

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in the Civic Suite 1a, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 8 March 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor P M D Godfrey – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, K M 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: Councillors D B Dew, C R Hyams,
P G Mitchell and P A Swales.

77. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 8th February 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

78. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

79. FORWARD PLAN

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

In so doing, Members requested sight of the Planning Proposals Development Plan Document, the St Ives West Urban Design Framework and the Great Fen Supplementary Planning Document when they became available. The Panel was informed that a report on the Community Infrastructure Levy Supplementary Planning Document had been delayed and was expected to be available in the summer.

80. 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. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that all objectives had been achieved or exceeded and the Huntingdon West Area Action Plan had been found to be sound by the Planning Inspector.

After querying the plans for the low carbon agenda, particularly in respect of leisure centres, Members were advised that progress would be subject to available funding for energy saving measures that delivered long term savings. However the Environmental Management Division had been working with One Leisure and a suite of proposals concerning energy saving measures at the leisure centres would be available in due course.

81. NEW COUNCIL PLAN

With the aid of a report prepared by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to the content of a new Council Plan, which set out the Council's vision and priorities for the period from 2011 to 2015. This would replace the current corporate plan "Growing Success" which had been first adopted in 2006.

Subsequent changes announced by the Government to the national performance framework for local authorities and the abolition of the Comprehensive Area Assessment and the Audit Commission, together with financial challenges faced by the Council had prompted the need for a revision of the existing document and its replacement with a more pragmatic plan with less aspirational targets.

Having considered details of the process undertaken to develop the proposed Plan, the Panel proceeded to review in detail each of the proposed priorities. With regard to the objective of keeping the District clean, providing recycling services and collecting rubbish, Members were informed that the targets were being revised having regard to present performance. Concern also was expressed over the volume of litter that was deposited by the general public and it was suggested that there was a need for an emphasis on public education and communication in this respect to raise standards of behaviour on the part of those who discarded litter indiscriminately.

With regard to the priority relating to support for strong communities, the Panel suggested that there should be greater clarification of the terminology used to describe the 'less able' in need of support in the District.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be invited to consider the Panel's comments as part of its deliberations on the report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships.

82. PAYMENT OF RECYCLING CREDITS

(Councillor C R Hyams, Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services was in attendance for this item.)

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) informing Members of proposed changes to the payment arrangements to site owners for mini bring recycling sites.

The Panel was advised that in order to support recycling, the Council previously had set up mini recycling centres for paper and glass. Recycling credits had been paid to these communities from the income received based upon the volume collected. The Panel was advised that in 2009/10 payments to parish and town councils had amounted to £40,404 for a total of 63 site.

Following the inclusion of paper and glass in the kerbside recycling bin the amount of materials being collected from mini-recycling centres had reduced significantly resulting in a loss of income to the site owners and the imminent removal of the banks as it was no longer an economic proposition to retain them.

Members were informed that work had been ongoing to procure an alternative source of recycling income for those concerned and a new 5 year contract in respect of textiles recycling would generate income from the sale of the material collected. Textile banks would be provided and emptied by a contractor at no cost to the Council and it was proposed that these would replace the paper and glass recycling banks. After having considered a number of options, the Head of Operations proposed a payment to parish and town councils of £150 per tonne for textiles collected. This would generate the potential for the same level of income for the parishes and towns while enabling the District Council to achieve a net income of £65,600 per annum.

Members commented on the amount of textile tonnage needed to maintain a similar level of income for the parishes and towns and they also drew attention to the number of charity recycling banks located at mini recycling centres. Having been informed that the decision as to whether to accept textile recycling bins would be a matter for the parish and town councils, concerned the Panel

RESOLVED

that the recommendation in the report be endorsed for submission to Cabinet.

83. WORKING GROUPS

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

The Panel noted that the item has been included on the agenda following the receipt of concerns from a local residents group over the status and role of the working group that had been established to consider the formulations of an urban design framework for development west of St. Ives.

The Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport addressed the Panel on the remit of the working group. A similar exercise involving representatives of District, County, Town and Parish Councils had been undertaken for the development east of St.

Neots and had been considered helpful in informing the preparation of an urban design framework for that area. Similar working groups had therefore been established for St. Ives West and RAF Brampton.

Councillor Dew informed the Panel that the working groups, which were serviced and coordinated by the Council's Planning Division, were intended solely to seek advice and comment on the content of UDFs and had no decision making responsibilities. It was suggested that it was preferable to invite the views of local authority representatives prior to formal public consultation which could assist in the formulation of the documents.

Nevertheless Councillor Dew offered to review the terms of reference of the working groups and it was

RESOLVED

that the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport be requested to submit the proposed arrangements to a future meeting of the Panel for information.

84. GREAT FEN

(Councillor D Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport and Councillors P G Mitchell and P A Swales were in attendance for this item.)

The Panel was updated by way of a presentation, on progress toward the implementation of the Great Fen Masterplan and the preparation of an associated Action Plan.

The Panel was advised that the Masterplan for the project had been approved by the Great Fen Steering Committee (GFSC) and had recently won a Royal Town Planning Institute award for its integration with the planning system. Members were acquainted with the timescales and target dates covered by the proposed new Action Plan 2011 – 2016 which it was expected would be available in the summer.

Members were informed that a phased approach would be taken toward the creation of visitor facilities and liaison between stakeholders involved in the project had resulted in the formation of both a Great Fen Councils Forum and a Great Fen Users Forum. A friends group of the Great Fen had also been established. Both Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council had accepted places on the GFSC as observers.

Members were advised that a funded study into the hydrology of the area had been completed by Atkins and a further report was due for completion by September 2011 and Members welcomed a suggestion that the Middle Level Commissioners be invited to the October meeting of the Panel on to discuss this matter on completion of the report.

Members were advised that negotiations were ongoing in order to secure access routes to the Great Fen area with the County Council currently mapping gaps in the footpath network to the south of the

Great Fen. Staff based at the Great Fen Centre in Ramsey Heights had been working on an events programme, school visits, marked trails and volunteering opportunities.

With regard to land restoration, the Panel was advised that 1,014 hectares of land currently were under restoration and 2,112 hectares remained in agricultural production. Issues with regard to land ownership and tenancy arrangements were explained and Members were reminded that heritage lottery funding required that 740 hectares of the Holme Estate would need to be put into restoration by August 2013.

In discussing employment possibilities for the area, Members were informed that the majority of the 22 agricultural based positions that had existed within the Great Fen Project area in 2004 still continued and in addition the project employed 12 full time and 2 part time members of staff.

With the permission of the Chairman, Councillors Mitchell and Swales drew attention to concerns locally with the project and the pace of change from arable production which had been swifter than envisaged. It had been expected that peripheral employment and visitor numbers would increase and replace agricultural income which had yet to be the case. There were concerns that high quality agricultural land was being sown as meadow at a time when food production was of paramount importance both locally and nationally. In response, the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport reiterated the need to comply with the terms of the lottery funding but agreed to discuss the issue with the Cabinet and, if supported, with the Council's partners in the project.

Having concurred with the comments expressed by Councillor Mitchell and Swales over the pace of change by the project, the Panel

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be requested to explore with the Great Fen Partners the possibility of land within the area currently in arable production and not yet sown to grass remaining in use for that purpose, pending a review being undertaken of the land that is already under restoration, the development proposals for the visitor facilities and the creation of associated employment opportunities.

85. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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 Scrutiny Panels.

Members were advised that the Cabinet had accepted the recommendations made by the Panel following their study into Planning Conservation and had expressed their thanks to the members of the working group for the report.

In discussing the possibility of moving forward with studies into both

rural transport issues and land use for agricultural purposes in the context of planning policies and its contribution to the local economy, the Panel agreed that further information should be presented to the Panel at their April meeting.

86. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

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

Members were informed that a new contact officer at Anglian Water had been identified who had been approached with a request to providing the Panel with an update on the flooding at St Audrey's Lane, St Ives and elsewhere at a future meeting.

Members were updated on progress that had been achieved with respect to the cycle routes planned for Farcet and Grafham, both of which were on target for completion in early summer.

87. SCRUTINY

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

Chairman