

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, 11 September 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor D Harty – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee,
I J Curtis, J W Davies, G J Harlock,
C R Hyams and Mrs D C Reynolds.

Co-opted Members Messrs D Hopkins and M Phillips.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors I C Bates and D A Giles.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D M Tysoe

23. MINUTES

Subject to the deletion of the last sentence of the fifth paragraph of Minute No. 12/15, to be replaced by 'Consequently the use of heat from the power station would not currently be possible because of the very high rates of return required, however a financially viable scheme would still be possible. Such a scheme could deliver a 7-10% rate of return which would benefit local businesses and deliver both cheaper heat and electricity', the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10th July 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

25. 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 September to 31st December 2012. Members were advised that a report on charging for a second green bin would be presented to the Panel for consideration in November.

26. FIXED PENALTY NOTICES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

(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) seeking approval for a change in the fine level for Fixed Penalty Notices issued under Sections 46 and 47 of the Environment Protection Act. The change was required by an Amendment Order 2012.

Given that the Council already offered a reduced fine for payment within a certain timescale, combined with the facts that Section 46 notices were rarely issued and no section 47 notices had been issued by the Council, the Panel endorsed the report for submission to the Cabinet.

27. NEW GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES ON THE HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT 1995 (HECA) AND DELIVERY OF THE GREEN DEAL IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

(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 the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 and the delivery of the Green Deal in Huntingdonshire. He emphasised the importance of the Green Deal and that the preferred option to deliver it locally would enable the Council to offer its expertise and the data it held on premises that could benefit from home energy efficiency measures to commercial providers.

Members expressed the view that the Council had a good reputation which could be tarnished if work undertaken as part of a scheme it supported was not of an adequate standard. To this end the Panel suggested that safeguards should be put in place to guarantee the standard of work by suppliers. Furthermore, on the basis of recent experiences reported by Councillor C R Hyams, Members emphasised that the Council's partner companies should employ acceptable sales practices. The Panel was assured that these matters would be addressed through a procurement exercise to identify partners, which would establish a single scheme for Cambridgeshire with acceptable sales methods and effective products.

Members recommended that option two of those identified in paragraph 3.3 of the report was adopted. This meant that the Council would work in partnership with Green Deal providers and community partners to deliver and facilitate the delivery of the Green Deal. The Council's role in this arrangement would be to provide leads for potential customers to be followed up by providers. The Council would benefit through the receipt of referral fees. It was estimated that this could produce an income in the order of £150k per annum. Attention was also drawn to the potential to bring in top-up grant funding through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), which equated to £1.3bn per annum to be invested by the major energy companies to cover a combination of more expensive measures and the delivery of affordable warmth to priority householders who might be suffering from fuel poverty.

The Panel further recommended that once the scheme started to operate, details of accredited partners should be published on the

Council's website. It was also suggested that feedback on providers was sought and monitored to ensure satisfactory services were maintained. This would ensure that members of the public received acceptable services and would protect the Council's reputation.

Having regard to the County Council's involvement in the scheme, Members noted that although it would operate County-wide, only District Councils, being authorities with housing responsibilities, would be party to the scheme. However, the County Council would be involved by providing procurement expertise. Furthermore, the Green Deal was most appropriate for housing and not suitable for County Council assets, such as schools. This position would be confirmed at the forthcoming meeting of the Making Assets Count Board.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended

- (a) to authorise Officers of the Environment Team (in conjunction with Officers from other Cambridgeshire authorities) to undertake further work to develop an outline business case for an action plan to deliver the procurement of a joint local authority Green Deal offering for Cambridgeshire, and
- (b) request that, when completed, the outline business case is presented to Members for consideration including a full appraisal of the work streams and resources required to procure and deliver a Green Deal scheme for Cambridgeshire.

28. JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING

Consideration was given to a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) by the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy on the Joint Statement on the Development Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by the Local Authorities. The Planning Service Manager (Policy) informed Members that the Joint Statement represented a formalised way of working that took into account the National Planning Policy Framework, localism and strategic cross-border matters such as the A14 and the Enterprise Zone.

In response to a question by Councillor G J Harlock on what evidence existed to support the Statement's claim that 'major developments, essential regeneration and infrastructure provision in Cambridgeshire's market towns continue to make positive progress' Members were advised that the Statement covered the whole County in which many examples could be found and that the purpose of the Statement was to balance future infrastructure requirements to allow developments to take place.

Given the need for joint working on cross border issues, Members questioned why the Statement made no reference to neighbouring authorities other than those in Cambridgeshire. They were informed that two meetings had been held with partners including Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Peterborough Councils. This would enable them to comply with the 'duty to co-operate'. Having

regard to the joint working arrangements, Councillor C R Hyams stated that historically Huntingdonshire District Council had delivered on its regional strategic objectives but that not all neighbouring authorities had done so. In response, Members were assured that the joint working arrangements would establish the causes of this and were intended to prevent undue development being forced upon Huntingdonshire District Council. It should ensure that the right development targets would be set for each authority.

Councillor Mrs M Bannerjee expressed the view that the District Council should try to ensure that developments in neighbouring districts did not impact negatively on Huntingdonshire. Having specific regard to the Great Haddon development within Peterborough City Council's jurisdiction, the Planning Service Manager (Policy) advised that the District Council's Planning Officers were working with Officers at Peterborough City Council to mitigate its impact on the northern fringes of Huntingdonshire. It was noted that the development of more than 5000 homes was in Peterborough City Council's Core Strategy; however, at the time it was approved, Peterborough City Council were not involved in the joint working arrangements.

RESOLVED

that the Joint Statement on the Development Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by the local authorities be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

Owing to their importance for the Council's planning function, the Panel received an update on recent Government announcements on temporary changes to the planning system. The Planning Service Manager (Policy) informed Members that there was likely to be a relaxation of planning policy and guidance. At the same time the Planning Inspectorate would have an enhanced role and be instructed to direct resources to appeals that had major economic implications. Consultation was also planned on extending Permitted Development rights, the idea being that this would allow Development Management Officers to process major applications. Finally, other initiatives being planned included allowing offices that were not used to become residential properties and allowing developers to re-negotiate S106 agreements that were not viable.

29. DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Further to Minute No.11/50 and with the assistance of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor Mrs M Banerjee acquainted the Panel with the outcome of the deliberations to date of the Working Group which had been established to examine concerns raised over the Loves Farm development in St Neots and to make recommendations to inform future developments. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that the Building for Life assessments, undertaken by the Working Group during a site visit to Loves Farm, had established that the site had been developed to a silver (good) standard.

The Panel was informed that lessons from Loves Farm would inform

future developments, particularly relating to phasing development and road construction. Having regard to road adoption, Members were advised that the District Council was hoping to engage more effectively with the County Council to ensure that roads on future developments were acceptable to residents in terms of their design and standards. Further to this, it was confirmed that standards relating to car parking allocations had changed. The Planning Service Manager (Policy) reported that these standards together with those for dwelling sizes would be contained in the new Local Plan. However, the Secretary of State had recently announced an urgent review into local and national standards with a view to rationalising them, which could affect the Council's ability to influence such matters.

It was reported that a further meeting would be arranged between the Working Group and the Council's Urban Design, Trees and Landscape Team Leader to discuss aspects of the Design Guide in more detail.

30. THE CONTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURE TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF PLANNING POLICIES

Further to Minute No.11/70 and with the assistance of a report by the Working Group (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor Mrs M Banerjee advised of the findings to date of the study into how agriculture and its environmental work was reflected in the Council's policy framework. The Working Group had formed the view that the importance of rural areas and agriculture should be reflected to a greater extent in the Council's planning policy framework.

The Planning Service Manager (Policy) advised Members that the new Local Plan would address some of the issues raised by the Working Group, specifically the protection of high quality agricultural land. Furthermore, Planning Officers would be looking at 'enabled exceptions' whereby communities would be able to safeguard their own sustainability via community development.

In light of concerns raised by the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy regarding the Working Group's recommendations, it was agreed that the Working Group would meet with Planning Officers to discuss the issues raised and determine a way forward for the study.

31. JAPANESE KNOTWEED

Owing to Councillor D A Giles' absence from the meeting, it was agreed that the consideration of a report on Japanese Knotweed, which had been produced at his suggestion, would be deferred until the next meeting of the Panel.

32. 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.

33. 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. Councillor J W Davies advised Members that there had been a delay in the production of the Tree Strategy, principally due to the voluntary redundancy of administrative staff within the Tree and Landscape Planning Team. It was anticipated that the Strategy would be completed by the end of 2012, at which time consultation would take place.

Councillor M G Baker reported that the Waste Collection Working Group had made good progress against its aim to educate residents as to what items could be placed in which bin.

Councillor Mrs M Banerjee informed Members that two meetings had been held with Anglian Water and the Environment Agency regarding ongoing drainage problems within the District. The Panel noted that County Council Officers would meet with representatives from Anglian Water in order to resolve these issues.

34. 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, the Scrutiny and Review Manager clarified the current position in relation to voluntary sector funding.

Having regard to Members' deliberations on Waste Collection Policies at the previous meeting, Councillor G J Harlock requested further information at a future meeting on the Council's policy on stickers on wheeled bins.

Chairman