

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, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 9 July 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, K J Churchill, J W Davies, D A Giles, D Harty, Ms L Kadic and Mrs D C Reynolds.

Mr D Hopkins – Co-opted Member.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K M Baker and G J Harlock.

14. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 11th June 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

16. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel considered and noted the current Notice of Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council for the period 1st July to 31st December 2013. It was confirmed that the item entitled Loves Farm – Request for Supplementary Estimate related to the Community Centre and had been deferred for consideration by the Cabinet at its September meeting. In noting that the Whole Waste System Approach would be submitted to the Panel at its October meeting, comment was made that there should be early Member involvement in this matter as the proposals were likely to affect all Wards.

17. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY TO WIND TURBINE DEVELOPMENT DRAFT REVISED SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

With the aid of a report prepared by the Planning Service Manager (Policy) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to the Landscape Sensitivity to Wind Turbine Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and the supporting technical evidence prior to their submission to the Cabinet. In introducing the item, the Planning Service Manager (Policy) reported that the Draft Revised SPD had been updated to take into

account the publication of new national policy guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the development of the technical methodological approach to assessing landscape sensitivity to wind turbine development since 2005, the need for guidance on the siting and design of smaller scale wind turbines and the need to clarify the document's evidence base. The evidence base included an additional commissioned piece of work on the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines in Huntingdonshire, which detailed all operational and consented wind turbine developments in the District together with those which currently were awaiting determination.

The Chairmen drew attention to the content of a letter sent to Members by Mr Watters, a representative of Molesworth Action Group, in which he stated a number of concerns relating to various aspects of the proposed SPD. In the letter the view was expressed that the guidance on wind turbine developments had been relaxed. In response, the Landscape Officer confirmed that there may have been some confusion over the reclassification of wind turbine group sizes within the SPD but the guidance overall was designed to tighten up the guidelines for developers. The omission of separation distances between developments was a further area of concern and it was held that other local authorities within Cambridgeshire had introduced them. However the Landscape Officer confirmed that this was not correct and that, in any case, the Local Plan was the appropriate place for such a policy. Finally, in response to references in the letter, clarification was received of the term "historic village". It was noted that this included conservation areas as well as buildings of historic interest which were on the Listed Buildings Register. Having expressed their satisfaction with the responses received to the points made, Members requested that a written response was sent to Mr Watters.

Following discussion on the findings of the study on the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines in Huntingdonshire and in acknowledging the importance of this piece of work, the Panel made a recommendation that in order to give the draft revised SPD further weight and to make it better able to withstand the rigours of an appeal, the document should be subject to a separate public consultation exercise. It was therefore agreed that this recommendation should be put to the Cabinet.

Having regard to the NPPF, a Member commented upon the omission of the terms "adverse visual impact" and "material harm" from the SPD. The Planning Policy Manager (Policy) responded by informing the Panel that they appeared in the Core Strategy. Nevertheless, the Panel recommended that explicit reference to these terms should be incorporated within the new planning policy framework.

Discussion then ensued on the wind turbine group sizes proposed within the SPD which was previously of particular concern to the Panel. Members were not satisfied that the group sizes had been satisfactorily justified, particularly when considering the District's unique landscape characteristics. They reiterated the point made in January 2013, when the draft revised SPD had been considered prior to public consultation, that the SPD should not include the proposed

upper limit for large groups of wind turbines. At that time it was argued that the specification of an upper limit would provide developers with an indication of the level of development for which they could expect to receive approval and, in some cases, they might expect to exceed that level. The Panel thought that the SPD should be strengthened to provide more rigidity in this respect. Whilst it was acknowledged that the previous Land Use Consultants Study was used to inform the existing and the revised SPD group sizes, it was considered that this report had been based on areas which had differing landscape characteristics to those of Huntingdonshire. Furthermore, Table 1 of the SPD provided a summary of potential capacity for wind turbine developments, which indicated that there was, at best, moderate capacity for large groups with some of these limited to groups of 13-15. In addition, Table 6 revealed that some areas of the District were already reaching saturation point. It was further noted that conditions placed on existing developments severely restricted further development. Members argued that as capacity for turbines at the upper end of the large group size had already been restricted, the large group size should not be set at 24. In that light, the Panel recommended that further work should be undertaken significantly to revise downwards the size of the groups.

The Panel then discussed the absence of separation distances from the draft revised SPD. It was suggested that a minimum distance of 2km should be introduced either within the draft Local Plan or the SPD itself. Members recommended that Officers should be requested to produce terms for such a policy for approval by Members.

Whilst the Panel recognised the need for the Council to have in place a SPD for wind turbine developments, with reference to the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines in Huntingdonshire, it was clear that owing to the fact that the District had reached saturation point in certain landscape character areas, Government policy represented a particular challenge. Comment was also made that there appeared to be fewer wind turbine developments in neighbouring local authority areas.

A number of other matters were discussed including the guidance on wind turbine developments due to be issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government, National Grid connections and the use of photo montages. Having regard to the former, it was reported that the impact of the announcement was not yet known but would need to be taken into account in the future.

Having commended Officers for the production of a high quality, objective and comprehensive report, it was

RESOLVED

that the Panel's comments and recommendations on the report by the Planning Service Manager (Policy), the Landscape Sensitivity to Wind Turbine Development Supplementary Planning Document and the study on the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines in Huntingdonshire be conveyed to the Cabinet.

18. UPDATE ON DRAINAGE IN YAXLEY

Owing to delays with receiving a response from Anglian Water, the Chairman reported that this item would be deferred for consideration at a future Panel meeting.

19. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Social Well-Being and Economic Well-Being. The Chairman indicated that he would be making enquiries into how the Environmental Panel might have an input into the items on Economic Development and on the Local Plan 2036 – Provision of Social, Affordable and Supported Housing which were being examined by the Economic Well-Being Panel and Social Well-Being Panel respectively.

20. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions. The Chairman delivered a brief update on the work being undertaken by the Corporate Plan Working Group on the development of the Council Delivery Plan, which would then be used to hold Executive Members to account on the performance of their respective service areas.

Having regard to the Tree Strategy and Design Guide, the Chairman indicated that he would be raising both matters at a meeting he had arranged with the Assistant Director for Environment, Growth and Planning and the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing. In noting that a report on the Whole Waste System Approach would be submitted to the Panel in October, Councillor M G Baker reported that the Waste Collection Working Group would consider whether to reconvene once the work on RECAP was complete.

In terms of rural transport and the suggestion made at the previous meeting that local bus services within Towns might be a potential future study area, the Panel decided that both matters should be raised by Councillor Mrs L Kadić through her Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative scrutiny work. Members then requested that a scoping report on car parking management and a position statement on areas where household recycling was not taking place were submitted to the Panel at its September meeting. Finally, the Panel agreed to remove the impact of large scale housing developments upon the A428 from its work programme as it was a matter that would be addressed through the Local Plan.

21. SCRUTINY

Having considered the 135th Edition of the Decision Digest, the Panel

placed on record their concerns at the increase in waiting times for Occupational Therapy assessments which was reported as currently being 26 weeks. This matter had been discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) as part of their deliberations on the Home Improvement Agency Shared Service Review and Disabled Facilities Grant Budget report.

Chairman