

A meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING)** will be held in **THE WREN ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE, HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK** on **TUESDAY, 9 MARCH 2010** at **7:00 PM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

**Contact
(01480)**

APOLOGIES

1. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 6)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9th February 2010.

**Mrs J Walker
387049**

2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to personal and/or prejudicial interests and the nature of those interests in relation to any Agenda item. Please see notes 1 and 2 overleaf.

3. FORWARD PLAN (Pages 7 - 12)

A copy of the current forward plan is attached, which was published on 12th February 2010. Members are invited to note the plan and comment as appropriate on any items contained therein.

**Mrs H Taylor
388008**

4. PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Pages 13 - 26)

To consider a report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships containing details of the Council's performance against its priority objectives.

**Mr H Thackray
388035**

5. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS WORKING GROUP
(Pages 27 - 66)

To receive a report outlining the findings of the Development Management Process Working Group.

**Mrs J Walker
387049**

6. WORK PLAN STUDIES AND WORKING GROUP TEMPLATES
(Pages 67 - 90)

To consider, with the aid of a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services, the current programme of Overview and Scrutiny studies.

**Mrs J Walker
387049**

7. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS (Pages 91 - 98)

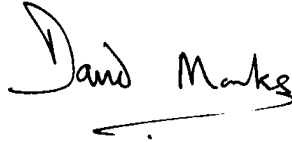
To consider a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services on decisions taken by the Panel.

**Mrs J Walker
387049**

8. **SCRUTINY** (Pages 99 - 108)

To scrutinise decisions as set out in the Decision Digest and to raise any other matters for scrutiny that fall within the remit of the Panel.

Dated this 1 day of March 2010



Chief Executive

Notes

1. *A personal interest exists where a decision on a matter would affect to a greater extent than other people in the District –*
 - (a) *the well-being, financial position, employment or business of the Councillor, their family or any person with whom they had a close association;*
 - (b) *a body employing those persons, any firm in which they are a partner and any company of which they are directors;*
 - (c) *any corporate body in which those persons have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000; or*
 - (d) *the Councillor's registerable financial and other interests.*
2. *A personal interest becomes a prejudicial interest where a member of the public (who has knowledge of the circumstances) would reasonably regard the Member's personal interest as being so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Councillor's judgement of the public interest.*

Please contact Mrs J Walker, Trainee Democratic Services Officer, Telephone: 01480 387049, email: jessica.walker@huntsdc.gov.uk if you have a general query on any Agenda Item, wish to tender your apologies for absence from the meeting, or would like information on any decision taken by the Committee/Panel.

Specific enquiries with regard to items on the Agenda should be directed towards the Contact Officer.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting as observers except during consideration of confidential or exempt items of business.

Agenda and enclosures can be viewed on the District Council's website –
www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk (*under Councils and Democracy*).

If you would like a translation of Agenda/Minutes/Reports
or would like a large text version or an audio version
please contact the Democratic Services Manager and
we will try to accommodate your needs.

Emergency Procedure

In the event of the fire alarm being sounded and on the instruction of the Meeting Administrator, all attendees are requested to vacate the building via the closest emergency exit.

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Agenda Item 1

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, P J Downes, P Godley,
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, J A Gray and Messrs D Hopkins and M Phillips.

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

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FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

Prepared by Councillor I C Bates
Date of Publication: 12 February 2010
For Period: 1st March to 31st June 2010

Membership of the Cabinet is as follows:-

Councillor I C Bates	- Leader of the Council	4 Church End Hilton Huntingdon PE28 9NJ Tel: 01480 830250 E-mail: Ian.Bates@huntsdc.gov.uk
Councillor L M Simpson	- Deputy Leader of the Council with Special Responsibility for HQ/Accommodation	45 Devoke Close Stukeley Meadows Huntingdon Cambs PE29 6XE Tel: 01480 388946 E-mail: Mike.Simpson@huntsdc.gov.uk
Councillor K J Churchill	- Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health	51 Gordon Road Little Paxton St Neots PE19 6NJ Tel: 01480 352040 E-mail: Ken.Churchill@huntsdc.gov.uk
Councillor D B Dew	- Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport	4 Weir Road Hemingford Grey Huntingdon PE28 9EH Tel: 01480 469814 E-mail: Douglas.Dew@huntsdc.gov.uk
Councillor J A Gray	- Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology	Shufflewick Cottage Station Row Tilbrook PE28 OJY Tel: 01480 861941 E-mail: JG@novae.com

Councillor C R Hyams	- Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services	22 Bluegate Godmanchester Huntingdon Cambs PE29 2EZ Tel: 01480 388968 E-mail: Colin.Hyams@huntsdc.gov.uk
Councillor A Hansard	- Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy	78 Potton Road Eynesbury St Neots PE19 2NN Tel: 01480 388942 E-mail: Andrew.Hansard@huntsdc.gov.uk
Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds	- Executive Councillor for Leisure	17 Virginia Way St Ives PE27 6SQ Tel: 01480 388935 E-mail: Deborah.Reynolds@huntsdc.gov.uk
Councillor T V Rogers	- Executive Councillor for Finance	Honeysuckle Cottage 34 Meadow Lane Earith Huntingdon PE28 3QE Tel: 01487 840477 E-mail: Terence.Rogers@huntsdc.gov.uk

Any person who wishes to make representations to the decision maker about a decision which is to be made may do so by contacting Mrs Helen Taylor, Senior Democratic Services Officer on 01480 388008 or E-mail: Helen.Taylor@huntsdc.gov.uk not less than 14 days prior to the date when the decision is to be made.

The documents available may be obtained by contacting the relevant officer shown in this plan who will be responsible for preparing the final report to be submitted to the decision maker on the matter in relation to which the decision is to be made. Similarly any enquiries as to the subject or matter to be tabled for decision or on the availability of supporting information or documentation should be directed to the relevant officer.

Roy Reeves
Head of Administration

Notes:- (i) Additions/significant changes from the previous Forward are annotated ***

(ii) For information about how representations about the above decisions may be made please see the Council's Petitions Procedure at <http://www.huntsdc.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/3F6CFE28-C5F0-4BA0-9BF2-76EBAE06C89D/0/Petitionsleaflet.pdf> or telephone 01480 388006

Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/ recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Consultation	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
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Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Consultation	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Request for a loan to the Wildlife Trust***	Cabinet	18 Mar 2010	Past papers for the Great Fen Project	Steve Couper, Head of Financial Services Tel No. 01480 388103 or e-mail Steve.Couper@huntsdc.gov.uk		T V Rogers	Economic Well-Being
Green ICT Strategy and Action Plan	Cabinet	18 Mar 2010	TBA	Andrew Howes, IMD Operations Manager Tel No. 01480 388190 or e-mail Andrew.Howes@huntsdc.gov.uk	Environmental Management Team	J A Gray	Environmental Well-Being
Development Brief Chequers Court, Huntingdon	Cabinet	18 Mar 2010	Previous urban design framework	Richard Probyn, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No 01480 388430 or e-mail Richard.Probyn@huntsdc.gov.uk	Adopt as Interim Guidance	D B Dew	Environmental Well-Being
Covert Surveillance Policy Review	Cabinet	18 Mar 2010	Existing Policy Legislation	Wayland Smalley, Solicitor Tel No 01480 388022 or e-mail Wayland.Smalley@huntsdc.gov.uk	Internal Steering Group	A Hansard	Economic Well-being
Masterplan for Great Fen	Cabinet	18 Mar 2010	Development Management DPD	Richard Probyn, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No. 01480 388430 or e-mail Richard.Probyn@huntsdc.gov.uk	Adopt as Planning Policy	D B Dew	Environmental Well-Being
Home Improvement Agency Review - Future Delivery Model Consultation	Cabinet	18 Mar 2010	None.	Mr S Plant, Head of Housing Services Tel No. 01480 388240 or e-mail Steve.Plant@huntsdc.gov.uk		K J Churchill	Social Well-Being
Rural Strategy Cambridgeshire ACRE	Cabinet	18 Mar 2010	None.	Dan Smith, Community Initiatives Manager Tel No. 01480 388377 or e-mail Dan.Smith@huntsdc.gov.uk		K J Churchill	Social Well-Being

Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Consultation	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Former Fire Station and Waste Recycling Site, Huntingdon Street, St. Neots	Cabinet	18 Mar 2010	Development Brief and Marketing Information (in preparation)	Keith Phillips, Estates and Property Manager Tel No. 01480 388260 or e-mail Keith.Phillips@huntsdc.gov.uk	Ward Councillors.	A Hansard	Economic Well-Being
Transfer of S106 Asset (Community Building & Land) at Loves Farm***	Cabinet	22 Apr 2010	None.	Dan Smith, Community Initiatives Manager Tel No. 01480 388377 or e-mail Dan.Smith@huntsdc.gov.uk		K J Churchill	Social Well-Being
Street Naming and Numbering - charging for some services***	Cabinet	22 Apr 2010	None.	Chris Allen, Project and Assets Manager Tel No. 01480 388380 or e-mail Chris.Allen@huntsdc.gov.uk	None	J A Gray	Environmental Well-Being
Housing Enforcement Powers	Cabinet	22 Apr 2010	Cabinet Report	John Allan, Neighbourhoods Intervention Manager Tel No. 01480 388281 or e-mail John.Allan@huntsdc.gov.uk	Legal Services & Financial Services.	K J Churchill	Social Well-Being
Western Link Road, Huntingdon	Cabinet	22 Apr 2010	Previous planning consent	Keith Phillips, Estates and Property Manager Tel No. 01480 388260 or e-mail Keith.Phillips@huntsdc.gov.uk		A Hansard	Economic Well-Being
Homelessness Strategy	Cabinet	22 Apr 2010	None.	Jon Collen, Housing Needs and Resources Manager Tel No. 01480 388220 or e-mail Jon.Collen@huntsdc.gov.uk	Consultation process in preparation.	K J Churchill	Social Well-Being

Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/ recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Consultation	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Ramsey Market Town Transport Strategy***	Cabinet	20 May 2010	Draft Strategy	Steve Ingram, Head of Planning Services Tel No. 01480 388400 or e-mail Steve.Ingram@huntsdc.gov.uk		D B Dew	Environmental Well-Being
St. Ivo Leisure Centre - Proposal for Development	Cabinet	17 Jun 2010	None	Simon Bell, General Manager, Leisure Centres Tel No. 01480 388049 or e-mail Simon.Bell@huntsdc.gov.uk		Mrs D C Reynolds	Social Well-Being

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**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT
(Report by the Head of People, Performance & Partnerships)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to Members performance management information on “Growing Success” – the Council’s Corporate Plan.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Council’s Corporate Plan includes short, medium and long term objectives to help achieve aims and ambitions for Huntingdonshire’s communities and the Council itself. In addition the Council identified eight of these objectives which were considered as priorities for the immediate future.

3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- 3.1 Progress against all the objectives is reported to Chief Officers Management Team quarterly on a service basis. A progress report from each Division includes performance data in the form of achievement against a target for each of the objectives that those services contribute towards. This is supported by narrative on achievements, other issues or risks and budgeting information.
- 3.2 In addition, a working group appointed by the Overview & Scrutiny Panels continues to meet quarterly to monitor progress in the achievement of the Plan and to consider development issues.
- 3.3 Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Panels have an important role in the Council’s Performance Management Framework and the process of regular review of performance data has been established. In adopting the updated version of Growing Success, and in particular in prioritising objectives, it was intended that Members should concentrate their monitoring on a small number of objectives to enable them to adopt a strategic overview while building confidence that the Council priorities are being achieved.
- 3.4 Members of the Panels will also find broader performance information of help to them in undertaking their review and scrutiny functions. This information can be provided on a regular or ad-hoc basis.
- 3.5 The priority objectives have been allocated between Panels as follows:

SOCIAL WELL-BEING	ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING	ECONOMIC WELL-BEING
To enable the provision of affordable housing	To help mitigate and adapt to climate change	Effective Partnership
To achieve a low level of homelessness	To promote development opportunities in and around the market towns	To be an employer people want to work for
To promote active lifestyles		Maximise business and income opportunities including external funding and grants

4. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

4.1 The following performance data is appended for consideration:

Annex A - Performance data from services which contribute to the Council objectives. For each measure there is a target, actual performance against target, forecast performance for the next period, an indicator showing the direction of travel compared with the previous quarter and a comments field. The data is colour coded as follows:

- green – achieving or above target;
- amber – between target and an “intervention level” (the level at which performance is considered to be unacceptable and action is required);
- red – the intervention level or below; and
- grey – data not available.

Annex B - a summary of the achievements, issues and risks relating to the objectives, as identified by the Heads of Service.

5. DATA QUALITY

5.1 The appropriate Heads of Service have confirmed the accuracy of the data in the attached report and that its compilation is in accordance with the appropriate Divisions’ data measure templates. Acknowledging the importance of performance management data, a system of spot checks has been introduced to give further assurance on its accuracy.

6. RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Members are recommended to;

Consider the results of performance for priority objectives and to comment to Cabinet as appropriate.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Performance Management reports produced from the Council's CPMF software system

Growing Success: Corporate Plan

Contact Officer: Howard Thackray, Policy & Research Manager
☎ 01480 388035

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Community/Council Aim: A Clean, Green and Attractive Place

Objective: To help mitigate and adapt to climate change

Division: Environmental Management

Divisional Objective: To help mitigate and adapt to climate change

Key Activity(s) only to deliver service objective: Key Measure:

Target: Actual: Forecast: DoT*: Comment:

(NI 185) Green Force initiative	Number of Green Force meetings held in 2009/10 (target: 4 by year end)	3	4 (G)	↑	Staff internal environmental awareness initiative meets regularly and is taking forward a number of specific projects, including the 'get your kit off' campaign encouraging staff to turn off computers and monitors when away from their desk and at night.	QRT
17					A strategic review of carbon reduction opportunities at leisure centres to be completed to identify the most appropriate carbon saving measures - This has slowed down the implementation of year 1 Projects which are predominantly based at leisure centre sites but agreed measures will be completed as stated within the carbon management plan	QRT
(NI 185) Identify opportunities to reduce CO2 emissions from the Council's own operations	% of HDC Carbon Management Plan 1st year projects on track	70	90 (G)	↔	Salix Funding application submitted in the Third Quarter	QRT
	Tonnes of CO2 saved from year one carbon management projects (cumulative)	375	357 (A)	↓	Projects delivering savings to date include: Multi- Functional devices (67 Tonnes) PIR Sensors Sawtry (4 Tonnes) CHP at Huntingdon (166	QRT

* Direction of Travel - shows change in performance since last quarter, where applicable

(NI 186) Hunts Post Green page	Deliver monthly environmental information page in Hunts Post (cumulative)	9	9 (G)	↔	Hunts Post Green Page continues to be an invaluable means of promoting environmental initiatives within the district. Themes during this quarter included: October - Urban and Rural Character November - Clean and Safe December - Greening Christmas	Tonnes) Green Force Scheme (49 Tonnes) Travel Plan (71 Tonnes)	QRT
(NI 188) Undertake risk-based assessment of current vulnerabilities to weather and climate changes and identify adaptation responses	Local risk based assessment complete by March 2010 to achieve level 1 of NI188 on target (1=Yes, 0 = No)	1	1 (G)	↔	On course to achieving Level 1 of Indicator in line with LAA target by March 2010.		QRT
(NI186) Promote energy efficiency and use of renewable energy to householders	Number of tonnes of CO2 saved through installation of energy efficiency measures and renewables in domestic properties (cumulative quarterly measure)	525	522 (A)	↓			QRT
(NI186) Retro fit project - procurement of Housing stock	Green House (retro fit) project - completion of building work by Jan 2010 (on target 1 = Yes, 0 = No)	1	1 (G)	↔	Specification of measures/pre-monitoring undertaken. Procurement/tendering process for contractors expected to be complete in January 2010, Investigation of funding for 'role out' of retrofit programme in the wider District ongoing. Sponsorship programme and plans for filming developing.		QRT
(NI186) Update existing and extend Travel Plans to all of the Council's employment sites and implement to achieve a modal shift away from single occupant car use	% of council employees travelling alone to work by car	50		N/A	Annual measure, data to follow		YRL
Complete an annual review & update of Growing Awareness a plan for our environment	Review completed 2009/10 (1 = yes, 0 = no)	1	1 (G)	↔	Environment Strategy review up to the end of 2009/10 for publication in June 2010		QRT

* Direction of Travel - shows change in performance since last quarter, where applicable

Identify areas of joint working with stakeholders to help deliver aims of Growing Awareness.	HSP Environment Forum to meet at least twice annually (1=Yes, 0 = No)	1	1 (G)	↔	Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership Environment forum meets quarterly and is in the process of agreeing a joint action plan for 2010/11	QRT
Oversee the implementation of the Environment Strategy projects	% of Environment Strategy Year 2 projects on target	75	80 (G)	↓	<p>Year two funded Environment Strategy Projects 8 out of 10 on track -</p> <p>HDC Carbon Management Plan (on track)</p> <p>Sustainable Homes Retro-fit Project (on track)</p> <p>Huntingdonshire Nursery - Composting toilet (on track)</p> <p>Renewables at HDC owned Sites (on track)</p> <p>Schools Recycling Scheme (on track)</p> <p>Public Travel Information boards (being re-evaluated)</p> <p>Low Carbon Communities (on track)</p> <p>Pensioners Home Insulation Scheme (on track)</p> <p>Business Environmental Pledge scheme (re-evaluating through poor uptake)</p> <p>Green Force Environmental Awareness scheme (on track)</p> <p>Mayfield Road Showcase New Build (on track)</p>	QRT
Division: IMD						
Divisional Objective: Reduce the resources used by IMD						
Key Activity(s) only to deliver service objective: Key Measure:						
Implement new technology to reduce power consumption	Percentage reduction in power consumed (target TBA)			N/A	Annual measure, data to follow	YRL
Reducing number of commuting miles by sole car usage (eg working from home, car sharing, walking, cycling, use of public transport)	Number of car commuting miles saved	37,500	41,820 (G)	↑	Target is 50,000 for the year.	QRT

* Direction of Travel - shows change in performance since last quarter, where applicable

Division: Planning				
Divisional Objective: To encourage sustainable forms of development				
Key Activity(s) only to deliver service objective: Key Measure: Include sustainable policies within LDF (to set a sustainable policy framework)	Target: 1	Actual: 1 (G)	Forecast: ↔	DoT*: Comment: Adopted at September Committee.
Core Strategy – Adherence to LDF timetable, on target to be adopted by August 2009 (1=Yes, 0=No)				
Community/Council Aim: Developing communities sustainably				
Objective: To promote development opportunities in and around the market towns				
Division: People, Performance & Partnerships				
Divisional Objective: To promote development opportunities in and around the market towns				
Key Activity(s) only to deliver service objective: Key Measure: Deliver LES Physical Infrastructure Development activities in the Sustainable Economic Development service plan	Target: 90	Actual: 100 (G)	Forecast: ↔	DoT*: Comment:
% of Physical Infrastructure Development activities on track				
Division: Planning				
Divisional Objective: To promote development opportunities in and around the market towns				
Key Activity(s) only to deliver service objective: Key Measure: Develop strategic policy to promote well being of our market towns	Target: 1	Actual: 1 (G)	Forecast: ↔	DoT*: Comment: Adopted at September Committee.
Adoption of Core Strategy on target to be adopted by August 2009 (1=Yes, 0=No)				

* Direction of Travel - shows change in performance since last quarter, where applicable

<p>Objective To help to mitigate and adapt to climate change</p>	<p>Achievements:</p>	<p>Comments from appropriate Head of Service Environmental Management: Various energy efficient lighting schemes ongoing for internal and external clients (e.g. Sawtry and Huntingdon Leisure Centre car parks and various cycleways). Leisure roofing/insulation schemes awarded and starting Feb 2010 (Sawtry, The Ivo, Ramsey and Huntingdon). Brief developed with Leisure and Renewables East to look at energy and water management/efficiency management across Leisure portfolio. Will identify carbon reduction hits and costs for project implementation for the Carbon Management Plan. Delivery of document/plan around beginning of new financial year. New energy efficiency project in partnership with Renewables East, targeting 200 homes in St Neots. St Neots market sq bus shelter upgrade includes renewable technology. Development of climate change adaptation work with Environment Agency and County (NI 188). A Local Climate Impact Profile has been developed and will help define cost of climate change threats to HDC services. A series of meetings with internal service areas have been undertaken to establish risks to services e.g. leisure. HDC is at the forefront of districts working in this area.</p>
<p>Issues or actions for next quarter:</p>	<p>Issues or actions for next quarter:</p>	<p>Environmental Management: Retrofit project role out programme proposals and summer launch being developed. Undertake strategic overview/audit of energy and water management usage in Leisure Centres and develop options for low carbon infrastructure.</p>
<p>Risks:</p>	<p>Risks:</p>	<p>Environmental Management: Failure to 'green' facilities strategy/influence other services on low carbon agenda means higher long term costs (e.g. energy bills) Closer integration of key findings of the Carbon appraisal of the Cambridge sub region LTDP and HDC LIF continue to be critical to the delivery of long term carbon reduction measures to meet targets for: energy saving, combating climate change and meeting government targets NI 186 and 188. Findings from St Neots energy study not incorporated within DPD and therefore do not contribute to the wider evidence base for the district. BRE fail to deliver sponsorship for retrofit project. Affects project costs. County Flood Risk Management Partnership fails to find funding/resources for new work areas arising as a result of the Pitt review and Floods/Water Bill.</p>
<p>To promote development opportunities in and around the market towns</p>	<p>Achievements: Issues or actions for next quarter: Risks:</p>	<p>People, Performance & Partnerships: Monitoring of Town Centre shoppers/visitors through footfall surveys showed a 2.8% increase in footfall.</p>

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CORPORATE PLAN WORKING GROUP

NOTES OF MEETING HELD 23RD FEBRUARY 2010

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Corporate Plan Working Group met on 23rd February 2010 when Councillors J D Ablewhite, S J Criswell, P M D Godfrey, D Harty, G S E Thorpe and R J West were present.
- 1.2 Mrs C Garbett, I Leatherbarrow, A Roberts, H Thackray and Mrs J Walker were in attendance.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Working Group has been reminded that the Council has adopted 37 corporate objectives, eight of which are considered to be a priority for the immediate future. The eight priority objectives have been split between the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Social Well-Being, Environmental Well-Being and Economic Well-Being) accordingly.

3. WORKING GROUP COMMENTS

Social Well-Being

- 3.1 The Working Group has drawn attention to the number of admissions/participants in activities provided or promoted by the Council, which remains 4% below target. It has been noted that the closure of the two pools over the summer period and the inclement weather in December have been contributory factors to the shortfall, and it has been suggested that the current economic climate would also have had an effect. Members have noted that Huntingdon Leisure Centre has experienced an increase in visitor numbers.
- 3.2 Members have questioned how the data capture of all users from January 2010 will ensure the target number of active card holders is reached. In response, the Working Group has been advised that following the launch of 'One Leisure' in January 2010, a 'One Card' is being promoted which is free of charge and offers the cardholder benefits such as savings on activities, discounts and promotions. It is hoped that this initiative will result in an increase in the number of active cardholders.
- 3.3 Members have noted the increase in the number of households living in temporary accommodation, which stood at 65 at the end of the quarter. A maximum of 45 households will need to be achieved by the end of March 2010 to achieve the temporary accommodation reduction target. The Panel has asked whether those households living in temporary accommodation are automatically placed on the housing waiting list.

Environmental Well-Being

- 3.4 Having noted that the number of tonnes of CO2 saved through the installation of energy efficiency measures and renewables in domestic properties is slightly below the target, the Working Group has questioned how the CO2 saving is calculated. Members also have questioned whether the recent boiler replacement scheme is reflected in these figures. It is suggested that these issues should be pursued further by the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel.

Economic Well-Being

- 3.5 Attention has been drawn to the percentage of thematic groups who have reviewed their performance and delivery, which is below the target. The Working Group has been advised that the action plan for the Growth and Infrastructure Thematic Group needs to be redeveloped to ensure it is smarter, and can be integrated with partner activities and the Local Investment Framework.
- 3.6 Performance for the key measure for the Leisure Centres relating to the 'actual income received compared to budget' is five percent lower than the quarterly target. Members have discussed the schools' use of the pools and questioned the extent to which this has affected leisure centre income. The Working Group has suggested that this matter should be investigated further by the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel.

4. REVIEW OF GROWING SUCCESS TARGETS

- 4.1 The Policy and Strategic Services Manager has addressed the Working Group on the review of Growing Success non-priority targets. The review has been undertaken in conjunction with Heads of Service and has concentrated on the targets, objectives and measures to determine whether they remain appropriate for the period to the end of 2010-11.
- 4.2 Members have been acquainted with the changes that have been suggested to date. The Policy and Strategic Services Manager has requested any further comments within two weeks of the date of the meeting.

5. MAKING CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNT

- 5.1 The Director of Central Services has provided the Working Group with an update on the Council's involvement in Making Cambridgeshire Count and the progress of shared services. Members have been reminded that Making Cambridgeshire Count is an initiative that intends to examine the local area's public services to ensure the needs of local residents are being met. It is hoped that this will prevent duplication of service provision and, therefore, reduce costs. 13 pilot schemes are ongoing nationally, though Making Cambridgeshire Count is a voluntary scheme which has been funded by a grant of £350k from Invest East.
- 5.2 It has been reported that Cabinet Members have expressed reservations about the project, specifically that there has been a lack of clear direction, references have been made to the possible reorganization of local authorities in

Cambridgeshire and insufficient evidence has been presented of the cost savings that might be achieved. In addition, Cabinet Members have concerns regarding project management, governance and the perceived lack of benefit to local residents. Concerns also have been raised over the lack of scrutiny and elected Member involvement in the project. As a result the Leader of the Council has suspended the Council's formal involvement and decided to monitor progress of the project before making any decisions on the extent of the District Council's future involvement in it. South and East Cambridgeshire District Councils have adopted similar positions.

- 5.3 While it has been noted that some work is continuing at officer level, the Working Group has strongly expressed the view that ways should be found to enable the Council to resume playing a full part in Making Cambridgeshire Count.
- 5.4 Members also have reiterated their view that shared services could offer significant benefits to the Council and, as such, ought to be explored further. Although the Director of Central Services has provided assurances that the management team is continuing to explore the possibility of shared services, the Working Group has suggested that the Cabinet should be recommended to investigate whether there are any opportunities for jointly employing expert staff to avoid the greater costs using of specialist consultants.

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING)

9th March 2010

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS (Report by the Development Management Process Working Group)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At their meeting held on 14th July 2009, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) decided to establish a working group to investigate the process for the determination of planning applications and make recommendations where appropriate. The working group comprised Councillors M G Baker, P Godley, M F Newman and J S Watt and has met on a number of occasions in the ensuing months. Councillor Baker has acted as rapporteur.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Panel's interest in the subject was prompted by anecdotal evidence from members of the public's concern over the pre-decision planning process. The Panel acknowledged at the outset that planning can be a contentious subject with "winners and losers". The views of the public therefore have to be tempered accordingly.
- 2.2 It was decided that the review of the development management process should concentrate on the process leading to the determination of planning applications, rather than the decision making process itself or the merits of decisions. The working group decided to look at the practices and procedures from first enquiry by potential applicants to the preparation of an officer's final report and recommendations, involving pre-application advice, public consultation, plans and amendments, duration of the process and other related matters.

3. EVIDENCE AND INVESTIGATIONS

- 3.1 The working group carried out extensive consultation to ensure that any recommendations that it made would be evidence based as opposed to personal anecdotes and the views of parties aggrieved by a decision. The following investigations and enquiries were therefore made -
- A questionnaire to town and parish councils, given their role as statutory consultees and frequently raised comments about the planning process. This generated a healthy 58% completion rate, the results of which are summarised at Appendix A.

- A press release which was reported in the local media which generated a total of 17 replies from individuals expressing views and concerns about the planning process.
- A search of other local authority websites and personal enquiries with other authorities on their policy of charging for pre-planning advice.
- An interview with the Planning Services Manager (Development Management) on the Council's current processes and performance.
- An interview with representatives of two local planning agents (both of whom are former employees of the Council's Planning Division).
- An interview with two applicants for planning permission to obtain a personal perspective of the process.
- An interview with the Council's Scrutiny Manager on complaints regarding the planning process that are dealt with locally under the Council's feedback system and through the Local Government Ombudsman.
- A further interview with the Planning Services Manager accompanied by the Chairman of the Development Management Panel on the working group's provisional findings.

3.2 Having conducted their investigations the working group has found that the Council's processes compare favourably with other authorities and there is no significant cause for concern. However development management decisions can have very personal consequences for individuals affected by them which can colour their perception of the process and the decisions themselves. In particular the working group found that:-

- a growing number of authorities charge for pre-planning application advice;
- although not legally required, the Council has a procedure of posting notification letters to households that may be affected by a proposed development;
- the Council is not obliged to accept amendments to applications once they have been submitted, although officers tend to be flexible providing this does not delay the determination of an application unduly;
- the Council consults again on amendments to applications where they are deemed significant;

- out of several thousand applications determined each year, there are a handful of instances where a case officer's recommendation is overruled by a line manager;
- the Council has a 100% success rate in registering applications within three days;
- in the view of the agents interviewed, the Council's performance compares favourably with other local authorities;
- from the agents' perspective, policies sometimes can appear to be interpreted slightly differently by the three area planning teams in the District;
- in the views expressed by the public, lack of communication was frequently cited as a complaint; and
- the majority of complaints received by the Ombudsman from Huntingdonshire residents are planning related but it is rare for the Ombudsman to find maladministration in the Council's actions.

3.3 In order to consider all the evidence that has been obtained throughout the review, this report will focus on each sequence of the development management process in turn.

4. PRE-PLANNING APPLICATION ADVICE

4.1 At an early stage in its investigations, the working group was informed that the Council is not obliged to provide advice at the pre-submission stage of a planning application. Some authorities offer limited advice, some charge for detailed advice and others decline to provide any pre-submission advice. The Planning Division currently do offer advice and endeavour to respond to requests within four weeks. However this is achieved in only two thirds of cases.

4.2 The Planning Services Manager advised the working group that, in his opinion, pre-submission advice does present benefits for the authority and officers in his team by improving the quality of applications. It tends to deter speculative enquiries that would be unlikely to receive permission, design quality is improved and it helps to expedite the determination process by reducing the level of discussions required with applicants or amended plans. However, it was clear to the working group that, at the pre-submission stage, a potential applicant is receiving the view of a case officer prior to the receipt of views from consultees and, in most cases, the opinion of a team leader or other more senior officer.

4.3 The Planning Services Manager informed the group that he is keen to ensure that the Division continues to offer advice on proposals that are likely to come forward but he does acknowledge that resources are finite and there is a

- need to ensure that they are used in the most efficient and effective way possible.
- 4.4 Having interviewed the Council's Scrutiny Manager, the group learnt that the majority of complaints received by the Ombudsman from Huntingdonshire residents are planning related and that these number approximately six per annum. Of those, the majority have been concerned with the nature of advice given by case officers, particularly where a decision has differed from the advice given. The working group regard this as an almost inevitable consequence of the process. The advice of a case officer will always be without prejudice to the outcome of the consultation process and the view of a more senior officer or indeed the Development Management Panel itself where recommendations can be rejected. It is not clear that this is always fully appreciated by applicants.
 - 4.5 The working group did consider the option of recommending that the availability of pre-submission advice is withdrawn. Most applicants employ agents when applying for planning permission who should be aware of planning policies. If an application is then refused on design grounds, the applicant has the opportunity of re-applying free of charge a second time to address the reasons for the initial refusal. This again has its flaws in that a greater proportion of applications might be refused, some unsatisfactory decisions may be successful on appeal that could have been influenced at the pre-submission stage and it is likely to appear unhelpful and unpopular.
 - 4.6 Another option is the possibility of charging for pre-submission advice which the working group considered at length. Following clarification on the legal basis for charging, a number of authorities have followed this route in recent years as a way of recovering part of the costs being incurred in providing advice. In the opinion of the agents who were interviewed, obtaining pre-submission advice currently was often a lengthy and frustrating process with delays in receiving a response. Moreover, advice tended to be policy based with little attempt at local interpretation which the agents felt was not particularly helpful and did not justify the introduction of charging. If a fee were to be charged, the agents' view was that the majority of applicants would be unlikely to seek pre-submission advice unless a greater degree of interpretation and assistance was offered.
 - 4.7 A further consideration is the weight that is placed on advice for which a charge has been made and whether this will lead to a presumption on the part of both applicants and objectors that permission will be granted. It is the opinion of the Planning Services Manager that the amount of revenue that might be generated from the introduction of charging is often over estimated by those authorities that have decided to charge and that this is not borne out by subsequent events, especially as most authorities do not charge for householder type applications.
 - 4.8 Rather than carry out more in-depth investigations on the subject, the working group relied on a recent report to Cheltenham Borough Council in which the various benefits and drawbacks of charging have been captured (appendix B attached). In considering whether to continue to offer pre-submission advice

and, if so, whether to charge, the working group was advised by the Planning Services Manager that on balance it was his view that the drawbacks of charging were not outweighed by the income that might be achieved.

- 4.9 In a growth area where substantial development has taken place and is expected to continue, this was not a view that the working group could adhere to. In difficult financial circumstances with reductions in expenditure required by the Council, the working group question whether it is sustainable for the Council to continue to provide pre-submission advice free of charge when this is a time consuming exercise for which no income is received. On balance, the working group considers that a free service should no longer be offered, other than for small, householder type applications. For residential and commercial developments, the costs involved in bringing forward a successful scheme are considerable and the working group sees no reason for one part of that process to be offered free of charge by the planning authority. Careful consideration will be necessary to ensure that the determination and local democratic processes are not compromised by the advice given but, subject to those caveats, **the working group recommends that the possibility of charging developers for pre-submission advice be investigated further by the Council.**

5. RECEIPT OF APPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Councils current procedure requires applications to be registered within 3 days of receipt which the working group was pleased to see was being achieved. In terms of the determination of planning applications, the targets set by the set by Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is 8 weeks for minor applications and 13 weeks for major applications. The timescale for consultees to respond if they wish to submit comments is 21 days, although the working group was informed that some consultees were traditionally slow in responding within the allocated timeframe.
- 5.2 The results of the parish and town council questionnaire (Appendix A), show that 51% of town and parish councils who responded felt that 21 days was sufficiently long enough to enable them to submit their comments on an application. A number of parish councils did express a view that the 21 day consultation period did not fit into their cycle of meetings, with several stating that 28 days would be preferable. The working group recognise that the 21 day process forms part of the statutory process and cannot be changed.
- 5.3 The Planning Services Manager has explained that case officers do endeavour to be flexible and will, on request from town and parish councils, extend the deadline for comments where the extension of time requested is not unreasonable. The working group was conscious that the timescale set by the DCLG will inevitably be inconvenient for some town and parish councils but the group recognised that this is beyond the Council's control and greater flexibility on the part of town and parish councils in the way in which they formulate their responses would help.

6. APPLICATION AMENDMENTS

- 6.1 The working group found this to be one of the more contentious aspects of the process. The Council is not obliged to accept amendments to applications but, following negotiation, case officers do accept amendments from applicants providing this does not result in an undue delay. Upon receipt of amended plans, the Council's approach is to re-consult only if the change in the opinion of the case officer is significant. Major changes are not accepted and require a fresh application to be made. The exercise of that judgement is subjective and reliant on the experience of the case officer.
- 6.2 The working group found that in exercising that judgement, problems can occur. If, for example, a neighbour has decided on balance not to object to a planning application and amended plans are subsequently approved, the first that the neighbour may be aware of the amendment is when the building work is underway. What may have been judged a relatively minor change on the part of the case officer may, in the opinion of the neighbour, be of sufficient magnitude that he would have objected to the application, the opportunity for which has now passed. Town and parish councils also may be unaware of any change which can prompt calls to the Planning Division that development is taking place that is contrary to plans that they commented on. It was the overwhelming view of the towns and parishes (95%) that further consultation should take place.
- 6.3 The working group acknowledges the dilemma for case officers. Further consultation on amendments will inevitably delay the determination of applications which may impact on the achievement of DCLG targets. If towns and parishes are consulted again, this could lead to plans being submitted to a further round of meetings or complaints that there is insufficient time to comment.
- 6.4 Solutions to the question are limited. Case officers could simply process an application as submitted and if the design is unsatisfactory, refuse permission which would enable the applicant to re-apply free of charge with suitably amended plans. While helping to achieve DCLG targets and providing consultees with the opportunity to comment, this is unlikely to be popular with applicants and will lead to further work on the part of the Planning Division in registering the application again and carrying out the consultation process for which a fee has not been received. This was therefore discounted by the working group.
- 6.5 The exercise of judgement in determining the significance test on whether to re-consult is a subjective one that is applied by individual case officers. The working group was informed that this could lead to complaints under the Council's feedback system and to the Ombudsman. On balance, therefore the working group does not feel that it is equitable for neighbours (and other consultees) to be denied the opportunity to comment again on amended plans, except where the change is of very minor significance. Although this will still involve an exercise of judgement on the part of case officers, the working group suggests that a liberal approach be taken to ensure that the

fundamental rights of neighbours to be able to comments on applications which may affect the enjoyment of their own homes is not compromised.

- 6.6 **The working group therefore recommends that relevant consultees and neighbours be consulted again on amended plans, except for those of very minor significance, with a 7 days deadline for reply.**

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The working group was advised that the Council is not required to write to neighbours who are affected by a proposed development. The legal requirement is simply to give notice of an application which could be satisfied by an advertisement in a local newspaper, a site notice(s) visible to the general public, or by neighbour notification to owner and/or occupiers of adjoining properties by post. The Council's procedure is to send notification letters to those households that are considered appropriate which again can lead to problems.

- 7.2 The choice of which household to write to is again a subjective one and there have been complaints to the Ombudsman that neighbours affected by a development have not been consulted. This can tend to arise where a neighbour lives in an adjoining street that backs on to a development site. The likelihood of passing the site notice may be limited and neighbours have claimed from time to time that they did not receive a notification letter. The latter situation in terms of neighbours claiming not to have received consultee letters is a not uncommon occurrence. Registered post is clearly out of the question on financial grounds and so much 'junk mail' is now delivered addressed to the householder that it can be difficult to distinguish what is genuinely of interest and as opposed being speculative in nature.

- 7.3 The working group does not see any necessity to change the present arrangements but **recommends that care is required by officers to ensure that all of those households that abut a development site, as a minimum, be sent a consultee letter and that the envelope be suitably overprinted with a suitable message to indicate that it is an important communication concerning a planning application.**

8. COMMUNICATION

- 8.1 A commonly recurring theme throughout the working group's investigations was a perceived lack of communication between case officers and applicants throughout the whole application process. A press release was circulated (Appendix C) at the outset of the working group's study which invited the public to share their views on their experience of the development management process. A summary of the responses from the public is attached (Appendix D). Of the comments received, almost 60% cited lack of communication and co-operation from the Planning Division as an issue. The agents who were interviewed also felt that what they perceived as a reluctance on the part of case officers to share their views or opinions on an application was frustrating, especially when an application was later refused.

- 8.2 Suggestions made by the agents included the establishment of an 'Agents Forum', which would allow agents, officers and Development Management Panel Members an opportunity to discuss relevant issues and share views and opinions. The working group was not persuaded that this was necessary however and could potentially lead to a perception that the Council was working too closely with planning agents as a group.
- 8.3 The agents also suggested that the Council consider implementing a duty planning officer system which is in place at a number of other authorities. This would enable the public and agents an opportunity to access planning advice of a general nature but the drawback is that the person on duty is unlikely to be able to deal with specific applications, unless he or she happens to be the relevant case officer. This would overcome the problem of the public being unable to access advice because officers are on site, in meetings, writing reports etc. but the agents also mention that some authorities publicise (through their website/letterhead) when planning officers are available, outside of which time general enquiries are dealt with by the duty planning officer. It was felt on the whole that the idea has much to commend it as the public and agents have access to an officer during normal working hours while case officers are not distracted by general enquiries.
- 8.4 In light of the concerns raised, **the working group recommends that consideration be given to the implementation of a duty planning officer system and the publication of times when case officers can be contacted.**
- 8.5 The working group acknowledged that problems can arise due to applicants not being made aware of issues with their application until towards the end of the eight week determination timeframe. Usually those issues will have arisen as a result of comments raised by consultees such as the internal conservation team. It can therefore come as something of a surprise to an applicant to be informed that issues have arisen shortly before they were hoping to receive an approval certificate. Therefore, **the working group recommends that applicants be advised in the clearest terms at the outset of the process that they are unlikely to receive any further communication until all of the consultees' views have been received, which could be towards the end of the eight or thirteen weeks determination period.**

9. DETERMINATION OF APPLICATIONS

- 9.1 In order to make the process manageable given the volume of applications received by the Council, a scheme of delegation is in place that enable the majority of applications to be determined by the Head of Planning Services or his staff, except in certain circumstances where an application is determined by the Development Management Panel or, very infrequently, the Council.
- 9.2 Where applications are determined by officers, the recommendation of a case officer is subject to approval by a team leader or more senior officer. In more complicated or contentious applications, the Planning Services Manager or the Head of Planning Services personally may have a contrary view to the

- team leader. The working group found that this on occasion can also lead to complaints from applicants. For example, an applicant can incur expense on preparing amended plans following discussion with a case officer, only for the application to be refused because the team leader or more senior manager then disagrees with the design or principle of the development. An applicant somewhat naturally can feel aggrieved that they have incurred additional expense unnecessarily.
- 9.3 However, the working group was encouraged to find that out of several thousand applications determined each year, there are only a handful of cases where a case officer's recommendation is not accepted by a more senior officer. In those circumstances, the working group does not recommend any change to the current process and regards the occasional complaint as an inevitable by-product of the process.
- 9.4 In terms of applications submitted to committee for determination, the working group was advised that DCLG guidance suggests that planning committees should consider no more than 10% of applications received by an authority. As the Council's Development Management Panel currently considers 5.8% of the applications submitted, the working group concluded that there was no need to investigate the delegation scheme that has been adopted by the authority.
- 9.5 The results of the town and parish council questionnaire (Appendix A) show that the majority of respondents (93%) feel that they are supplied with sufficient information to comment on an application and 67% feel fairly confident that they have sufficient knowledge of government guidance, regional strategy and district plans and policies to formulate recommendations on planning applications. The majority of respondents (64%) also feel that the opportunity for a town and parish council representative to speak at the Development Management Panel meetings is very useful. However, 57% of town and parish councils feel that the District Council does not offer sufficient training and that more should be made available. **The working group therefore recommends that further training be made available for town and parish councils on all aspects of the development management process.**
- 9.6 Returning to the question of DCLG timescales for the determination of applications, the working group recognised that the Council currently is performing well with the figures as at September 2009 being 93% of major applications determined within 13 weeks (against a target of 60%), 81% of minor applications within 8 weeks (65% target) and 89% of other applications within 8 weeks (80% target).
- 9.7 A number of issues were raised however by the agents who were interviewed. It was their view that case loads could sometimes appear disproportionate which could delay the determination process and on occasion delay the site visit by a case officer until some way through the determination process. Any issues that arose from that visit meant that there was limited opportunity to negotiate amendments within the required timescale. Although the agents suggested that Huntingdonshire was not

unique in this respect, the working group felt that this is an issue for the Planning Services Manager to address and not one on which it could usefully comment.

- 9.8 The decision to allow agents and applicants to speak at Development Management Panel meetings was welcomed by the agents but they felt that the time allowed of 3 minutes was insufficient and they expressed concern at the lack of opportunity to respond to what they regarded as factually incorrect statements either by objectors or as part of the debate. The latter view was echoed by the comments received by the working group from members of the public and town and parish councils. While the working group has some sympathy with those sentiments, it was also aware that the process for determining applications by the Development Management Panel has to be scrupulously fair to all parties and that while ward councillors, town and parish council representatives, applicants and objectors are allowed to speak, this is not an open debate. Moreover one person's perception of misleading information is likely to be contrary to that of the person supplying that information and members of the Panel are experienced in assessing the relative merits of the arguments presented. Nevertheless this is a matter of some concern that both some councillors and the public feel strongly about and **the working group recommends that when the public speaking procedure at the Development Management Panel meetings is next reviewed, consideration be given to the introduction of a mechanism that allows external speakers to respond to what they perceive to be factually incorrect information so that the Panel can make well informed decisions.**
- 9.9 Finally on this point, the agents suggested that there was sometimes an element of inconsistency in the interpretation of policies across the three planning teams into which the District is split. This view was reiterated in the response from the public, with five individuals citing that inaccurate and inconsistent advice was given and a person interviewed expressing concern over what he regarded as conflicting advice received from planning and conservation officers. The working group found no firm evidence to justify the views expressed however and acknowledge that planning is a discipline where different interpretations of guidance and policy will always occur.
- 9.10 It was suggested to the working group that case officers be moved around area teams to achieve a more consistent approach but the working group discounted this approach on the basis that this would detract from the local knowledge that case officers built up and the relationships that they established with town and parish councils etc. within their respective area. Nevertheless this is clearly an issue of concern to some parties and **the working group wishes to draw those concerns to the attention of the Council.**

10. RETROSPECTIVE PLANNING APPLICATIONS

- 10.1 A frequent cause for concern drawn to the working party's attention is the determination of retrospective planning applications. The working group has been assured by the Planning Services Manager that retrospective

applications where permission has not been granted or construction is not in accordance with approved plans are not dealt with differently. However there is a perception, rightly or wrongly, that where a decision is finely balanced, case officers tend to allow development to remain rather than require it to be demolished and re-built. The working group has been given examples by the Planning Services Manager of instances where the Council has required works to be changed and developers have been prosecuted successfully for having carried out works without permission. **The working group recommends that the Council reinforces the message wherever possible that development that takes place without permission is discouraged and that the Council will take a robust approach concerning the retention of development where permission is subsequently refused.**

11. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- 11.1 During the course of the working group's investigations, the Council's website was re-launched and the investigations that were undertaken into the public's access to planning information via the web was based on the old web pages. Following comments about the Council's public access software system by the agents who were interviewed, the working group reviewed the planning information on the websites of a number of other authorities, including those recommended by the agents. Although styles differed, the working group considered the content and functionality of the planning information on the Council's website to be as extensive and helpful as that of other Councils' websites viewed.
- 11.2 The responses to the town and parish council questionnaire also indicated that the website is well regarded and frequently used, with 51% of respondents indicating that they found the information on the website about planning applications very useful and 78% of respondents using the website at least once a month to obtain information about planning applications.

12. APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

- 12.1 The working group was conscious of the fact that there is an appeal mechanism for those applicants who are dissatisfied with the Council's decision to refuse planning permission. Although the volume of appeals is small, it should be recognised that the number of applications refused is relatively low in comparison with the total number processed by the Council. Unlike the licensing system where both applicants and objectors can appeal to the courts, there is no avenue of appeal for objectors aggrieved by a planning decision to approve permission, other than the relatively expensive option of judicial review through the courts. The only other option is for an aggrieved person to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman or through the Council's internal complaints system. However such complaints cannot challenge the merits of a decision and are restricted to potential maladministration and an alleged failure to follow approved processes and

procedures. Decisions therefore cannot be overturned, although compensation can be paid if the complaint is upheld.

When informed that permission has been granted, objectors are not routinely told that there is a complaints procedure. However if concerns are raised subsequently that due processes have not been followed, this is brought to the complainants attention. The working group has considered whether objectors should be advised of the opportunities available to them to submit a complaint or apply for judicial review. On balance, the working group decided against recommending that this be introduced, partly because this cannot lead to a decision being overturned, except in the case of judicial review, and partly for the very practical reason that the Council is unlikely to be able to handle the potential increase in the number of complaints that this may generate.

13. CONCLUSION

- 13.1 Members of the working group wish to extend their appreciation to all those who were interviewed, responded to the questionnaire and press release and took the time to contact them with their views on the development management process. They were also grateful for the advice given to them by the Planning Services Manager (Development Management).
- 13.2 The working group has acknowledged that planning is a contentious subject which, by its nature, can generate strong feelings and concerns. The origins of the study lay in the anecdotal evidence presented to Members by their constituents about failures and discrepancies in the system. Although these were reinforced to some degree by the responses that were received, the working party found it difficult to obtain firm evidence to reinforce the concerns that the members of the public had expressed without delving into individual cases in some detail. The information collated will nevertheless be passed to the Planning Services Manager for his attention.
- 13.3 The working group concluded that in overall terms the development management process works well and planning officers are to be commended in the often pressured and difficult environment in which they are working. Nevertheless there are some improvements that the working group suggest should be implemented as a result of their investigations which have been highlighted in the report and are reproduced below.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1 The working group therefore

RECOMMENDS

- (a) that the possibility of charging developers for pre-submission advice be investigated further by the Council;
- (b) that relevant consultees and neighbours be consulted again on amended plans, except for those of very minor significance, with a 7 days deadline for reply;
- (c) that care is required by officers to ensure that all of those households that abut a development site, as a minimum, be sent a consultee letter and that the envelope be suitably overprinted with a suitable message to indicate that it is an important communication concerning a planning application;
- (d) the working group recommends that consideration be given to the implementation of a duty planning officer system and the publication of times when case officers can be contacted;
- (e) that applicants be advised in the clearest terms at the outset of the process that they are unlikely to receive any further communication until all of the consultees' views have been received, which could be towards the end of the eight or thirteen weeks determination period;
- (f) that further training be made available for town and parish councils on all aspects of the development management process;
- (g) that when the public speaking procedure at the Development Management Panel meetings is next reviewed, consideration be given to the introduction of a mechanism that allows external speakers to respond to what they perceive to be factually incorrect information so that the Panel can make well informed decisions;
- (h) that the Council reinforces the message wherever possible that development that takes place without permission is discouraged and that the Council will take a robust approach concerning the retention of development where permission is subsequently refused;

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Notes of the Development Management Process Working Group
Planning Advisory Service Case Study – A Material World: Charging for Pre-Application
Planning Advice

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

<http://www.ryedale.gov.uk/>

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/>

Cheltenham Borough Council Cabinet Report 20th January 2009 – Charging for Pre-
Application Planning Advice

The Planning Portal

APPENDIX A

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARISH COUNCILS.** **RESPONSE SUMMARY** **42 responses received.**

- 1) **How useful do you find the Council's website in terms of the information that it contains about planning applications?**

Have not used it	5%
Not very useful	5%
Fairly useful	39%
Very useful	51%

- 2) **How often each month do you access the Council's website to obtain information about planning applications?**

Have not accessed it	2%
Less than once a month	20%
1-5 times a month	54%
5-10 times a month	7%
More than 10 times a month	17%

- 3) **Bearing in mind that planning applications are listed on the Council's website, would you be happy if the Council ceased issuing you with a paper copy of each application for comment?**

Yes	5%	No	95%
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- 4) **If no, please explain the reason(s) why you would like to continue to receive a paper copy of each planning application (Please tick all that apply)**

No access to a computer/ the internet	19%
Problems with potentially missing deadlines for consultation response	52%
Inability to print large plans for inspections/meetings	83%
Neighbours and others ask to see applications received	52%
Other (please specify)	

Applications are circulated for all Councillors to comment, 4 out of 11 have no internet access;

Problems that on many occasions Councillors can not access your website;

Internet does not provide a reminder that plans are there;

Not all Councillors will access plans on internet;

Plans are difficult to view adequately online;

Online plans no good for a site visit;

The Parish Council would have to cover the cost of printing all documents to ensure Councillors could view the plans before commenting, do not have an A3 printer;

Do not have a projector or internet access at meetings to view plans;

Still need paper copy for meeting;

Council Chamber ill-equipped to show screen;

Not everyone is computer literate and some times the reproduction is not clear;

I am a part time clerk and if away for any reason then arrange for any paper work to be seen by parish councillors for action if necessary;

*No access to projector – it would be useful if a parish council could borrow a laptop and projector to try out at meetings before committing to purchase (Spaldwick);
No access to a projector – it would be useful if a parish council could borrow a laptop and projector to try this out at a meeting before committing to cost of purchase (Stow Longa);
Not all Councillors have internet access;
Internet access is at work and I can not print off documents for parish council purposes;
Printed plans are necessary for discussion at DC meetings;
It is virtually impossible to judge scale and impact or to read the data, in addition the scans are often very poor quality and thus almost illegible.*

5) Is the information supplied by the Council with a planning application sufficient to enable you to comment on the application?

Yes 93% No 7%

6) If no, please explain what further information you would like to receive.

*At Parish Council level need full information that DM Panel have;
Plans can be sparse in detail and lack clarity;
Not always sufficient information on plans e.g missing compass, scale, some elevations;
Occasionally HDC send out plans to the parish council apparently unchecked, e.g all plans should show the street scene for new building work in relation to existing, this is often missing;
In the case of planning applications relating to listed buildings it would be valuable to see more detail and have knowledge that listed building consent has also been sought.*

7) Do you think that the consultation period of 21 days is sufficiently long enough to enable you to submit your comments on an application?

Yes 51% No 49%

8) If the answer is no, please explain why not and how long you would ideally prefer to have to comment on an application (bearing in mind that there are government performance measures to be met by local planning authorities in terms of determination of planning applications).

*Due to the need to circulate each application to 11 Councillors in turn;
Doesn't fit our cycle of Parish Council meetings;
This Parish Council meets once every two months and have to call special meetings several times a year which is costly to the Council in money terms as well as time -8 weeks;
Ideally 4 weeks – Plans are sent to the clerk, who is not in this village. There is thus at least a week's delay before consultation process starts. For most plans we require a Parish Council meeting (we only have 5 Councillors – so are too small for a planning committee). Meetings take time to be arranged to suit all;
28 days;
Due to timings of Council Meeting dates – 30 days minimum;
Short consultation times can some months be very tight, especially if a public holiday is involved;
Full month would be better- to enable all Councillors to look at and fit in with set meeting;
28 days would be better to allow for receipt and distribution of plans, inspection and reports back to parish council and HDC;
Plans need to be circulated and 21 days can be insufficient;
Extension to 30 days would be helpful on occasions when meeting has just passed, otherwise additional meetings have to be arranged at extra cost to Parish Council, so flexibility needed;*

Small parish councils don't have the ability to have a planning committee and only meet on a monthly basis 'ad hoc' meetings are not possible so suggest 6 weeks from submission for decision from HDC;

In the event of issues such as 'Northbridge' the impact deserves serious and complete investigation;

Not always as parish council only meets once a month, first Monday of the month – 28 days would suit better;

It would be preferable if the time period was 28 days;

Being a small council (5 members) it is sometimes difficult forming a quorum at short notice;

It is occasionally necessary to request an extension beyond 21 days to avoid an excessive number of meetings;

Some months we have to have a special meeting sometimes for one application – 28 days would be better;

Meeting schedules mean that we may miss deadlines;

I think 28 days would be better. We hold a planning meeting monthly and the 28 days period is not always sufficient;

Would prefer 1 month, to minimize calling for extraordinary meetings for each set of plans;

Small parish councils like Hemingford Abbots without a planning sub-committee frequently need to call additional or extraordinary council meetings to meet deadlines. 35 days would obviate this need, 28 days would significantly reduce it;

In most cases of minor planning applications, 21 days is fine but for changes to the village scene 28 days or more would be valuable, and for major changes, large industrial projects or more than one house for a small Hamlet – longer would be better – say 6 weeks. N.B all applications that come in from mid-July to August should have a September deadline because of school and other holidays.

9) Do you find it helpful if neighbours supply you with a copy of their comments on an application to assist you in formulating your recommendations?

Not very helpful	
Fairly helpful	40%
Very helpful	60%

10) How often is your council/meeting contacted by applicants/objectors with regard to planning applications in the parish?

Never	
Less than once a year	10%
1-5 times each year	59%
5-10 times each year	12%
More than 10 times each year	20%

Dependant on number of applications per year.

11) Do you allow members of the public to address your council/planning committee when they are considering a planning application and before a recommendation is determined?

Yes	95%	No	5%
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12) If yes, how often does this occur?

Less than once a year	13%
1-5 times each year	61%
5-10 times each year	18%
More than 10 times each year	8%

*Dependant on number of applications per year.
This is allowed during public forum.*

13) Do you think you should be consulted again if an application or plans are amended by an applicant before they are determined?

Yes	98%	No	2%
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14) Do you think that neighbours should be consulted again if an application or plans are amended by an applicant before they are determined?

Yes	98%	No	2%
-----	-----	----	----

15) Does your council/meeting feel confident that it has sufficient knowledge of government guidance, regional strategy and district plans and policies when determining your recommendations on planning applications?

Not very confident	24%
Fairly confident	67%
Very confident	10%

16) Do you think that the District Council offers sufficient training to town and parish councils/parish meetings on planning policies and processes?

Yes- sufficient training is offered	43%
No- insufficient training is offered, more training should be available	57%

17) If you think that more training is required, what subjects would you prefer to be offered? (Please specify)

Criteria;
Not training that is required, but more accessible times;
No training is offered at present as far as I know;
Planning Policy, as it affects applications in rural communities;
Planning Policy;
Material Considerations;
How to make good comments;
The major changes to LA planning procedures i.e development framework and linking documentation needs explaining more fully;
All aspects of planning process;
Planning guidelines and appeals process;
Specifying and interpreting planning guidance;
Something similar to the South Cambridgeshire parish planning pack updated regularly with briefing sessions;
We would like training to include examples of what is acceptable and what isn't;
Information on the new rules for developer contributions;
Overview of strategy for the region and area;
How development will impact on transport and services;
All those mentioned in question 15;
All those mentioned in question 15;

All those mentioned in question 15;
 Those mentioned in question 15;
 Those mentioned in question 15;
 The role of the parish council in the planning process – they currently get involved in larger issues that district and county take care of;
 Explain why two applications that are very similar get different outcomes – this can cause great confusion;
 Planning policies,
 Reasons for refusal;
 Local development framework overview;
 Changes in policy;
 I didn't even know HDC makes training available! We have new Councillors who would appreciate an introductory course on planning policies and procedures. I (Clerk) would also attend to refresh my knowledge and learn what's where on the different internet sites;
 Planning rules: Enforcement processes;
 Greater clarification of HDC rulings on enforcement issues, and in relation to the forthcoming new core strategy when ratified.

18) Do you think that the opportunity for a town/parish council/parish meeting representative to speak at Council Development Management Panel meetings is useful?

Not very useful	7%
Fairly useful	29%
Very useful	64%

Further Comments

Waresley – What would be most important would be some feedback from the officer concerned, if there is a disagreement between the Parish Council and the officer. It would be nice to have the opportunity to comment further in this case. Feedback and further comment from the Parish Council could mean that an application might be decided without recourse to the planning committee. We'd also like to see a faster reaction from enforcement, if we alert them to planning infringements.

Ramsey – Far too little weight is placed on town council representation, we know what we want in our area. We are far more consistent than Development Control at HDC.

Spaldwick – Finalisation of HDCs plans and policies would help. Why couldn't it be the clerk that speaks at Development Management Panel meetings?

Stow Longa – Completion of HDCs plans and policies would help. I do not see why representation is limited to Councillors – why should the clerk not represent the Council?

It should not be expected that Parish Clerks have the time to constantly trawl HDC's website in case there is a planning application.

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Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet – 20 January 2009

Charging for pre-application planning advice Report of the Strategic Director Environment

1. Executive summary and recommendation

1.1 The purpose of this report is to propose a charging scheme for pre-application planning advice given to applicants prior to the submission of a planning application. This proposal will contribute to the cost of providing the service.

1.2 I therefore recommend that Cabinet:

1.2.1 Approves the introduction of a charging scheme for pre-application planning advice and set fees to be effective from 1st April 2009 in accordance with the flat rate fee banding structure detailed at Section 8 below;

1.2.2 Delegates authority to the Strategic Director Environment to make minor changes to the approved scheme as required. This will include the development of customer guidance notes, application forms and website information to support the scheme, similar to that adopted by other local authorities.

1.3 Summary of implications:

1.3.1 **Financial** – Given the extent of pre-application advice the Council currently gives out for free, the possibility of charging is something that must be given serious consideration given the Council's revenue position over the medium term. It is anticipated that the recommended flat fee charging for pre-application advice outlined at section 8 will create an additional projected income generation in the region of £30,000 for 2009/10.

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1.3.2 **Legal** - Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 introduced a general power for authorities to charge for "discretionary" services. In the case of planning, this applies to activities outside the scope of the existing fees structure, such as pre application advice. The Act restricts the amount of the charges recoverable to the costs of providing the service with no ability to make a profit. In deciding whether or not to charge for any discretionary service the Council must have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Consultative draft guidance has been issued and whilst this is still a draft document regard should be made to it although the weight to be attached is limited. The draft guidance states that the power in Section 93 will operate on the basis that the discretionary service is offered at a charge and that anyone who requires the service agrees to take it up on these terms. Where existing services are charged for, payment in advance or on application is the usual practice. This should also be the case for

charging for pre-application advice as it avoids extra costs associated with debt recovery should payment in arrears not be made. Any pre application advice given is without prejudice to the final decision made on the application. There will be no refund of the fee when an application is refused.

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01242 775117

1.3.3 Human Resources

No direct HR implications arising from this report. However, a review of the impact of officer time is recommended after first six months of the scheme being operational.

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01242

1.4 Implications on corporate and community plan priorities

- 1.4.1 Fee income from pre-application charging is identified as one of the Bridging the Gap programme board projected income generation of £30,000 in the draft general fund budget for 2009/10.

1.5 Statement on risk

- 1.5.1 There is a perception that charging for pre-application advice raises the customer's expectations about the level of service they can expect to receive, and this has to be carefully considered and aligned with resources.
- 1.5.2 It is proposed to monitor the nature of decisions issued to identify if the charging procedure results in an increase in the refusal of planning permission. Officer time spent on charged pre application advice will also be recorded. The procedure, including the rate of the charge, and types of proposal that attract the charge, will be reviewed after 6 months of coming into effect. This will include giving consideration to whether there is scope for extending charging into other areas of planning work.
- 1.5.3 The projected income has been based on those major and minor applications in the 2007/08 where pre-application advice was sought. There is a risk that future volumes may be different resulting in different income levels to that projected in this report. Pre application advice income levels will need to be carefully monitored alongside existing development control fee income levels.
- 1.5.4 A risk assessment is attached at Appendix 1.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Many local planning authorities devote considerable time and effort to offering pre-application advice, seeing it as part of delivering a good planning service. Many requests for advice are of a speculative nature and do not lead to the submission of an application. If an application is eventually submitted the application fee is for considering the application, rather than for the cost of the pre-application discussions – which clearly have cost implications for the Council.
- 2.2 The Local Government Act 2003 gave planning authorities a discretionary power to charge for giving pre-application advice (as a service that an authority has the power, but is not obliged, to provide) and therefore allowed authorities to recover at least some

of the costs incurred *before the application is submitted*. However the income raised must not exceed the cost of providing the service. In January 2008 the Audit Commission published a report 'Positively Charged – Maximising the Benefit of Local Public Service Charges.' The report provides advice and recommendations on the approach to charging for services by local authorities.

3. Key issues considered

- 3.1 Whether to charge for all pre-application advice given or only for specific types of development proposed or nature of applicant.
- 3.2 How to charge for officer time, either by size of development, percentage of planning fee, seniority of officer involved, or to adopt a flat rate.
- 3.3 What rate the charge should be.
- 3.4 Whether to charge for advice given on schemes that involve Council owned land.

4. Options appraisal

- 4.1 There are a number of local authorities that charge for pre-application advice but there is no consistent approach in the way that the charge is levied. It is however clear that most authorities do not charge for advice relating to the extension of householder / domestic properties. There are some however including Bracknell Forest who charge £20.00 for householder enquiries with exemptions for disability conversions or listed building / conservation consents. Taunton & Deane charge £40.00 per meeting plus VAT. Whilst this type of application represents a significant proportion of the applications submitted to Cheltenham Borough Council, the no fee approach is favoured for householders, small businesses, and developments on Council owned land. It is important that the charge is easy to calculate and collect, and reflects the different levels of complexity and time taken to give the advice. Most authorities have adopted a practice where developers submit a written request for a meeting and the fee for such is then paid in advance of the meeting taking place. This approach is favoured for Cheltenham. There are various methods of charging for meetings / written advice in these examples -

4.1.1 A fee based on a percentage of the planning fee:

Hart District Council charge 25% of the planning fee for pre-application advice. Bath and North East Somerset charge for meetings on major applications on the basis of 10% of the planning fee.

This approach is not favoured because of the complexities of calculating the fee, particularly when schemes are in their infancy and the precise floor space / number of units may not be known.

4.1.2 A fee based on the length of time of the meeting:

This approach is taken by Surrey Heath with a one hour meeting attracting a fee of £350.00 and a three hour meeting £700.00.

This approach is not favoured because it presents difficulties when meetings overrun (for maybe good reasons) the allocated time. The planning officer clearly could not demand more money before allowing the meeting to continue.

4.1.3 A fee based reflecting the seniority of the planning officer at the meeting:

This approach is adopted by Windsor and Maidenhead who charge £30.00, £50.00 or £70.00 per hour depending on the seniority of those attending the meeting.

Such a system can however result in greater pressure for meetings with more senior staff and also has the same disadvantages of 4.1.2 above.

4.1.4 **A flat rate per meeting based on the size of the development:**

Developments are already categorised by the Government according to their size. "Major" applications include all residential schemes of 10 or more units and commercial schemes which create more than 1000m² floor space. "Minor" applications exclude all householder proposals but include residential schemes from 1 to 9 units and commercial floor space up to 1000m². Mid Sussex, whilst not differentiating between application type, charge a flat rate £100.00 per meeting.

A flat rate fee is considered to be the most suitable approach for Cheltenham primarily because the fee scale is easily calculated and understood and can be adjusted to reflect the complexity of the proposal. It is also likely a flat rate for a meeting would bring a higher income on smaller schemes. Tewkesbury Borough Council and Cotswold District Council have already introduced a pre-application charging scheme based upon this option. The Council have a similar regional customer / agent base and therefore the resistance to introduction of fees should be reduced.

However, even with the majority of local authorities nationally adopting a flat rate approach to fees the banding is complex and varies wildly from £100.00 up to a £3,000.00 rate introduced by Tewkesbury BC.

4.2 **Cotswold DC and Tewkesbury BC scheme comparisons**

4.2.1 Cotswold DC have adopted a flat rate pre-application advice fee of £1,000 for all major developments whatever the size. Householder and small developments are exempt. In addition for subsequent meetings an hourly rate is applied based upon the seniority of the officer and numbers attending as outlined in 4.1.3 above. Cotswold DC approach is shown in Appendix 2.

4.2.2 Tewkesbury BC have adopted a flat rate pre-application fee of £500 for minor residential developments (2-9 dwellings) plus a £125 fee for subsequent meetings with officers. Some householder charges apply for officer visits and written requests.

The major developments have been banded into -

small scale (10-49 dwellings) = £1,000 plus a £500 fee for subsequent meetings;
medium scale (50-199 dwellings) = £2,000 plus a £750 fee for subsequent meetings;
and large scale (200+ dwellings) = £3,000 plus £1,000 fee for subsequent meetings.
Tewkesbury approach is shown in Appendix 3.

4.3 **Regional variation and scheme comparisons**

4.3.1 In its paper on local authority charging practices, *Positively Charged*, the Audit Commission recommends that local authorities take into account their unique demography when setting fees and charges. The combination of a rising population, a reputation as a cultural centre, an attractive location for employers and imminent urban development, provide a solid foundation for pre-application charges.

4.3.2 An example of the number of the varied approaches to pre-application advice charges are given in Appendix 4. This demonstrates the complexity and difficulty in arriving at an appropriate fee structure for the Council.

5. **Affordability**

5.1 Affordability should not be a significant issue. Major developments are multi-million pound enterprises. In that financial context, a pre-application charge of a few thousand pounds is not going to deter a serious developer. As we have seen from other

authorities, developers are generally content to pay if they get a clearly specified level of service in return.

- 5.2 The majority of planning applications are small-scale householder schemes. Such applications would be exempt from any pre-application advice charge, should the Council choose to impose one. The issue of affordability would therefore not arise in relation to these applications.

6. Benefits and sustainability

- 6.1 Introducing charges would have the following advantages –

6.1.1. The customer would pay for the service not the council tax payer;

6.1.2 Income could be used to fund improvements to the planning service;

6.1.3 Income could be used to reduce the call on council tax or built into overall budget savings.

6.2 It has proved very difficult to arrive at a realistic estimate of income. There are many unknown factors: for example, we do not know how the development sector will react to the introduction of a charge and the current economic climate has added to the uncertainties. The charging structure proposed appears reasonable based on the practice elsewhere. It is reasonable to expect that the £30,000 income generation identified in the Bridging the Gap Programme is achievable.

- 6.3 On the other hand the disadvantages could be –

6.3.1 The applicant could choose not to seek pre-application advice and problems may arise later which could have been avoided. This may result in poorer developments proposed, more refusals and subsequent appeals.

6.3.2 Charges for advice will require additional officer time in respect of the collection of fees and arrangement of meetings. Planning officers will need to give more time to preparing for meetings and provision of written minutes. This may impact on officers' ability to determine applications within the target period.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 A consultation exercise has been carried out with stakeholders in the form of 36 agents who regularly use the Council's Planning Service. We received 5 written and 2 verbal replies and the comments received are summarised as follows –

- Why should an additional charge be levied for a service which is under-resourced and has little time to analyse the detail of the proposal.
- Planning system has already moved backwards with contributions being requested. Clients have to pay for various surveys already. Pre-application fees are a payment too far.
- Minor applicants will avoid having pre-application discussions. This will lead to more work for the officers.
- Another admin process which will cause unacceptable delays
- Some simple discussions are short and not worth charging for
- Charge objectors, stakeholders and neighbours too, for explanation of proposals
- Application fees should cover these costs
- This is a public service and is already paid for
- There is no certainty that the advice will be adhered to and therefore be of benefit. We do not meet the officers in charging authorities now but wait for the decision and

then appeal or negotiate a resubmission. This is more work for everyone and counter-productive

- If advice includes detailed input from all consultees, charging would have some merit – but difficulty with getting replies within certain timeframe.
- Applicants will use first application as the pre-application discussion and then address refusal with the fee go. Might lead to more applications but less revenue.

The verbal replies were to the effect that this was another charge that would be placed with the client; there was no particular problem.

7.2 We have been advised that Gloucestershire County Council has intentions to start charging for pre-application advice and this element will have to be absorbed into any charges, unless a separate fee is charged – this is not recommended.

7.3 Tewkesbury Borough Council and Cotswold District Council are operating different charging schemes their year one projections of income (extrapolated from first quarter of operation) are –

Cotswold £16,000

Tewkesbury £26,000

Note: these figures do not take into account the steep decline in economic activity since the charging regimes started in July 2008.

8. Recommendation

8.1 Cheltenham has a good reputation locally for provision of helpful and timely pre-application advice. There is potential for introducing pre-application charges into the planning process, provided that the scheme is easy to understand and administer. The format must be simple and it should be fully explained on the Council's website with clear information on what is required to process a request. There must also be a clear indication of the scope of the response to be provided. In the spirit of joint working with other Districts in Gloucestershire, it would be helpful to have a scheme that follows the principles adopted elsewhere. Unfortunately, the two districts that have started charging have different regimes.

8.2 The recommended fee structure to be adopted by the Council is detailed below. It is similar to the Tewkesbury BC model except that householder pre-application advice is not chargeable and there is no proposal for charging for schemes relating to developments on Council owned land and small scale employment proposals under 1000 m². These fees would be subject to an annual review and inflationary price increases.

Charges would be introduced from 1st April 2009.

Householder development and single dwellings	Exempt – no charge
Minor Residential Development (2-9 dwellings)	£500 + VAT Each additional meeting with officers - £125 + VAT
Category C Major Residential Development (10-49 dwellings)	£1,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with officers - £500 + VAT

Category B Major Residential Development (50-199 dwellings)	£2,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £750 + VAT
Category A Major Residential Development (200+ dwellings)	£3,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £1000 + VAT
Other developments including changes of use under 1000 m ² .	Exempt – no charge
Other developments including change of use: 1,000 to 4,999 m ² of floor space, or where the site area is between 0.5 and 2.0 hectares.	£1,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with officers - £500 + VAT
Other developments, including change of use: 5,000 to 9,999 m ² or more of floor space, or where the site area is between 2.0 and 4.0 hectares	£2,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £750 + VAT
Other developments, including change of use: 10,000 m ² or more of floor space, or where the site area is 4.0 hectares or more	£3,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £1000 + VAT

Officers are preparing guidance notes for applicants, which will set out the procedures for pre-application discussions. These notes will be available in draft in January 2009 and will be published prior to the commencement of the charging regime.

Background papers: Audit Commission report 'Positively Charged – Maximising the Benefit of Local Public Service Charges'

Planning Advisory Service (PAS) case study – A Material World: Charging for pre-application planning advice

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Accountability: Cabinet Member Built Environment

Scrutiny function: Environment Overview and Scrutiny committee

Appendix 1

Risk identified		Impact Assessment	Impact score (1-4)	Likelihood score (1-6)	Initial risk score (1 - 24)	Managing the risk: Control / mitigating action	Ownership	Residual risk score
	Existing risk ref.							
Identify the event or trigger which may generate some new or additional risk to the council. Significant risks which already identified are recorded on the corporate risk register, or on division risk models on TEN, and should be referenced in column B.	If the risk is already recorded, note either the CRR or TEN reference	Use the corporate risk scorecard to identify the category of risk impact e.g. potential for litigation, financial uncertainty, reputation. There can be more than one impact.	Use the scorecard to evaluate the severity of impact(s); enter the highest score.	Assign a score according to probability, timing or frequency.	This is the raw risk score, without any controls in place to mitigate the risk	There are usually things the council can do to reduce either the likelihood or impact of a risky event. Mitigating controls can already be in place, such as budget monitoring. New controls or actions may also be possible, such as agreeing SLA's with partners, or obtaining additional funds.	Identifying the officer who will manage the risk will link mitigating actions to responsibilities in the business plan.	The initial impact or likelihood score can be lowered, to demonstrate the potential to reduce risk levels through actions noted in column G. Record the revised risk score as Impact x Likelihood = Risk
A	B	C	D	E	F = D x E	G	H	6 Accept
Charging for pre-application planning advice is a drain on planning officer resource.		Reputation Service provision Morale	2	3	6	Continually monitor published service levels and workload and conduct review after first six months of the scheme being operational.	Assistant Director Built Environment	6 Accept
Charging for pre-application advice leads to a decrease in applicants seeking advice and in turn an increase in refusals and appeals.		Reputation Service provision Financial	2	3	6	Continually monitor the trend in the number of refusals and appeals and conduct a review after first six months of the scheme being operational. Amend the scheme where necessary.	Assistant Director Built Environment	6 Accept
Projected income from charging for pre-application planning advice is not as projected due to either a reduced number of applicants requesting service or recession.		Business Plan objectives (BtG) Financial cost	3	3	9	Continually monitor income trends and conduct a review after first six months of the scheme being operational.	Assistant Director Built Environment	9 Accept

Cotswold District Council

For all pre-application advice there is a fixed initial standard charge of **£1000**, which comprises the amount of time taken on a case by officer(s), from the investigation stage to the actual meeting with the applicant and the final written comment. For subsequent work there will be an hourly charge based on the following rates:

Hourly rates for pre-application advice:

Officer	Hourly rate
Director	£110
Manager of Service	£75
Principal Planners/Heritage Officers	£50
Major Applications Officer	£55
Senior Planners/Heritage Officers	£48
Planners	£44
Assistant Planners	£40

All above charges are exclusive of VAT.

Appendix 3

Tewkesbury Borough Council

Professional Agents Replies to Written Requests for information or documents received from Solicitors, Developers or Professional Agents	£50 + VAT
Householder development and single dwellings – Site visits and written advice	£100 + VAT
Minor Residential Development (2-9 dwellings)	£500 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £125 + VAT
Small Scale Major Residential Development (10-49 dwellings)	£1,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £500 + VAT
Medium Scale Major Residential Development (50-199 dwellings)	£2,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £750 + VAT
Large Scale Major Residential Development (200+ dwellings)	£3,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £1000 + VAT
Other Minor development*	Written advice - £75 + VAT Meeting with officers - £125 + VAT
Other Small Scale Major development **	Written advice - £250 + VAT Meeting with officers - £500 + VAT
Other Large Scale Major Development***	Written advice - £500 + VAT Meeting with officers - £1,000 + VAT

***Minor Development** = all other developments, including change of use, floor space of up to 999 square metres or site area of up to 0.99 hectares. Gypsy and Traveller Pitches – 1-9 pitches.

****Small Scale Major Development** = all other developments, including change of use: 1000-9,999 square metres or more of floor space, or where the site area is between 0.5 and 2.0 hectares. Gypsy and Traveller Pitches – 10-199 pitches.

Cabinet 20 January 2009
Charging for pre-application planning advice

*****Large Scale Major Development** = all other developments, including change of use: 10,000 square metres or more of floor space, or where the site area is 4.0 hectares or more. Gypsy and Traveller Pitches - 200 or more pitches

Extracts from local authority web sites – Appendix 4

Bracknell Forest Council – pre-application advice charges

Residential Development	Initial fee (per site)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-5 homes - £205.53
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-10 homes - £293.62
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11-50 homes - £489.36
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 + homes - £978.72
	Plus Officer recharge rate at £73.40 per officer in attendance at a meeting
	Traffic model - at cost
Commercial Property Development (including change of use)	Initial fee (per site)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-1,000 sq m - £244.69
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1001-10,000 sq m - £489.36
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • over 10,000 sq m (1Ha)- £978.72
	Plus Officer recharge rate at £73.40 per officer in attendance at a meeting
	Traffic model - at cost

London Borough of Merton – pre-application advice charges

Major/Complex: The initial charge for this service is £800 (plus VAT)

Minor/Conversions: The initial charge for this service is £400 (plus VAT)

Fees are non-refundable.

The fee will cover the time taken on a case by a planning officer from the investigation stage through to the actual meeting with the applicants and the written response.

Where additional officers are required at meetings then additional charges will apply. The hourly rate for officers is shown below:

- Head of Service £250 per hour
- Team leader/Section Manager £170 per hour
- Design officer £100 per hour
- Senior planner £ 80 per hour

London Borough of Barnet – pre-application advice charges

Category ‘A’ Proposals £2,935 (including VAT)

Large Scale, Complex Development

25 or more residential units

2000m² or more of commercial floor space

Category ‘B’ Proposals £1,468 (including VAT)

Other Major Development

Provision of 10 - 24 dwelling units

Provision of 1000m² - 2000m² of commercial floor space

Development involving a site of 0.5ha and over

Mixed use developments

Complex Proposals

Large or complex change of use or development proposals e.g. sport and leisure proposals

Development requiring an EIA*

Planning proposals which are associated with complex heritage listed building or conservation issues

Entertainment uses

Telecommunications equipment and masts – composite proposals for 10 or more sites.

Note:

* EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) refers to development proposals which fall under the provision of categories 1 and 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environment Impact Assessment) Regulations 1999.

Planning / development briefs / frameworks / master planning

Sites for which the landowner wishes to establish their potential value, or where a clear and consistent advice for potential developers will expedite the development process.

Category ‘C’ Proposals £646 (including VAT)

Minor development

Provision of commercial development of 100-999 m²

Creation of 2-9 new residential units

Changes of use of 100m² -999m²

Advertisement application for hoardings

Individual proposals for Telecommunications equipment and masts

Exemptions - no fee

The charging scheme will not apply to discussions in connection with very small business premises, and related advertisement proposals, or very minor schemes or householder schemes (small extensions / alterations), certificates of lawfulness, enforcement or advice to any local resident affected by a development. Such advice at this time will continue to be provided free of charge.

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council – pre-application advice charges

For 2007/08, the fee scale will be as follows:

- £200 for meetings lasting up to one hour
- £500 for meetings lasting between one and three hours.

Charges for meetings taking longer than three hours would be a matter of negotiation.

Doncaster Council – pre-application advice charges

We welcome pre application discussions for all types of development proposal and believe they are of value to all parties. Development proposals that will be subject to the chargeable pre application advice scheme are the following types of development:

- Provision of 50 or more residential units
- Provisions for over 5,000 m² of commercial or industrial floor space
- Development sites over 5 hectares
- Developments that are of significant size / scale and are potentially of major public interest, where an Environmental Impact Assessment would normally be required.

All developments that fall below these levels will not be offered the chargeable detailed service unless specifically requested in order to take advantage of the project led approach to the process. All other developments will be subject to general pre application advice, which will be FREE of charge.

Chargeable detailed service

When your development proposals falls within the chargeable criteria, you will have three options available, these being;

- Take advantage of the 1 meeting and detailed written advice option, or
- Take advantage of the 5 meetings and detailed written advice option, or

- Have no pre-application advice and submit your application.

We would advise one of the top two options. The charges for the service are;

- 1 meeting and detailed written advice - £800
- 5 meetings and detailed written advice - £3500

If you require any additional meetings, or advice from the Council, these can be arranged at appropriate hourly rates for the staff involved. Please read the document below to find the full information about this.

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APPENDIX C

PLANNING PROCESS UNDER REVIEW

Submitted a planning application lately? Or perhaps you have objected to an application? Huntingdonshire District Council would like to have your views on what you thought of the process. Were you satisfied with the way in which your application or comments were dealt with for example? Did you think the process took too long?

One of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels is looking into the way in which planning applications are determined and would welcome comments from anyone who has recently been involved in the process. The Panel cannot deal with decisions themselves for which there are avenues of appeal for aggrieved parties, but would like members of the public to share their experience of the way with which they were dealt with and whether they have any suggestions for improvements.

If you would like to comment please do so in writing or email to: Mrs Jessica Walker, Democratic Services, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE29 3TN. Jessica.walker@huntsdc.gov.uk by Wednesday 30th September.

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APPENDIX D

Development Management Process
Summary Of Views Received From The Public
17 views received

Recurring Themes.

- Lack of communication and co-operation from the planning department. **(10 times)**
- Inaccurate and inconsistent advice given. **(5 times)**
- Negative, arrogant and unhelpful attitude. **(3 times)**
- Remit for neighbour notification letters isn't inclusive enough. **(4 times)**
- Notifications are placed in newspapers – however publications are not delivered to all areas. **(3 times)**
- Once received and catalogued, applications should be sent to parish council's straight away for consideration at their monthly meeting. If necessary the consultation period for applications should be extended to accommodate this. **(2 times)**

Other Matters Raised.

- The planning form (one size fits all) causes difficulties for applicants.
- Civic Society of St Ives suggested that they should be a formal party to any planning applications which involve conservation areas or historic buildings.
- HDC website does not contain as much information as neighbouring authorities.
- More attention is paid to central government and quangos than local residents and businesses.
- Satisfied that planning officers have been willing to give their time and expertise to listen to concerns and provide assistance – particularly Louise Platt – appreciative of her open and honest attitude.
- The planning authority does not use its enforcement powers as it should.
- Significant documents for large scale developments should be available on the planning portal.
- Pleased that contributions to the consultation process have shown to make a difference.
- The planning authority should prioritise environmental concerns for the wellbeing of residents.
- South Cambridgeshire District Council set a better example of working with developers and the public to get landscaping and biodiversity measures achieved.
- Concern that planners are using their time and tax-payers money impeding householders trying to carry out essential repairs rather than concentrating on major development issues.

- Development Management Panel Members do not seem to have a grasp of planning policies and appear confused by planning terms.
- Development Management Panel Members appeared to have their minds made up before discussions on an application have taken place.
- Planners and Members do not have to justify their decisions, even when they go against their own guidelines.
- Minor amendments can be agreed without further consultation as long as they are not a 'material change', what constitutes a 'material change'?
- 3 weeks is not long enough for neighbours to respond to larger applications.
- More help should be given to individuals trying to understand planning policies.
- Parish Councils need to seek the opinions of neighbours – at the very least residents should know the timescale that Parish Councils work to.
- Guidelines need to be rigid and more consistently applied.
- 3 minutes to speak on an application is not long enough.
- Development Management Panel Members should not rely on a case officer's summary, they should read objectors letters to get a better understanding of the case.
- Pertinent parts of the planning process not adhered to by the case officer.
- When applying for planning permission comparable evidence should be considered fairly.
- There should be a simple procedure for updating temporary permission to full permission, and the fee seems very high.
- Some large developments seem to be granted permission despite public criticism.
- Unclear for people with no experience whether the planning department is here to help with applications, recommend approval/refusal, offer honest and current advice or deter alterations and developments overall.

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS
(SOCIAL WELL-BEING)
(ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING)
(ECONOMIC WELL-BEING)**

**2ND MARCH 2010
9TH MARCH 2010
11TH MARCH 2010**

**WORK PLAN STUDIES
(Report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to allow Members of the Panel to review their programme of studies and to be informed of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

2. STUDIES

- 2.1 The Council has a duty to improve the social, environmental and economic well-being of the District. This gives the Overview and Scrutiny Panels a wide remit to examine any issues that affect the District by conducting in-depth studies.

- 2.2 Studies are allocated according to the Council's service areas which have been identified as follows:-

Social Well-Being

Housing
Community
Leisure Centres
Operations (part)
Democratic and Central Services (part)
People, Performance and Partnerships (part)

Environmental Well-Being

Environmental and Technical Services
Planning Services
Environmental Health
Operations (part)

Economic Well-Being

Information Management
Finance
Customer Service and Call Centres
Revenues
Democratic and Central Services (part)
Law, Property and Governance
People, Performance and Partnerships (part)
HQ/Accommodation

2.3 On going studies have been allocated between the Panels accordingly:-

STUDY	PANEL	STATUS
The processes involved in applying for community grant aid and the effectiveness of grant schemes.	Economic Well-Being	Annual report on those organisations supported by grants to be submitted to a future Panel meeting.
Provision of play facilities for young people across the District.	Social Well-Being	Final report to be submitted to the Cabinet on 18 th March.
Car parking at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.	Social Well-Being	Final report outlining findings of the study submitted to Hospital. Also appears on the Panel's March Agenda.
Tourism.	Economic Well-Being	Panel will consider looking at the wider implications of tourism.
The process for the determination of planning applications.	Environmental Well-Being	Final report of the Working Group anticipated for submission to the Panel's March meeting.

2.4 The following have also been identified by Members as possible future studies:-

Review of the incentives contained in the Council's Travel Plan.	Environmental Well-Being
The Council's future borrowing arrangements.	Economic Well-Being
Planning enforcement.	Environmental Well-Being
Waste disposal arrangements.	Environmental Well-Being
Management of capital projects by Environmental Management Section.	Economic Well-Being
The effect and cost implications of the loss of the Huntingdon Enterprise Agency.	Economic Well-Being
The employees performance development review process.	Economic Well-Being

The Creative Exchange, St Neots.	Economic Well-Being
Annual report on organisations supported through service level agreements.	Economic Well-Being
Financial reports on the District Council's Leisure Centres.	Economic Well-Being
Lessons learned from the Headquarters and other accommodation project.	Economic Well-Being
Industrial Units at Caxton Road, St Ives.	Economic Well-Being
Night time economy study (Hospital's perspective).	Economic Well-Being

- 2.5 At its last meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel considered undertaking an investigation of planning enforcement issues. A summary of enforcement activity for 2009 has been attached at Annex A for the Panel's consideration.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The Panel is requested to note the progress of the studies selected.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Minutes and Reports from previous meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

**Contact Officers: Miss H Ali, Democratic Services Officer
01480 388006**

**Mrs J Walker, Trainee Democratic Services Officer
01480 387049**

**Mrs A Jerrom, Member Development Officer
01480 388009**

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**SUMMARY OF ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY FOR 2009
(Report by Planning Service Manager (Development Management))**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The main purpose of this report is to update Members on enforcement activities carried out during 2009, to report back on the priorities which were identified for 2009, and to outline to the Panel the proposed priorities for 2010.
- 1.2 It is also to ask Members to endorse the revised Planning Enforcement Policy document.

2. OVERALL SITUATION DURING 2009

- 2.1 The theme for 2009 has been ever increasingly heavy workloads, seriously exacerbated by absence on sick leave of one of the two Enforcement Officers for the last 14 weeks of the year. During the early part of the year, the workload increase was gentle and manageable with experienced staff. However 82 more files were opened in June for units at Hartford Marina, and from that time the number of active files has grown steadily to its current record high of 416. This is an increase of 56% since January 2009 (and 195% since December 2006). With no increase in Officer hours (in reality a reduction due to one Officer working part-time) this is clearly very difficult to manage.
- 2.2 Karen Tozer has completed the Cambridge University Certificate of Continuing Education in Planning Enforcement, a qualification now held by the Planning Enforcement Team Leader and both Enforcement Officers. This comprises 4 modules in various aspects of enforcement work, each involving attendance at contact sessions, assignments and presentations. It is a nationally recognised qualification which, with relevant service, can lead to membership of the RTP1.
- 2.3 The Planning Enforcement Team Support Officer post (15 hours per week) has been extended for a further 12 months from January 2010. This post is vital for the function of the service, including responding to basic enquiries, recording and acknowledging post, raising files, issuing updates to complainants, and providing general support for the team. During 2009 she sent 213 letters informing complainants of progress on their cases, which was an increase of 88% on 2008, delivering improved communications to our customers.
- 2.4 The decision to divide the District into two Officer areas has worked well, with neither area showing significantly more cases than the other. Parishes immediately either side of the boundary facilitate flexibility as complaints in those areas can be handled by either Officer depending on prevailing workloads. Releasing the Planning Enforcement Team Leader from new cases has enabled her to focus on the more complex cases, appeals, etc in addition to providing support as required. Unfortunately the staff shortage has prevented

her from finding a better balance between casework and managerial responsibilities.

- 2.5 The predominant issue for complaints during 2009 has been the unauthorised residential occupation of boats, caravans, and buildings. These cases are complex and require detailed investigation and sensitive handling, and often will not be resolved without recourse to formal enforcement action which is then likely to be challenged by appeal. These cases are time-consuming, but so are those requiring extensive monitoring, often outside normal working hours, of which there have been several high profile cases this year. The nature of these sorts of issues has added to the difficulties of dealing with a high number of complaint files.
- 2.6 Hartford Marina continues to be the most significant enforcement issue with 157 files now opened relating to this site alone. Colleagues have started pursuing Council Tax in respect of residential occupiers of other Marinas and this has already led to a small number of additional files being raised for investigation with more expected.
- 2.7 Residential caravans lead to frequent complaints. As a predominantly rural District the siting of a caravan on agricultural land is not uncommon, but attempting to establish whether or not it is occupied can be difficult, and more so proving that it is a sole or main residence. Significant resources have been spent investigating a series of caravans in Ramsey Heights following complaints from nearby residents.
- 2.8 Despite these pressures there have been several positive outcomes achieved during 2009 including prompt and effective actions against unauthorised gypsy sites.

3. REQUESTS FOR SERVICE

- 3.1 In terms of workload 441 formal complaints were received during 2009. This was an increase of 16% over 2008, largely due to the Hartford Marina files. The average number of new complaints over the last 5 years has been 343 so even allowing for 82 Hartford Marina files this still shows an upward trend.
- 3.2 In addition there have been a further 146 issues reported which related to general enquiries, searches, matters for other organisations, expired planning permissions, and other potential breaches of planning control. These are allocated a lesser level of service but nevertheless require time to be spent on checks and responses and may on occasion require a site inspection.
- 3.3 Thus the total number of requests for service received during 2009 was 587 which is 81 more than in 2008, an increase of 16%. However this difference equates to the number of Hartford Marina files raised this year (82), meaning that the remaining number of complaints received has remained static.
- 3.4 There have been 322 planning permissions identified for monitoring during the year which represents a 23% decrease on the 2008 figure, reflecting the general reduction in the number of planning applications this year. However the total number of cases now selected for

monitoring has risen to 375 from 238 in January 2009 and still remains of concern because when development commences on those sites there will be a significant influx of cases needing action. For this reason, and because Planning Officers are now more proactive in securing compliance with conditions, the role will be reviewed during 2010 to ensure that this resource is used in the most effective way.

- 3.5 The Planning Enforcement Condition Monitoring Officer has carried out a total of 589 site inspections checking for the commencement of development, or actions on other trigger points such as occupation. She has also commenced a rolling review of occupancy conditions, checking to ensure that the unit is still occupied in accordance with the planning permission. This work has already identified two apparent breaches, one of which was successfully remedied and the other for which investigations are ongoing. This process will be extended in 2010 to include checking the use of designated agricultural buildings.

4. RESPONSE TIMES

- 4.1 Huntingdonshire District Council's Development Control Service Plan sets out timescales for making an initial site visit in response to a complaint. The measurement is the number of visits made within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint. The target is 100%, but statistics are also collected for visits made within one week and within 24 hours of receipt of the complaint.

- 4.2 For 2009 the statistics were as follows (with 2008 and 2007 figures in brackets for comparison purposes – 2008 figures first):

• Visits within 10 working days	77% (87%) (78%)
• Visits within one week	52% (66%) (50%)
• Visits within 24 hours	20% (26%) (19%)

- 4.3 Whilst the response time has fallen during 2009 this is not unexpected due to the heavy workloads and staff shortages. However these statistics reflect the priority that Officers give to new complaints when possible, and one in five complaints being visited within 24 hours is a very good service.

- 4.4 Prioritising actions is a vital element of managing a heavy caseload. The current prioritisation system has been in operation since 2003 to reduce caseloads to a level where actions can be efficient and effective. The system relies on actions being determined on the basis of a harm assessment, which accords with advice in PPG18. All complaints receive an initial investigation and any established or perceived breach is notified to the relevant persons with advice on how to remedy it. When harm is minimal formal enforcement action would not be expedient and those cases are closed without further follow up action, allowing resources to be targeted at those breaches which are unacceptable.

- 4.5 Complaints from Members have been actioned outside this process since 2003. A review has been undertaken of a sample of such complaints which found overwhelmingly that this different approach made no difference to the final outcome. There is accordingly no

justification for complaints from Members being treated any differently from others and in accordance with the Council's equality agenda it is proposed that all complaints will fall within the agreed prioritisation system from 1 January 2010.

5. CLOSURE OF FILES

5.1 290 cases were closed during 2009, a small increase on the 285 closed during 2008. However as 151 more files were opened than closed (and Hartford Marina accounts for only 82 of those) this is a serious concern. It is hoped that a return to full complement in the New Year will enable Officers to move more cases forward to closure, which in turn will bring the caseloads down to a more manageable level.

5.2 There continues to be a focus on bringing files more than two years old to a conclusion. There are currently 54 such files which represents only 13% of the live caseload. These files are reviewed on a regular basis to bring them to a conclusion where possible.

5.3 Of the 290 files which were closed the outcomes were as follows:

- 49% (144 files) No breach found (permitted development, lawful, de minimis, or not development)
- 23% (66 files) Remedied voluntarily following negotiation, or remedied after formal action
- 7% (20 files) Planning permission granted or minor amendment approved following enforcement intervention
- 21% (60 files) Not expedient to pursue further under our adopted prioritisation system

The main change in 2009 was a 7% increase in the number of cases where a voluntary remedy was achieved through negotiation. This is commendable given the time pressures on staff and demonstrates an important core enforcement skill.

5.4 57 planning applications were generated as a direct result of enforcement activity. This is a marginal increase over the total for 2008 but greater in real terms due to the smaller number of planning applications lodged this year.

6. SIGNIFICANT CASES

6.1 The Hartford Marina issue remains the most significant matter with more than 150 files raised for investigation, although action on all but 30 is currently suspended following the report to Panel in August 2009 pending the formulation of a relevant policy on which future decisions can be based.

6.2 An Enforcement Notice issued in respect of the unauthorised change of use at Anglo in St Neots was subsequently withdrawn following undertakings to carry out further remedial actions to address the noise and odour problems. Planning permission was granted to increase the height of the stacks and the alterations took place immediately prior to Christmas and testing is scheduled for the end of January 2010. If this resolves the issues it will demonstrate the

benefit of taking a firm stance whilst working with the company to bring about a solution.

- 6.3 A successful application for an injunction was made to prevent land in Bluntisham from being occupied by gypsies. This was an apprehended rather than actual breach, arising from information obtained and activity on site which gave rise to concern. The prompt action means that the site remains vacant and no unauthorised development took place.
- 6.4 An Enforcement Notice was issued in respect of an unauthorised gypsy site on land at Ramsey Heights. This resulted in the site being vacated before the Notice even came into effect.
- 6.5 An Enforcement Notice relating to the unauthorised siting of a residential caravan on land at Great Gransden was upheld on appeal with the use to cease by mid-April 2010. Another successful appeal outcome was the upholding of an Enforcement Notice relating to the occupation of a narrow boat and associated land for residential purposes at Hemingford Abbots. This followed substantial investigation into the occupier's circumstances in order to refute claims that an alternative address materially altered the planning position.
- 6.6 Enforcement action and sensitive negotiations led to the reinstatement of a tiled roof on a property in St Neots which had been re-roofed using unacceptable artificial slate.
- 6.7 A successful prosecution was brought in respect of works to a listed building in Ramsey. These works included the demolition of internal walls, alterations to a window, the removal of a fireplace and door, and the destruction of a slate lined water system. The defendant pleaded guilty to two charges and was fined a total of £5500 with costs of £3500 awarded to the Council.

7. 2009 PRIORITIES

- 7.1 Seven key objectives were identified for 2009 and the outcomes are summarised below:

To facilitate a smooth transition into the new offices without detriment to customer services

- 7.2 The office move has been welcomed by all members of the team. The feeling of isolation resulting from being in a separate remote room has gone with all now feeling part of the Development Management service. The ability to work remotely enabled cover to be provided throughout the move with no resultant loss of response.

To ensure that individual workloads remain manageable following the transition to only two Officer areas

- 7.3 This was being achieved for the first half of the year but the addition of another batch of Hartford Marina files together with the steady increase in the number of general complaints and significant issues led to an increase in workloads to a level of concern. This was compounded by the absence of one Enforcement Officer during the

last 4 months of the year. Temporary measures were introduced in October to spread the work but it will be some time before actual caseloads will be reduced to an acceptable level. This will be an ongoing priority for 2010.

To make use of available technology to reduce time spent on administrative tasks such as printing, etc

- 7.4 During 2009 the use of electronic information was enhanced to support the transition to electronic records which commenced in 2008. Access to data from other services has been obtained which is now made available to Case Officers to minimise background investigations. Electronic file notes and the attachment of documents are now standard processes on all cases, although paper files continue to be raised where formal action is considered. Work is ongoing to enable some records to be accessed via the website which will allow customers to obtain information without the Enforcement Register having to be taken to and from the Customer Service Centre.

To record all condition monitoring records on the computer system, to add document templates, and to implement the process for monitoring occupancy conditions

- 7.5 All current condition monitoring cases are on the system but it has not been possible to enter all historic cases due to time constraints. This will be actioned on an "as and when" basis, and may be reviewed as the role evolves. Some document templates have been introduced but more are to be created to support the actions required. The procedure for monitoring occupancy conditions has been commenced with one breach being identified and resolved and another under negotiation.

To introduce a process of raising awareness internally of successful outcomes

- 7.6 The team has focussed during 2009 on sharing information with colleagues during the lifetime of a complaint and at its point of closure. Working in one office has supported this, as has the increased use of technology which enables others to view a file at any time.

To complete the updating of the Enforcement Manual and web pages

- 7.7 An Advice Note was published on the website during 2009 providing general information about the planning enforcement function. This leaflet will form the new enforcement web page which is due to go live in January 2010. The Enforcement Manual has been added to and updated and is now on a shared drive so it can be accessed by colleagues. Adding to it is an ongoing process but it will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains relevant and accurately reflects working practices.

To review and revise as necessary the Planning Enforcement Policy document

7.8 The review has been completed and the Policy has been updated to include reference to the procedure for handling new complaints and reference to the prioritisation system. Members are asked to endorse the revised document will be circulated electronically prior to the meeting.

8. PRIORITIES FOR 2010

8.1 Five key objectives have been identified for 2010:

- To reduce caseloads to a manageable level
- To focus on quality outcomes where unacceptable breaches are identified
- To review the procedure for closing complaint records
- To review the role of the Planning Enforcement Condition Monitoring Officer to ensure it complements condition-related work carried out by Planning Officers
- To introduce a process for monitoring the use of agricultural buildings

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That the Panel **NOTES** the content of this report and endorses the identified objectives for the Enforcement Service during 2010.

9.2 That the Panel **ENDORSES** the December 2009 revisions to the Planning Enforcement Policy document.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Huntingdonshire District Council Planning Enforcement Policy (revised December 2009)

CONTACT OFFICER: - Enquiries about this report to Sandy Kinnersley – Planning Enforcement Team Leader ☎ **01480 388461**

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AREA OF REVIEW	DETAILS/COMMENTS
Title of Study (name of Working Group)	Development Management Process Working Group.
Appointing Panel	Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel.
Members Assigned (including date Working Group appointed)	Councillors M G Baker, P Godley, M F Newman and J S Watt. Appointed by the Panel on 14 th July 2009.
Possible Co-Options to the Group	TBC
Interests Declared	None received.
Rapporteur	Councillor M G Baker
Officer Support	Roy Reeves, Head of Democratic and Central Services Jessica Walker, Trainee Democratic Services Officer
Purpose of Study / Objective (specify exactly what the study should achieve)	To investigate the process for the determination of planning applications and make recommendations where appropriate.
Rationale (key issues and/or reason for conducting a study)	Anecdotal evidence from Members of public concern over the pre-decision planning process.
Terms of Reference	The review will concentrate on the process leading to the determination of planning applications, not the decision making process itself or the merits of decisions. The intention will be to look at the practices and procedures from first enquiry by potential applicants to the preparation of an officer's final report and recommendations, involving pre-application advice, public consultation, plans and amendments, duration of the process and other related matters.
Links to Council Policies/Strategies	Link to Corporate Plan – To improve our systems and practices.

Methodology / Approach (what types of enquiries will be used to gather evidence)	Examination of available data; Interviews; Surveys.
External/Specialist Support	TBC
Existing Documentation	To be determined.
Evidence to be Obtained (e.g. witnesses, documents, site visits, consultation, research, etc)	Evidence to be obtained by the Democratic Services team, together with information from the Planning Division. Possible survey of sample of applicants. Consultation with Town and Parish Councils. Customer feedback & ombudsman investigations (if any). Comparison of processes with other authorities. Website Comparisons. Performance against Government Indicators. Availability of best practice advice and guidance. Cost effectiveness of process.

Reference Sites	Comparable local authorities.
Investigations	To be undertaken by officers supporting the Working Group.
Witnesses	Planning officers. Chairman of Development Management Panel.
Site Visits (if necessary) (where and when)	Likely to be unnecessary.
Meetings of the Working Group	Meetings held on Thursday August 6 th 2009, Thursday September 10 th 2009, Thursday 8 th October 2009, Thursday 29 th October 2009 and Friday 20 th November 2009, Thursday 10 th December 2009, Thursday, 7 th January 2010 and Thursday 28 th January 2010.
Costs (resource requirements, additional expenditure, time)	Officer time – both to provide support and to conduct research.
Possible Barriers to the Study (potential weaknesses)	None known at this stage.
Projected Timescale (Start and end times)	Start – July 2009 End – March 2010

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
(SOCIAL WELL-BEING)
STUDY TEMPLATE**

AREA OF REVIEW	DETAILS/COMMENTS
Title of Study (name of Working Group)	Parking At Hinchingsbrooke Hospital
Appointing Panel	Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)
Members Assigned (including date Working Group appointed)	Date Appointed: 7 th July 2009. Agreed to pursue this as a full Panel investigation, comprising Councillors P L E Bucknell, Mrs K E Cooper, S J Criswell, J W Davies, J E Garner, Mrs P A Jordan, P G Mitchell, A Monk, J M Sadler and R J West.
Possible Co-Options to the Group	None identified at present.
Interests Declared	Cllr Mrs P A Jordan – by virtue of her employment with the NHS.
Rapporteur	Councillor S J Criswell (as Chairman)
Officer Support	Miss H Ali, Democratic Services Officer, HDC Mr A Roberts, Scrutiny and Review Manager, HDC
Purpose of Study / Objective (specify exactly what the study should achieve)	To generate and raise awareness of the impact that the introduction of car parking charges has had upon the public and the consequent restrictions that it has placed upon them.
Rationale (key issues and/or reason for conducting a study)	The suggestion for the study was prompted by representations made by a number of members of the public to the District Council on the level of charges being levied for parking at the hospital, restrictions on parking in terms of the length of stay permissible and the impact of the introduction of charges on the surrounding residential area.
Terms of Reference	To investigate the causes of complaints and make recommendations on measures that will ameliorate them.
Links to Council Policies/Strategies	To Improve Our Systems and Practices - In particular, the objectives to be good at communicating and listening to people and organisations and to be clear about what we can do and aspire to achieve and to enable Councillors to carry out their leadership role effectively. A Clean, “Green” and Attractive Environment – to help mitigate climate change. Healthy Living – to promote active lifestyles. Developing Communities Sustainably – supporting opportunities to cycle, walk and use public transport.

Methodology / Approach (what types of enquiries will be used to gather evidence)	Investigations into:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the management of the car park • the effectiveness of the hospital's Travel Plan • the availability of public transport • the impact of parking and associated charges on the surrounding area • inviting a representative of the NHS Trust to attend a future Panel meeting • consultation with local residents and users of the car park • comparisons to other hospitals, i.e Addenbrooke's • desktop research • formal request for information to the Hospital • public views sought.
External/Specialist Support	Ms E Stubbs, Mrs R Clapham and Ms B Heather – Cambridgeshire LINK. Mr C Plunkett – Facilities Business Manager, Hinchingbrooke Hospital.
Existing Documentation	Planning Permission for Hospital site. Hinchingbrooke Hospital Travel Plan. Presentation delivered by the Scrutiny and Review Manager on 1 st September 2009.
Evidence to be Obtained (e.g. witnesses, documents, site visits, consultation, research, etc)	Representative from the NHS Trust. Consultation Questionnaire with local residents living within the vicinity of the site. Discussion with Ward Councillors.
Reference Sites	Hinchingbrooke Health Care NHS Trust http://www.hinchingbrooke.nhs.uk/ East of England Strategic Health Authority http://www.eoe.nhs.uk/ Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Trust (Addenbrooke's) http://www.cuh.org.uk/addenbrookes/addenbrookes_index.html NHS Cambridgeshire http://www.cambridgeshirepct.nhs.uk/ British Parking Association http://www.britishparking.co.uk/

Investigations	As outlined above; namely local parking facilities, parking practices at other Hospitals and national policies.
Witnesses	None currently identified.
Site Visits (if necessary) (where and when)	None currently identified.
Meetings of the Working Group	Panel discussions: 7 th July 2009, 1 st September 2009 and 3 rd November 2009 and 2 nd February 2010.
Costs (resource requirements, additional expenditure, time)	Officer time – both to provide support and conduct research.
Possible Barriers to the Study (potential weaknesses)	None currently identified.
Projected Timescale (Start and end times)	Start: July 2009. End: March 2010.

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
(ECONOMIC WELL-BEING)
STUDY TEMPLATE**

AREA OF REVIEW	DETAILS/COMMENTS
Title of Study (name of Working Group)	Grant Aid Working Group
Appointing Panel	Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) Formerly Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery)
Members Assigned (including date Working Group appointed)	Date Appointed: 3 rd July 2007 Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, P G Mitchell and J S Watt. In addition, former District Councillor D A Giles was appointed on to the Working Group and assisted with the investigations up until April 2008.
Possible Co-Options to the Group	None identified.
Interests Declared	None declared.
Rapporteur	Councillor P G Mitchell.
Officer Support	Miss H Ali, Democratic Services Officer, HDC Mr A Roberts, Scrutiny and Review Manager, HDC Mr S Plant, Head of Housing Services, HDC Mr F Mastrandrea, Policy and Enabling Officer, HDC Mr K Tayler, Private Sector Housing Officer, HDC Mr S Ingram, Head of Planning Services, HDC Mr R Probyn, Planning Policy Manager, HDC Mr I Leatherbarrow, Former Head of Policy and Strategic Services Dr S Lammin – Head of Environmental and Community Health Services Mr D Smith – Community Team Manager Mrs K Shaw – External Funding Officer
Purpose of Study / Objective (specify exactly what the study should achieve)	To undertake a review of the processes involved in applying for community grant aid and the effectiveness of grant schemes.
Rationale (key issues and/or reason for conducting a study)	The suggestion for the study emerged from the Panel's previous investigations into the Small Scale Environmental Improvements Scheme, where the recommendations arising from the study had been endorsed by the Cabinet and implemented by the Council.
Terms of Reference	As above, and additionally, the following:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the purpose of each scheme having regard to the Council's priority contained in Growing Success; • To investigate the criteria for assessing applicants' eligibility under each scheme; • To investigate the methods adopted to publicise the availability of grant funding; • To investigate the application process for each scheme; • To be informed of Officer/Member involvement during

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
(ECONOMIC WELL-BEING)
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	<p>the approval process; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To investigate external sources of funding, specifically, the level of funding attracted by the Council and the application procedure.
Links to Council Policies/Strategies	<p>Link to Council Aim: To Maintain Sound Finances. Link to Community Am: Developing Communities Sustainably.</p>

ACTION BY WORKING GROUP	
Methodology / Approach (what types of enquiries will be used to gather evidence)	Discussions with all of the Officers within the Council previously identified.
External/Specialist Support	N/A
Existing Documentation	<p>Minutes and Reports of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) – 3rd July 2007. 2006/07 – HDC Grant Aid News Release. 2008/09 HDC Capital Grant Aid News Release. Voluntary Sector Commissioning Report – Report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services. HDC CAB Commissioning Agreement Document. HDC Grants Award Information – Report by the Head of Financial Services. HDC Grant Application Handbook and Application Form ~ Capital and Revenue. Listed Building / Shopmobility / Shopfront / Transportation / Home Repairs / Voluntary Grants. HDC Grant Awards Scheme. Six Month Review of Capital and Revenue Grant Aid Awards 2008/09 – Report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services.</p>
Evidence to be Obtained (e.g. witnesses, documents, site visits, consultation, research, etc)	Discussions with all Officers identified above.
Reference Sites	HDC Website:- www.huntsdc.gov.uk
Investigations	As outlined above.
Witnesses	<p>As above and in addition the following Councillors:-</p> <p>Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds, Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health. Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Finance and Environment.</p>
Site Visits (if necessary) (where and when)	N/A
Meetings of the Working Group	<p>24th October 2007. 1st February 2008. 20th March 2008. 26th March 2008.</p>

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(ECONOMIC WELL-BEING)
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	<p>9th April 2008. 7th May 2008. 24th July 2008. 24th October 2008.</p>
<p>Costs (resource requirements, additional expenditure, time)</p>	<p>Officer time – both to provide support and conduct research.</p>
<p>Possible Barriers to the Study (potential weaknesses)</p>	<p>None currently identified.</p>
<p>Projected Timescale (Start and end times)</p>	<p>Start: January 2009 End: July 2009.</p>

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
(SOCIAL WELL-BEING)
STUDY TEMPLATE**

AREA OF REVIEW	DETAILS/COMMENTS
Title of Study (name of Working Group)	Provision of Play Facilities Across the District Working Group
Appointing Panel	Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) Formerly Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery)
Members Assigned (including date Working Group appointed)	Date Appointed: 3 rd March 2009. Councillors J D Ablewhite and P G Mitchell. Councillors Mrs P A Jordan and R J West were later appointed onto the Working Group in June 2009. Councillor J D Ablewhite assisted with the study up until June 2009.
Possible Co-Options to the Group	None identified.
Interests Declared	Councillor P G Mitchell declared a personal interest into the study due to his involvement with the Stilton Skate Park Project.
Rapporteur	Councillor P G Mitchell
Officer Support	Miss H Ali, Democratic Services Officer, HDC Mr A Roberts, Scrutiny and Review Manager, HDC Mr R Ward – Head of Operations, HDC Mr J Craig, Service Development Manager, HDC
Purpose of Study / Objective (specify exactly what the study should achieve)	To investigate the provision of play facilities across the District, with a view to making recommendations on achieving an even distribution of facilities across the District and on meeting the ongoing revenue costs associated with such facilities.
Rationale (key issues and/or reason for conducting a study)	Raised as potential study area by Councillor P G Mitchell due to the current problems experienced at Stilton. Further information obtained from the Head of Operations and Panel concluded that due to the inconsistencies with the distribution of facilities across the District, a study should be undertaken.
Terms of Reference	As above.
Links to Council Policies/Strategies	Link to Community Aim: Developing Communities Sustainably. In particular, the objective to enable the provision of the social and strategic infrastructure to meet current and future needs. Link to Community Aim: Safe, Vibrant and Inclusive Communities. In particular the objective to reduce anti-social behaviour and ensure that people feel safe.

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STUDY TEMPLATE**

ACTION BY WORKING GROUP	
Methodology / Approach (what types of enquiries will be used to gather evidence)	Information from the Head of Operations.
External/Specialist Support	N/A
Existing Documentation	Provision of Leisure Facilities for Young People – Report by the Head of Operations. Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) – 3 rd March 2009.
Evidence to be Obtained (e.g. witnesses, documents, site visits, consultation, research, etc)	Further discussions with the Head of Operations and Executive Councillor for Operational & Countryside Services.
Reference Sites	N/A
Investigations	As outlined above.
Witnesses	Mr R Ward, Head of Operations Mr J Craig, Service Development Manager Councillor C R Hyams, Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services.
Site Visits (if necessary) (where and when)	None currently identified.
Meetings of the Working Group	First meeting held 30 th April 2009. Second meeting held on 13 th August 2009. Third meeting held 28 th October 2009. Fourth meeting held 16 th December 2009.
Costs (resource requirements, additional expenditure, time)	Officer time – both to provide support and conduct research.
Possible Barriers to the Study (potential weaknesses)	None currently identified.
Projected Timescale (Start and end times)	Start: March 2009 End: March 2010.

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date		
13/01/09 14/07/09 09/02/10	<p><u>Heavy Goods Vehicle Parking In The District</u></p> <p>The outcome of discussions at the first meeting of the three county group to be reported.</p> <p>The Panel suggested that the problem of HCVs parking in the District had not been resolved by the re-opening of Alconbury Truck Stop.</p> <p>The Panel requested an update on the situation with regards to HCVs parking in the District.</p>	The Transportation Team Leader updated the Panel on the current situation.	<p>The County Council are developing a County advisory route network for HCVs, which they will be consulting the District Council on.</p> <p>Alconbury Truck Stop re-opened in the first-half of 2009. At present, the former Motel and associated facilities remain out of use.</p> <p>The Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport has responded on behalf of the Council to the HCV Advisory Route Network Public Consultation. Furthermore, as part of the A14 proposals, the Council is seeking the provision of HCV parking facilities or the expansion of existing facilities within the District.</p>			
	08/07/08		<p><u>Petition By St Audrey Lane Area Residents, St Ives</u></p> <p>Representatives from Anglian Water in attendance at the Panel's July meeting. Requested that an update be provided in 6 months time and that residents be informed of the outcome of their investigations.</p>	Email requesting update sent	CCTV survey of St Audrey Lane and Pig Lane Surface Water sewer completed. Funding now available to Jet Sewer – will be carried out shortly.	
	14/07/09		The Customer Response Manager to be invited to	Letter sent 07/08/09		

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date
08/09/09	attend a future meeting to discuss progress which has been made since Anglian Water's attendance at the Panel meeting in July 2008. Response received from Anglian Water which outlines the progress made since they last attended a meeting of the Panel. The letter has been circulated by email to all Panel Members.	Email sent inviting the Customer Response Manager to attend the Panel meeting in November.	The Collection Manager has advised that he will not be attending the November Panel meeting, he has requested a list of questions which he will endeavour to respond to for the November Panel meeting.	
13/10/09	The Panel discussed Anglian Water's response.	A list of questions was sent to Anglian Water's Customer Response Manager on 26/10/09.		
8/12/09	The Panel discussed Anglian Water's response.	Members acknowledged that as Anglian Water are not prepared to attend a Panel meeting, little further could be achieved.	Officers will continue to monitor the situation.	
14/07/09	<u>Cycling In Huntingdonshire</u> Members requested an update from the Transportation Team Leader.	Following the AJC report of July 2008, the top five schemes approved for further development have been progressed, based on available staff resources/funding.		
08/09/09	Members requested an update as to the current situation with the cycling review and required further information with regards to the cycle way planned alongside the St Ives guided bus way.	The cycling review is still to be undertaken. The guide way is part of the County Council Transport and Works Act	The Panel may wish to direct its comments specifically to the County Council in order to gain an update and any	

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date
13/10/09	Members requested an update on the Perry village cycle route.	<p>consent and is outside the direct control of this Council.</p> <p>The status of this scheme is unchanged, it is at the development stage pending further meetings with Anglian Water and other partners.</p>	feedback or progress on this issue.	
13/10/09	Members questioned whether the dual use of footpaths for pedestrians and cyclists could be considered.	The current market town transport strategies allow for the development of cycling and walking schemes as either segregated routes or as shared/dual routes and there are many examples across Huntingdonshire where dual cycle routes have been implemented as part of agreed action plans. Such options are covered by national guidance and design standards so it is not an issue of considering this pending funding for cycleways, the delivery of these being available now.		
10/11/09	Members requested a further update as to the status of the Perry village cycle route.	Email sent to the transport team leader requesting further information.	Rural cycling priorities were reviewed across Huntingdonshire and agreed by AJC in July 2008. Perry was ranked as a top 5 scheme for further development but it is only the security of funding from the extension of Liittlehey Prison and the funds now held by the District Council as a result of the S106 agreement that is moving this scheme	

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date
8/12/09	Members requested a further update as to the status of the Perry village cycle route.	The Transport Team Leader has been invited to the next meeting of the Panel to provide an update.	<p>forward, it is only recent action since July 2008 that is making this scheme a reality.</p> <p>The Transport Team Leader has agreed to attend the next meeting of the Panel.</p>	
12/01/10	The Transport Team Leader updated the Panel on progress towards the provision of cycling routes within Huntingdonshire.	A meeting has been arranged to discuss options for the Perry village cycle route with the private land owners affected, following which consultation will be undertaken with residents and the Parish Council in order to inform the Area Joint Committee of villagers' views on a preferred course of action. The scheme will depend on the sufficiency of the available budget and programming of work within the wider network programmes.	On being advised that progress was constrained by the requirement to use County Council approved contractors, the Panel undertook to question the Head of Environmental Management on the possibility of contractors being engaged directly by the District Council.	
08/09/09	<p><u>Adoption of Roads and Sewers</u></p> <p>The report of the Working Group was considered by the Cabinet.</p>		The Cabinet requested that the Panel revisit this study once the extent is known of the sewers not under the responsibility of Anglian Water and following the implementation of the government initiative referred	

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date
			to in paragraph of 4.10 of the report. The Scrutiny and Review Manager was requested to lobby the local government association to seek the powers of the Highways Authority with regard to the road adoption process.	
13/05/09	<p><u>Corporate Plan – Growing Success</u></p> <p>Councillors P M D Godfrey and D Harty appointed to Corporate Plan Working Group.</p>	Quarterly reports submitted to all Overview & Scrutiny Panels		
13/05/09	<p><u>Local Area Agreements</u></p> <p>Councillor P M D Godfrey appointed to Joint Accountability Committee. Substitute Members to be appointed in consultation with the Head of Democratic and Central Services.</p>			
08/09/09	Minutes of future meeting of the Joint Accountability Committee should be circulated to all Panel Members.	The Scrutiny and Review Manager has undertaken to include future Minutes of Joint Accountability Committee meetings on the Work Plan Studies reports.		
14/07/09	<p><u>Great Fen Project</u></p> <p>The Great Fen Collaboration Agreement was considered by the Panel. All Scrutiny Members were</p>	The Great Fen Collaboration Agreement was considered by the	The Cabinet resolved that the principal of entering into a	

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date
08/09/09	<p>invited. The comments of the panel were passed to the Cabinet for their consideration.</p> <p>The Great Fen Master Plan was considered by the Panel. All Scrutiny Members were invited. The comments of the Panel were passed to the Cabinet for their consideration.</p>	<p>Cabinet on 23rd July 2009.</p> <p>The Great Fen Master Plan was considered by the Cabinet on 17th September 2009.</p>	<p>collaboration agreement in respect of the Great Fen project for a renewable five year fixed term be approved.</p> <p>The Cabinet approved the Great Fen Master Plan as a basis for public consultation, and requested that Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council be formally consulted on the master plan with a view to them eventually becoming partners.</p>	
09/02/10	<p><u>Carbon Footprint Reduction</u></p> <p>The Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology and the Head of Environmental Management addressed the Panel on actions taken by the Council to address the need to reduce carbon emissions.</p>		<p>The Panel has 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.</p>	June 2010
09/02/10	<p><u>Kerbside Recycling Services</u></p> <p>The Panel has requested further information on the implications of the changes to kerbside recycling services.</p>		<p>The Head of Democratic and Central Services has undertaken to circulate the requested information to Panel Members.</p>	

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date
	<u>Forward Plan</u>			
13/11/07	Parish Plans and Local Plan Policy Circulate report when this becomes available.			TBA
08/07/08	Developer Contributions SPD Requested that the report should be considered at a future meeting of the Panel.			April 2010
09/06/09	Site Options Gypsy and Travellers Development Plan Document Requested that the report should be considered at a future meeting of the Panel.			April 2010
12/01/10	Site Options Planning Proposals Development Plan Document Requested that the report should be considered at a future meeting of the Panel.			April 2010
12/01/10	Masterplan for Great Fen Requested that the report should be considered at a future meeting of the Panel.			April 2010

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Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st February to 26th February 2010.

PARKING AT HINCHINGBROOKE HOSPITAL

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has received a presentation from the Facilities Business Manager for Hinchingsbrooke Hospital on the operation of the hospital car parks and the action taken to review the parking policy. A number of proposals for change have been suggested, which include increasing the provision for employees, extending the current pick up/drop off point and disabled parking spaces. A change to the charge for the shortest period of stay is also being proposed of £2 for 2 hours with the charge rising by £1 for every hour thereafter. £500,000 revenue is generated by the Hospital each year, of which £30,000 is paid to a contractor to manage the car parks. The remaining funds are utilised by the Hospital for car parking maintenance and essential medical services.

A number of matters have been discussed by the Panel. It was concluded that the Hospital should

consider further reducing the length of the shortest stay and to explore more cost effective ways of enabling visitors to pay on leaving the Hospital. Alternative ways that a Shuttle Bus service to the Hospital might be achieved was also suggested by Members. A report by the Panel on these points and other findings in the course of the study will be sent to the Hospital's Senior Executive Group at the end of February for inclusion as part of their deliberations.

PETITION – HILL RISE PARK, ST IVES

A petition signed by 16 people was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) drawing attention to nuisance caused by anti-social drivers late at night in Hill Rise Park, St Ives. The petition was referred via the Community Safety Partnership to the St Ives Neighbourhood Forum which resulted in the area being adopted as a Policing Priority at the Neighbourhood Forum. A number of suggestions to resolve the nuisance caused was also proposed and endorsed by the Panel. A report on

progress has been requested for 6 months time.

MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS (PLANNING OBLIGATIONS)

The receipt and expenditure by the Council of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). A detailed description of the progress of those schemes yet to be completed has been requested for inclusion in the next monitoring report.

PLAY FACILITIES WORKING GROUP

The Play Facilities Working Group has presented the findings of their latest investigation to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). It was concluded that a funding arrangement should be offered to Parishes to assist with their facilities' revenue costs based on a 40-40-20% split between the District Council, Parish Council and users of the facilities respectively. Facilities that would qualify under the scheme are skateboard ramps and multi-use games areas. The proposal has already been discussed with the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services.

With regard to the financial implications of the proposals it was suggested that only one Parish Council should be permitted to enter into this arrangement per year. Investigations also are being undertaken into whether the Council can co-ordinate insurance for Parishes wishing to insure their facilities under a group scheme. Councillors P G Mitchell and R J

West will present the findings of the study to the Cabinet.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 – FORWARD PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has requested sight of the Housing Enforcement Powers item prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

FINANCIAL STRATEGY, MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2011 - 2015 AND THE 2010/2011 BUDGET

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the Financial Strategy, Medium Term Plan 2011 - 2015 and the Budget for 2010/2011 in advance of their consideration by Cabinet and final determination by the Council.

Members have been acquainted with the changes that have been made since they previously endorsed the draft strategy. Changes include the identification of £1.2million in savings which have been transferred into a Special Reserve in order to facilitate the achievement of future spending adjustments. The changes have brought about a reduction in the Council's budget deficit which will allow the future required spending adjustments to be phased in at a more regular rate. Overall spending will be significantly lower than previously assumed owing to lower pay and price provisions, lower assumptions relating to Government Grant and the proposed reduction in the level of Council Tax increase to 2.49%. The result will be that a reduced level of spending

adjustment will be needed in the Medium Term Plan period with the longer term requirement little changed. The Director of Commerce and Technology has informed Members that in his opinion the combination of a robust budget process and the current level of reserves should give Members no concerns over the Council's financial position for 2010/2011. He does however believe a significant level of work will be required to plan for the spending adjustments that will be required in future years as reserves are depleted.

The Panel has been reminded of the uncertainties and risks associated with the financial forecast and further discussion took place on investment interest and borrowing costs. Members have received assurances that the budget will enable the Council to achieve its objectives in the forthcoming financial year and outlined their support for an annual increase of 2.49% in Band D equivalent Council Tax and for the proposed Budget and Medium Term Plan.

Having noted the conclusions reached by the Panel, the Cabinet has recommended to Council that the proposed budget, MTP and Financial Strategy be approved along with a council tax increase of £3.02 (2.5%) representing a level of £124.17 for a band D property.

2010/2011 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel has considered proposed changes to the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2010/2011. New guidance has been published by the Audit Commission and a revised

Code of Practice has been received from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) as a result of the collapse of Icelandic banks in 2008. Revised guidance on local authority investments to apply from April 2010 is also expected from the Department for Communities and Local Government. The Panel has endorsed the Treasury Management Strategy for 2010/2011 and its submission to the Cabinet and Council.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has recommended to Council the adoption of the Strategy and the Scrutiny of Treasury Management by the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel has been apprised of the business support that is now provided to individuals following the loss of the Huntingdonshire Enterprise Agency. Having discussed the cost to the Council of business development, Members concluded that, through partnership working the budget available attracts a significant level of services including the Cambridge and Rural Enterprise and Mentoring (CREAM) project which gives business advice to individuals wishing to become self employed.

The Panel also has received a presentation on the Creativexchange in St. Neots. The project, which was developed in partnership with Longsands School, has had a total investment of £2m, has exceeded its operating targets to date and is well placed to meet its targets for 2010/2011. The Panel congratulated all those involved in

the project which has received a number of awards.

INDEPENDENT SCRUTINY MEMBERS

The following persons have been appointed as independent Members to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels:

Economic Well-Being – Mrs H Roberts and Mr R Hall;

Environmental Well-Being – Mr D Hopkins and Mr M Phillips; and

Social Well-Being – Mr R Coxhead and Mrs M Nicholas.

THE HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

The Economic Well-Being Panel has followed-up work carried out by the former Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) during a study into the impact of excessive alcohol consumption on levels of anti-social behaviour and alcohol related crime within the District by receiving data on the effect of alcohol consumption on local health and health services. The data provided indicates that for all age bands Huntingdonshire has lower rates of admission to hospital than the national average. However, the Panel has requested further information on why the rate of alcohol specific hospital admissions for under 18s is higher than for other indicators and whether any qualitative analysis has been carried out on the effects of alcohol consumption in rural areas.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

The Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel has requested reports on the cost

associated with Standards and on the Council's management of capital projects for submission to future meetings.

LICENSING COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT POLICY

Both the Licensing and Protection Panel and Licensing Committee have approved a draft licensing compliance and enforcement policy statement which has been revised in light of the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008 and the new Regulators' Compliance Code. Licence holders and relevant responsible authorities will be consulted.

FEES AND CHARGES

The Licensing and Protection Panel has noted a 2.5% increase in fees and charges for licences administered by the Council for the period 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011. Some further adjustments have also been made to reflect additional charges made by the Council's vehicle testing centre in respect of meter testing and wheelchair suitability.

SECRET GARDEN PARTY

The Licensing Committee has been acquainted with the extensive measures put in place by the licensing authority to minimise the impact of the Secret Garden Party on the area following the granting in perpetuity of a premises licence for this large annual outdoor event which attracts an attendance of approximately 26,000 people.

CHANGES TO LICENSING PROCESSES UNDER THE LICENSING ACT 2003

The Head of Democratic and Central Services has been authorised to respond to a Government consultation proposing to simplify requirements under the Licensing Act 2003 in respect of three processes recognised by stakeholders to be unduly restrictive and burdensome.

If approved, the proposals which include the removal of a requirement for licensing authorities to determine and publish a licensing statement every three years will simplify processes and reduce unnecessary work.

CHANGES TO THE POLICE AND CRIME ACT

The Licensing Committee has been acquainted with amendments to the Licensing Act that will allow members of licensing authorities to act as interested parties, allowing them to make representations in respect of applications for and variations to, premises licences and club premises certificates and to make applications for a review of such licences or certificates without the need to reside within the vicinity of the premises. The Committee have also been informed of changes which will make it an offence to persistently sell alcohol to children from the same premises on two or more occasions within 3 months. Under 18s can also now be prosecuted if found in possession of alcohol in a public place on three or more occasions within a twelve month period.

SMALL LIVE MUSIC EVENTS

The Licensing Committee has authorised a response to a consultation exercise being undertaken by the Department of Culture Media and Sport on a Government proposal to exempt small live music events from having to obtain a variation to an existing licence or certificate. The proposal has led to a number of local authorities and police raising concern over the impact of the exemption on the licensing objectives as a result of which residents, businesses and responsible authorities will be able to apply for specified premises to be excluded from the exemption.

CARBON REDUCTION

FOOTPRINT

Following the discussion at the headline debate at the Council meeting held on 2nd December 2009, the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has received an update from the Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology and the Head of Environmental Management on actions being undertaken by the Council to address the need to reduce carbon emissions.

As the Council's resources are limited and the widespread implementation of carbon reduction schemes costly, the Panel has been advised that the Council hope to access external funding to deliver projects. The Panel has 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.

CAR PARKING REVIEW UPDATE

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has considered the findings of a meeting of the Car Parking Review Working Group which was convened to discuss the operational issues of introducing 38 spaces for free car parking for 2 hours use at the Riverside Car Park, St. Neots for recreational use.

Members raised concerns over the possible implications of introducing charging in the car park in view of a recent reduction in the footfall in St. Neots and problems of traffic congestion in the town. The Panel is of the opinion that the implementation of parking charges at the Riverside Park will further exacerbate these issues and increase air pollution in the Town Centre. The Panel invited the Cabinet to consider allowing three hours free parking in the whole of the Riverside Car Park which will benefit shoppers who wish to park there and those who want to use the park for leisure and recreational purposes. The Panel has suggested that an appropriate charge be set for those who park longer than three hours with payment on exit which may reduce enforcement costs.

Having been advised of the Panels views, the Cabinet has authorised the Director of Environment and Community Services to proceed to make and advertise the Revised Off-Street Parking Places order which will enable the Panel's comments to be considered with any other responses received during the statutory consultation period. The Cabinet is conscious that

provision has been made in the budget for increased income at several car parks commencing at the beginning of June and that any further delay in proceeding with the order will jeopardise the anticipated level of income.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has endorsed a report on the changes proposed to the Local Development Scheme for Huntingdonshire. The changes have arisen as a result of new Regulations on development plan document production and the need to amend the anticipated timetable for the production of various elements of the Local Development Framework since adoption of the Core Strategy. Subsequently, the Cabinet has approved amendments to the Scheme prior to its submission to the Secretary of State.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DPD - PROPOSED SUBMISSION

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has considered the proposed submission document for the Development Management DPD which has been prepared following consultation on the development of options between 30th January and 30th March 2009. Key stakeholder consultation also has taken place between 18th December 2009 and 11th January 2010 on the draft proposed submission document.

When considering the development of options stage, the Panel has expressed concern over the adverse effects on carriageway congestion and parking on verges as a result of

car parking allocations on new developments as well as Policy E6 relating to the implementation of the Great Fen Project. At the same time, doubts have been expressed about the proposed withdrawal of permitted development rights for specific farming or operational purposes in the Great Fen area.

The Cabinet has recommended the adoption of the submission document to Council.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) PROGRESS

The Transportation Team Leader has updated the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel on the situation with regard to HCV parking in the District. The Panel has been advised that the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport has responded on behalf of the District Council to the HCV Advisory Route Network Public Consultation. The HCV parking facility at Alconbury has re-opened, and as part of the A14 proposals, the Council will continue to look for the provision of HCV parking facilities or the expansion of existing facilities within the District.

Having regard to a question raised by a member at an earlier meeting about the cost of the Council's website, a detailed answer has been provided to the Panel's satisfaction.

NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES – DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF UNDER LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1988

As a result of a re-examination of the Council's policy for assessing

entitlement to discretionary rate relief for charities and kindred organisations the Cabinet has –

- ◆ agreed that the rateable value referred to in the policy be reviewed on the occasion of a new rating list (every five years);
- ◆ authorised the Head of Revenue Services and the Local Taxation Manager to grant relief under the new policy;
- ◆ agreed that "Part Occupation" relief be optimised in appropriate cases for a maximum of twelve months, subject to prevailing legislation on unoccupied rating;
- ◆ agreed that "Rural Rate Relief" continue to be granted in appropriate cases (subject to the Rural Settlement List) and with a provision of 100% relief for post offices;
- ◆ approved the determination of "Hardship Relief" by the Head of Customer Services, after consultation with the Executive Member for Finance, on the merits of individual cases; and
- ◆ authorised the Director of Commerce and Technology to deal with appeals from applicants dissatisfied with the determination made by the Head of Revenue Services and the Local Taxation Manager.

MINI-RECYCLING SITES – WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Revised working arrangements put in place by the Head of Operations to ensure that 1,100 litre wheeled bins at bring sites are moved safely by employees have been noted by the Cabinet. The collections have been re-scheduled so that two employees attend known heavily used locations together. If an employee finds that a bin is too heavy to move when working alone, he should not attempt to move it. These changes meet the requirements for safe working practices outlined by the HSE Inspectorate.

ST NEOTS EASTERN EXPANSION

Governance arrangements required to support the master planning process for the St Neots Eastern Expansion have been reported to the Cabinet. A Members' Steering Group will be established with representatives from the County, District and Town Councils. The Group will receive input from the various stakeholder groups including the St Neots Town Centre Initiative and will report directly to a Delivery Board on which the Director of Environmental and Community Services will represent this authority.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

At its February meeting, the Development Management Panel approved eight and refused four applications for development.

In addition, the Panel has given early consideration, as a consultee, to an outline application, made to Peterborough City Council for the

development of a new township south of Hampton Vale between the A15 and A1, west of Yaxley.

Representations were made to the Panel on a number of issues by Parish and Ward Councillors, an objector and the agent. The Panel agreed that Officers should continue discussions with the City Council to address the issues raised in connection with the Master Plan and transport and the benefits likely to accrue to Yaxley and Huntingdonshire as a result of the application.

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