

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 10 July 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor D Harty – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, M G Baker,
Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, I J Curtis,
J W Davies, D A Giles, N J Guyatt,
C R Hyams and Mrs D C Reynolds.

Co-opted Members Messrs D Hopkins and M Phillips.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor G J Harlock.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors J D Ablewhite, N J Guyatt and D M Tysoe.

11. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 19th June 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

13. 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) which had been prepared by the Executive Leader of the Council for the period 1st July to 31st October 2012.

14. LEADERSHIP DIRECTION

With the assistance of a report by the Executive Leader and Deputy Executive Leader (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to the Council's Leadership Direction. Members' attention was drawn to the notes of the Corporate Plan Working Group which had discussed the document at its meeting on 20th June 2012.

The Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite, explained that Leadership Direction represented his plans for the Council's direction of travel and aims. It had been presented to all Members at the Council meeting earlier in the month. The Panel was advised that the Corporate Plan Working Group would be developing the Council's

strategic planning arrangements over the summer and the results would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels in the autumn. Councillor Mrs M Banerjee suggested that residents ought to be given the opportunity to influence the Plan so that it reflected needs identified by the community.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be received and noted.

15. GROWING AWARENESS - A PLAN FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT

(Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for the Environment, was in attendance for this Item).

Councillor D M Tysoe introduced a report by the Head of Environmental Management (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on Growing Awareness: A Plan for Our Environment. The Plan contained a framework for the Council to make continual, measurable progress in reducing its own resource use and in stimulating environmental improvements in the wider district. The Annual Review of the Plan was appended to the report. The Review analysed how the Council had performed against the Plan's targets. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that energy usage had decreased by 18% across the Council's portfolio.

The Panel questioned whether there were any plans to increase the types of materials that could be recycled. In response, Councillor Tysoe advised Members that the Council was hoping to expand the range of items which could be recycled and that work was ongoing with other authorities in order to determine the cost-effectiveness of offering an enhanced service.

Having questioned whether it would still be worthwhile to install PV panels and other energy saving measures given the reduction in the Government feed-in tariff, Members were advised that as there had also been a decline in their cost, they still offered a favourable rate of return and as such should still be encouraged.

In response to a further question, the Environment Team Leader clarified the Government Salix Energy Efficiency Grant Funding process. £75,000 had been received and match funded to provide an initial £150,000 for energy efficiency projects at the Council's main site. Savings generated from the projects that had been implemented would be recycled into the fund. This would provide a maximum of £450,000 towards energy efficiency projects across the Council's estate. The Panel was then advised that a biomass boiler would be used to generate heat for Hinchbrooke Country Park's Countryside Centre. This should realise savings as the Country Park had a plentiful supply of logs and volunteers were willing to assist with this change in approach.

The Panel discussed the possibility of generating energy from waste and the implementation of a district heating scheme. With regard to the latter, the Head of Environmental Management explained that RWE Npower had requested a 15% – 20% rate of return to engage

with the Council on a heating scheme in St. Neots. As the heating scheme would only provide a 7% – 10% rate of return, at present, this was not a viable option.

Members were acquainted with details of the Green Deal, which would become active in the coming months. Having been advised that Councils would be best placed to promote the scheme, Members stressed the importance of ensuring that the Council provided the best value options for householders. Furthermore, the Panel recommended that, as far as possible, local traders should be used to deliver installations. A procurement exercise would be undertaken and a report would be delivered back to the Panel in due course on the precise details of the scheme.

Members highlighted the fact that the Council had not achieved its target of a 9.5% reduction in the cubic metres of water consumed by Council buildings, noting that there had been a 5.7% increase compared with 2008/2009. The Panel was assured that this would become a priority of the Environment Team and would continue to be carefully monitored. Attention was also drawn to the increase in the percentage of Council employees travelling to work by car and the slow progress that had been made in increasing the proportion of waste from the Council's Headquarters that was recycled. These trends illustrated the need for continual efforts to be made to encourage the activities that were required to achieve targets. In particular, reference was made to the need to promote the Council's home working policy and its travel plan.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the significant progress towards the implementation of Growing Awareness contained within the annual update 2011/2012 be noted, and
- (b) that the Cabinet be recommended to continue to support the role of the Strategy as the main means for the Council to monitor and improve its own environmental performance, whilst acting as a community leader, to encourage improved environmental practice in the District as a whole.

16. WASTE COLLECTION POLICIES

(Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for the Environment, was in attendance for this item.)

Councillor D M Tysoe introduced a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Council's waste collection policies which had been collated and some changes were suggested. The collated policies were intended to provide clarity to residents as to the type and extent of service they could expect. Members welcomed the fact that the Council's waste collection policies would now be available in a single document.

Members endorsed the proposal to provide paper sacks for food/green waste to properties currently receiving weekly bag collections. The sacks would be collected fortnightly to fit in with

existing collection rounds, which would remove the need for additional vehicles and crews to collect them. Members also supported the proposal to collect non-hazardous clinical waste through the normal grey bin arrangements, which would result in further savings. They then recommended that the Council should develop and publicise guidance on how items which were prohibited from wheeled bins and sacks, should be disposed of. Further to this it was suggested that advice should be made available on how to dispose of batteries and razor blades through the Council's service.

Members' attention was drawn to Policy 22 which prohibited stickers on wheeled bins. Members expressed the view that the use of stickers could provide an opportunity to convey messages that had community benefits, such as local speed restrictions. This happened in South Cambridgeshire and was supported by the Police. Councillor D M Tysoe advised that a pilot initiative was taking place in Huntingdonshire. In this light, Members recommended that, subject to feedback from the local community, this practice should be adopted in Huntingdonshire.

Members discussed the feasibility of removing the purple stickers on wheeled bins that identified residents whom required assistance. They were concerned that the stickers identified vulnerable residents and as such could potentially create a crime hazard. The Panel was advised that the introduction of in-cab technology would enable collection crews to identify properties where residents required assistance so the need for purple stickers would be removed. Work on introducing in-cab technology would commence once route optimisation was completed.

The Panel supported improved communications in relation to waste collection. Members noted that a comprehensive communication exercise would take place towards the end of the year to explain new collection arrangements. Further to this, the Panel's Waste Collection Working Group would be looking at ways of improving general communication in relation to waste collection.

RESOLVED

that the Waste Collection Policies be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

17. BEARSCROFT FARM URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

(Councillor N J Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, was in attendance for this Item.)

Councillor N J Guyatt introduced a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Draft Urban Design Framework (UDF) for land at Bearscroft Farm, Godmanchester. The UDF was intended to provide constructive guidance to future developers of the area to the maximum advantage and minimum disadvantage to local residents.

Councillor C R Hyams expressed the view that Godmanchester did not have the infrastructure to serve a large scale development. Further to this, the A1198 could be negatively affected by the

proposed development. Councillor Hyams further expressed the view that the proposals submitted were not sustainable and did not represent good design. In response, Councillor N J Guyatt assured the Panel that the UDF represented the best design options for development in Godmanchester and, as such, would ensure integration between the new development and the existing town.

Members noted that the UDF was the subject of consultation which had enabled residents to have input to the design of development. Councillor M G Baker advised the Panel that he had received criticism regarding the lack of consultation with Godmanchester residents, which was a matter that needed to be addressed. In response, it was reported that the preparation of the UDF had been informed by a Working Group consisting of appropriate elected Councillors from Godmanchester Town Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. Further to this, two well attended consultation events had been held. As a result, the UDF proposed ideas that would bring benefits to the area. Having noted that an outline planning application had been received from the owners of the site, Members were advised that this and subsequent applications would need to be determined regardless of whether the UDF was approved.

In considering the options identified within the UDF, several Members expressed a preference for Idea 5 which proposed that a new road was constructed around the southern edge of the development. This would allow for a greater developed area and enable the football pitch and other green spaces to be completely integrated with the rest of the development. However, Members expressed concern at the UDF's lack of provision of a secondary school and highlighted the need to ensure there was a safe route for pupils to take to their chosen secondary school.

During discussions on the report's recommendation, Councillor M G Baker suggested that the outcomes of the consultation exercise should be circulated before authorisation was given to finalise and approve the UDF. In response, Members were reminded that representatives of the Town, District and County Councils had been involved in the preparation of the UDF. Furthermore, residents had been acquainted with the content of the UDF, the aim of which was to meet the aspirations expressed during the consultation process. Councillor J D Ablewhite addressed the Panel during its deliberations and emphasised that the principle of development of the site had already been accepted by the Council and that Members were charged with ensuring that the right decisions were made for the District. In addition, the Chairman stated that approval of the UDF would give planning officers more opportunities to influence decisions on potential planning applications. Having concluded their discussions, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to authorise the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, in conjunction with the Chairman of the Development Management Panel and the Head of Planning Services, to finalise and approve the Draft Urban Design Framework for Bearscroft Farm,

Godmanchester to inform Council policy and Development Management decisions on potential planning applications.

18. NEW HUNTINGDONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

(Councillor N J Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, was in attendance for this Item.)

Councillor N J Guyatt introduced a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the consultation and engagement process for the preparation of the new Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. Members were advised that the Local Plan presented them with an opportunity to influence how land would be allocated. Councillor Guyatt indicated that all Members would be encouraged to discuss with him their Ward's requirements. Further to this Parish Councils would also be engaged. The Head of Planning Services informed Members that a workshop would be arranged for them to review the draft Plan.

Members' attention was drawn to paragraph 3.9 of the report, which highlighted the various methods of communication that would be used to ensure maximum engagement was achieved. It was suggested that the Peterborough Evening Telegraph should be utilised for the dissemination of proposals, as this would ensure that the whole of the District would be covered. This suggestion was accepted.

RESOLVED

that the consultation and engagement process for the preparation of the new Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 be noted.

19. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS OF THE ENTERPRISE ZONE

The Panel received a presentation by Mr P Mumford, Special Projects Manager (Alconbury), on the planning implications of the Enterprise Zone. Members were acquainted with the history of the Alconbury site and were advised that planning permission for enabling works on the site had been granted in February. Development works were expected to commence imminently.

It was likely that the Enterprise Zone would create 8,000 jobs, the majority of which would be in the high-tech manufacturing sector. The combination of business rate discounts, super fast broadband and simplified planning should ensure that the Alconbury Enterprise Zone would be an attractive location for businesses.

Members noted that the consultation process for development at the site would be extensive and exceed the standard consultation requirements. Urban and Civic, the site owners, were currently undertaking consultation exercises as part of their pre-application work. Having noted that the site's rail link permission had been extended to 2015, the Panel questioned whether the provision of an additional station would have an impact on the Huntingdon Railway Station. In response, the Head of Planning Services explained that Network Rail were keen to expand and it was his understanding that a

rail link at Alconbury would be an additional facility.

Having discussed its aspirations to create 'high value jobs' at the Enterprise Zone, the Head of Planning Services advised Members that the Local Enterprise Partnership would be looking to provide 'transformational employment' at the site. Subsequently, there was a possibility that commuting patterns across the District would change as traffic towards Cambridge and London could be reduced. The Head of Planning Services acknowledged that traffic management on the site would be a key factor in ensuring its success, and advised that work with the Highways Agency in this respect was already taking place. The Panel was advised that Urban and Civic had a strong record of delivering high quality developments in the South of England and the Enterprise Zone at Alconbury should be no exception to this.

The Head of Planning Services undertook to report back to the Panel with more information once development had commenced.

20. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) informing them of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

Councillor D A Giles highlighted his concerns over reports of Japanese Knotweed growing in Eaton Socon, some of which related to council-owned land, and the implications for the waste collection service. In response, the Scrutiny and Review Manager undertook to produce a scoping report on this matter in order for the Panel to assess whether a study was required.

21. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was advised of progress on issues that had been previously discussed. Having regard to the slow progress that had been made in the production of the Tree Strategy, Councillor J W Davies reported that he had contacted the Arboricultural Officer and a response was awaited.

With regard to the scheduled visit to the Great Fen, given that a number of Members were unable to attend on the proposed date, it was agreed that a new date should be arranged in order to achieve maximum participation.

In response to a request, the Panel appointed Councillor D A Giles to the Waste Collection Working Group.

22. SCRUTINY

The Panel received and noted the latest Edition of the Council's Decision Digest (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), which summarised recent decisions by the Council. In so doing, Councillor J W Davies explained the reasoning behind the Licensing

and Protection Panel's decision to return the responsibility for licensing pavement cafés to the County Council.

Chairman