAR PARKING REVIEW UPDATE

(Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport was in attendance for this Item).

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which outlined the findings of the Car Parking Working Group on the operational issues of introducing an area of free car parking for recreational use at the

Riverside Car Park, St. Neots as part of a revised off-street parking places order. Members were advised that 38 spaces had been recommended for free parking of up to 2 hours for users of the Riverside Park.

A number of Members raised concerns over the possible implications of introducing charging for the car park. It was reported that the footfall in St. Neots had fallen recently and that the town was suffering from traffic congestion. It was felt that the implementation of parking charges at the Riverside Park would exacerbate these issues and increase air pollution in the town centre.

The Panel suggested that there should be three hours free parking in the whole of the Riverside Car Park which would benefit shoppers who wished to park there and those who wanted to use the park for recreational purposes. Members expressed the view that an appropriate charge should be set for those who parked for longer than three hours, with payment on exit which might reduce enforcement costs.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be advised of the Panel's views on the car parking review update.

85. CARBON FOOTPRINT REDUCTION

(Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology was in attendance for this Item.)

Following the discussion at the Council meeting held on 2nd December 2009, the Panel received an update from the Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology and the Head of Environmental Management on actions taken by the Council to address the need to reduce carbon emissions.

The Panel noted that 30% of the District's emissions were attributable to the housing stock. It was reported that the Council was working in conjunction with Cambridgeshire Horizons and Renewables East with a view to establishing a carbon offset fund, whereby developers would pay a levy which would contribute towards the retro-fitting of the existing housing stock.

Members acknowledged that the Council's resources were limited and that the widespread implementation of carbon reduction schemes would be costly. Having been advised that it was hoped that the Council could access external funding to deliver projects, the panel recognised that the preparation of bids was time consuming and there would be strong competition for any available funding.

The Panel questioned whether a low cost scheme could be introduced to arrange for libraries to loan smart meters to residents so that they could monitor their domestic energy usage. In response, the Panel was informed that, in the view of the Executive Councillor, the extension of the "Watts Going Down" scheme to other villages was likely to be more effective.

Having queried whether the Council could offer reduced fees for planning applications for the use of renewable energy sources, Members were advised that planning fees were set nationally and the reduction in fees could only be achieved by way of a subsidy by the Council itself.

86. REVISED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

(Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport was in attendance for this Item).

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the changes proposed to the Local Development Scheme arising from new regulations on development plan document production.

Having noted the need to amend the anticipated timetable for the production of various development plan documents since adoption of the Core Strategy, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the report be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

87. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DPD - PROPOSED SUBMISSION DOCUMENT

(Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport was in attendance for this Item).

Following the earlier consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) of a report on the development of options in December 2008, the Panel considered a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the proposed submission Development Management DPD which had been prepared following earlier consultation on the options development. Key stakeholder consultation had taken place between 18th December 2009 and 11th January 2010 on the draft proposed submission document.

In response to concerns raised over the adverse effects on carriageway congestion and parking on verges as a result of car parking allocations on new developments, the Panel was advised that the Council had to conform to national parking standards, although the standards set by the Council were slightly higher and the Council was liaising with the County Council on design guidance in an effort to improve the situation.

Members were reminded that when considering the development of options stage of the DPD, the Overview and Scrutiny (Service Support) Panel had proposed that the wording of policy E6 was unduly prescriptive by stating that planning permission for development would be granted for proposals which would deliver the implementation of the Great Fen Project. Doubts also had been expressed about the proposed withdrawal of permitted development rights for specific farming or operational purposes in the Great Fen

area which could disadvantage local land owners. Having questioned why changes had not been made to the submission document to reflect the Panel's concerns, Members were informed that the Government Office had instructed local planning authorities to be precise when wording policies to avoid any possibility of doubt. Also where permitted development rights had been removed, no charge was payable for any planning application that would otherwise not have been required.

RESOLVED

that the report be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

88. INDEPENDENT SCRUTINY PANEL MEMBERS

Members were advised that following the good response to publicity to attract interest for the new independent scrutiny member positions, politically balanced selection panels had recently been convened to interview the applicants. As a result Mr D Hopkins and Mr M Phillips had been selected to sit on the Environmental Well-Being Panel for a period of four years.

RESOLVED

that Council be recommended to accept the co-option of Mr D Hopkins and Mr M Phillips to the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel.

89. WORK PLAN STUDIES AND WORKING GROUP TEMPLATES

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's programme of studies and informing Members of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

In noting that the final report of the Development Management Process Working Group was due to be considered at the next Panel meeting, Members considered further possible subjects for investigation. Having suggested planning enforcement as a possible topic for a future study, the Panel was advised that the Head of Planning Services had recently undertaken a review of the Council's planning enforcement team, the findings of which had been considered by the Development Management Panel. In this light, it was agreed that this matter would be discussed further at the next Panel meeting.

90. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

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

The Transportation Team Leader updated Members on the situation with regard to the HCV parking in the District. The Panel was advised that the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport had

responded on behalf of the District Council to the HCV Advisory Route Network public consultation. Members were reminded that the HCV parking facility at Alconbury had re-opened and, as part of the A14 proposals, the Council would be seeking the provision of HCV parking facilities or the expansion of existing facilities within the District.

The Panel also received a response received from the Head of Information Management which detailed the development costs of the new website, and the running costs of both the old and new sites.

91. 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 requested that the Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology and the Head of Environmental Management attend the Panel meeting in June 2010 to provide a further update on progress made on carbon reduction measures.

Members also requested further information on the implications of the changes to kerbside recycling services.

Chairman