

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 9 November 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, M F Newman and J S Watt.

Messrs D Hopkins and M Phillips.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D B Dew.

46. MINUTES

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

47. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

48. 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.

49. GREEN HOUSE PROJECT

The Panel expressed their thanks to those responsible for the tour earlier in the day of the two properties in St. Ives and St. Neots modernised by the Council as part of the "Green House Project".

The Panel felt that the cost savings associated with the energy saving measures should be widely publicised to householders alongside the reduction in carbon emissions.

With regard to the staffing implications of having the houses manned whilst they were open to the public, Members were advised that it would be possible for officers to work from the houses due to the availability of wi-fi.

50. ABANDONED SHOPPING TROLLEYS

The Panel was advised that at the previous meeting of the Huntingdon Neighbourhood Forum complaints had been raised by members of the public about the number of shopping trolleys being abandoned by customers of town centre shops.

Members were informed of the powers available to the District Council if Section 99 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 were to be adopted which would enable the Council to seize shopping

trolleys that appeared to have been abandoned and store them for up to six months. If a trolley was not claimed within that time, it could be sold or disposed of by the Council. If a trolley was seized, the owners had to be served with a notice within 14 days stating that it had been removed, where it was being stored and, if it was unclaimed, that the Council would dispose of it. The cost of seizing, storing and returning a trolley could be recovered by the Council from the owner of the trolley if the company asked for its return.

The Panel also discussed the possibility of shops charging a deposit of £1 for trolleys which would be refunded upon their return. However the implementation of such a practice would require the agreement of retailers.

The District Council's Streetscene Manager was in attendance to discuss steps already being taken to tackle the issue of abandoned shopping trolleys. It was reported that the Council had only received 8 complaints of abandoned shopping trolleys since 2004. A good working relationship had been established with the major supermarkets, some of which had engaged a company to collect abandoned trolleys while others would collect their own abandoned trolleys if they were reported.

Having regard to the possibility of adopting Section 99 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Panel was advised by the Streetscene Manager that the Council had limited storage facilities for any trolleys that were collected and that the low number of complaints together with the co-operation of supermarket owners made such a venture unnecessary.

With regard to specific issues elsewhere which were mentioned by Members, the Streetscene Manager advised that complaints locally regarding the Co-Operative Superstore in St. Ives had been resolved following collaboration with the store manager. Having regard to a problem of trolleys being abandoned around the Rainbow Superstore in Yaxley, the Streetscene Manager undertook to raise this issue with the store manager.

51. ST NEOTS EAST URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

(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 development opportunities for land east of the railway line, St. Neots. The Panel also received the comments of the Development Management Panel on the urban design framework document (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

The principal areas of concern raised by the Panel were highways and educational provision. Members accepted the aim of integrating the eastern expansion into St. Neots as a whole. In view of its separation from the rest of the town by the East Coast main rail line, the Panel acknowledged that, without careful planning, there was a danger of a separate community developing which was not integrated with the remainder of the town.

The Panel accepted that the idea of a third secondary school in St. Neots located within the eastern expansion might exacerbate the sense of a separate identity and therefore did not support the recommendation of the Development Management Panel in that respect. Nevertheless, the Panel suggested that an adequate financial contribution be secured from the developers to ensure that the existing secondary education establishments in St. Neots could be expanded to meet the anticipated increase in pupil numbers.

Having regard to primary education, the Panel was advised that the County Council had sought a minimum of three new schools as part of the development as there was under-capacity west of the rail line in existing establishments. The land use plan suggested an allocation of land for two new schools in addition to the existing primary school already provided as part of the Loves Farm development. However, the Panel queried whether this was sufficient for a projected development of 5,000 homes. Notwithstanding its support for integration of the new development, the Panel did not consider it appropriate for children of primary school age to have to travel far to school which could lead to traffic congestion and reduce the number of children walking or cycling to school. The Panel queried the proposed distribution of sites for primary schools within the eastern expansion with those houses in the north-eastern sector of the new development being some distance from the primary schools proposed. The Head of Planning Services assured the Panel that he would re-examine the County Council's response on educational provision in advance of the Cabinet's consideration of the framework document.

The Panel also commented on the highway provision and particularly the uncertainty over improvements to the A428 before the development took place, with the new development creating greater pressure on the already congested A428. The Panel supported ongoing efforts to encourage investment in the upgrading of the road to accommodate the inevitable traffic growth. The Panel also was keen to ensure that there was sufficient vehicular links in addition to those proposed for cyclists and walkers as a failure to do so could lead to unacceptable congestion on those which currently existed via Cambridge Street and the A428.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be advised of the Panel's views on the St. Neots East Urban Framework.

52. CABINET FEEDBACK

The Panel received and noted a report from the Cabinet detailing their deliberations on Performance Management in response to the Panel's recommendations.

53. 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 programmes of studies and informing Members of studies being undertaken by the other Scrutiny Panels.

Members were advised that the first meeting of the Local Drainage Liaison Group had been held and a progress report was now awaited from Anglian Water's Collection Manager.

The Panel was updated on the work to-date on preparation of a Tree Strategy and it was agreed that Councillor M Baker be co-opted onto the Tree Strategy Working Group in view of his interest in the subject and to ensure that this had cross party representation.

54. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

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

55. SCRUTINY

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

56. PLANNING FOR SCHOOLS DEVELOPMENT CONSULTATION

(The Chairman announced that he proposed to admit the following item as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B (4b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in view of the fact that the closing date on a recent consultation paper issued by the Government was imminent.)

Councillor P J Downes addressed the Panel on a recently published Planning for Schools Development consultation exercise which had invited views on the Government's proposals to make changes to the General Permitted Development Order to give permitted development rights for a change of use for schools development. The purpose of these proposals was to support the Department for Education's policy on new "free schools" but Councillor Downes suggested he was concerned that the proposed absence of any requirement for planning permission would prevent any local objection to the opening of a new school, dispense with the requirement for a traffic impact assessment and remove any democratic involvement in the process.

Under the circumstances, it was

RESOLVED

that an ad-hoc working group be established including Councillor Downes, Councillor P G Mitchell as Chairman of the Development Management Panel and Councillor D B Dew as Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport to draft a response to the consultation for consideration at the next meeting of the Panel prior to the closing date for comment of 10th December 2010.

Chairman