

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in the CIVIC SUITE, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 14 September 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor P M D Godfrey – Chairman.
Councillors K M Baker, M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, J W Davies, P J Downes, P Godley, D Harty and M F Newman.

Messrs D Hopkins and M Phillips.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors D B Dew and J A Gray.

28. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 13th July 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

29. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

30. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

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

31. REVOCATION OF THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

(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 revocation of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the implications for strategic planning locally.

Members were reminded that Huntingdonshire remained at the forefront in terms of the delivery of the sustainable growth strategy for Cambridgeshire and the sub-region with the District Council being one of a minority of local planning authorities in the region that had an adopted Core Strategy which set out a positive and robust framework to deliver sustainable development. The strategy had been tested at public inquiry and found by subsequent planning inspectors to be sound.

The Panel was pleased that the more ambitious targets for development in Huntingdonshire mooted by the defunct East of

England Regional Assembly for the review of the East of England Plan to 2031 had been abandoned. However Members noted that, with guidance from the Secretary of State calling for local planning authorities to identify a fifteen years supply of land for housing, the Core Strategy which applied until 2026 would need to be re-visited.

Issues that remained a concern for Members were the need for employment provision to cater for housing growth and infrastructure improvements in advance of developments taking place. Members drew particular attention to the A428 which was under increasing pressure from housing development in St. Neots.

The Panel welcomed the apparent change in direction over the provision of gypsy and traveller sites which would enable the District Council to assess its own need for additional pitches as opposed to this being determined regionally. Having been informed by the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport that further guidance was awaited before progressing with the gypsy and traveller site DPD, the Panel suggested that the Cabinet should make a public announcement on the present situation having regard to the magnitude of the public response to the SHLAA exercise on the identification of potential sites.

RESOLVED

that the report be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

32. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

Councillor J W Davies addressed the Panel on his concerns over the scale and timing of the felling of a large number of trees on the former St. Ives Golf Course and along Houghton Road, St. Ives in advance of the residential development which was to take place on the site. Attention was also drawn to instances elsewhere where developers had felled trees in advance of obtaining permission.

As the loss of mature trees was of concern to many people, Councillor J W Davies requested that improvements be made in the way that the Council dealt with the problem, either by more rigorous enforcement or by means of improved communication with landowners, developers and the public generally.

Having regard to the particular development at St. Ives Golf Course, Members were advised that it had been made clear before permission was granted for development at this site that a significant number of trees would be lost, although it was acknowledged that they should not have been felled in the nesting season. The Head of Planning Services confirmed that no trees had been removed from the site without prior permission, that re-planting was required under the planning permission and other trees were protected by conditions attached to permission. The Panel accepted that unauthorised works to trees was an issue within Huntingdonshire which was exacerbated by the limited resources available in the planning division. While commending the work of the officers in the team and those involved in the parish planting scheme, the Panel suggested that a strategy for the retention and planting of trees would be of assistance in raising the profile of this issue and encouraging good practice and public

awareness.

Having been advised by the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport that work on such a strategy had commenced and that Member involvement would be welcome, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, J W Davies and P M D Godfrey form a Working Group to work with the Tree Officers for this purpose.

33. CARBON MANAGEMENT UPDATE

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

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Environmental Management (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing an update on progress against the targets set in the Carbon Management Plan.

The Panel was pleased to note that the District Council was on course to meet the 10:10 Campaign objectives with an 11% reduction in carbon emissions and a 9% reduction in energy costs being achieved over the past year. Members were advised of ongoing works to determine which efficiency saving measures would be most appropriate for each District Council site to ensure the most cost-effective systems were put into place.

Although Members agreed that the progress made against targets in the Carbon Management Plan was encouraging, the Panel questioned the energy efficiency of Pathfinder House. The Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology advised the Panel that the Environmental Management Team were assuming responsibility for the management of the premises and a report on the performance of the building was due to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel in October. In response to a question, the Environment Team Leader undertook to determine whether the individual target figures in the Carbon Management Plan were being met.

With regard to the Green House Project the Panel was advised that a provisional launch date for the opening of the properties had been set for 29th October 2010 which coincided with National Energy Saving Week. The Panel was advised of the cost of the retrofitting project and noted that the scheme had been sponsored by 29 companies. Once completed the properties would provide a showcase for a wide range of efficiency measures and it was hoped that the project would also provide an opportunity for local businesses to gain experience of new technologies and implementation processes. A visit to the premises was being arranged for Members of the Panel.

34. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The Panel considered a report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book)

on the performance of the authority against the priority objectives for environmental well-being identified in "Growing Success", the Council's corporate plan.

With regard to the failure to meet the target for the number of energy efficiency and renewable energy measures carried out as a result of District Council schemes and promotions, the Head of Environmental Management explained that this was due to an unavoidable delay in appointing contractors for the "Cosy Homes" insulation scheme.

Members requested clarification as to the definition of 'Songbird funding' which had reportedly been downgraded resulting in broadband projects to complement BT roll out needing to be re-assessed.

35. 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.

The Panel was invited to bear in mind that issues for investigation could be researched by an individual Member and reported back to the Panel. In response to a suggestion by Councillor Banerjee that she would look into the question of road adoptions, the Panel was informed that a study on the adoption of roads and sewers had been completed in the previous year.

36. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

The Panel was advised of progress on issues that had been previously discussed.

The Chairman advised that the Joint Accountability Committee had requested the attendance of the Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council at its next meeting to question her about the performance of Cambridgeshire Together.

The Panel was informed that the review of cycling priorities had been put on hold due by the County Council due to funding shortages. The Vice-Chairman undertook to make enquiries with the County Council regarding the audit trail for Section 106 contributions generated from development in Huntingdonshire.

37. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest summarising the Council's decision since the previous meeting.

Chairman