

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMY AND GROWTH) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 5th October 2017.

PRESENT: Councillor D B Dew – Chairman.
Councillors C E Bober, E R Butler,
Mrs S Conboy, I D Gardener, D J Mead,
T D Sanderson, Mrs J Tavener and
D R Underwood.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B Hyland and K D Wainwright.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller and J White.

21. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7th September 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors Mrs S Conboy and D R Underwood declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Minute Number 24 as Members of Godmanchester Town Council.

Councillors E R Butler, I D Gardener and D J Mead declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in relation to Minute Number 25 as owners or occupiers of land or property subject to Business Rates or in receipt of rate relief.

23. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st October 2017 to 31st January 2018.

24. GODMANCHESTER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN EXAMINATION OUTCOME AND PROGRESSION TO REFERENDUM

With the aid of a report by the Senior Planning Policy Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the report on the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan Examination Outcome and Progression to Referendum was presented to the Panel.

The Executive Councillor for Housing and Planning introduced the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan which the Examiner had recommended should progress to referendum following appropriate modifications. The Council's decision was described as a procedural

matter which did not require a forensic examination of policy. If a majority of residents were to vote 'yes' at a referendum then the District Council would be asked to 'make' the Neighbourhood Plan and it would become part of the statutory development plan for Huntingdonshire.

Planning officers and Godmanchester Town Council were commended on the work undertaken, with the Neighbourhood Plan seen as an example of how well the District Council and Town/Parish Councils can work together. This view was mirrored by Godmanchester Town Councillors present.

The Panel's attention was drawn to an email from Carter Jonas, property agents working on behalf of The Fairfield Partnership, which had been circulated to Members (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). In response to a main point raised, officers observed that the end date of 2036 had been selected specifically in order to converge with the end date of the draft Local Plan. This was described as a perfectly reasonable choice given that the Core Strategy with an end date of 2026 is due to be superseded by the Local Plan. There is a mechanism to address conflicts between plans, with the most recently adopted plan taking precedence, but emerging Local Plan policies are compatible with those in the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan without requiring further changes at this stage. The next iteration of the Local Plan after adoption would be before 2036 and would allow an opportunity for Godmanchester to update their Neighbourhood Plan as well. Based on the recommendation from the Examiner, changing the end date is not among the limited options available to Cabinet without going back through the examination stage.

The Fairfield Partnership's interest was described as seeking allocation of land further east of the Romans' Edge site for housing and there will be opportunities for them to seek to achieve this through the Local Plan process. As a point of clarification, it was confirmed that the modified Neighbourhood Plan does include a definition of what constitutes a 'moderate' sized site (10-59 dwellings). The observations made in the email from Carter Jonas were noted by the Panel.

Members discussed the recommendation made by the Examiner. The Neighbourhood Plan appended to the report has been updated post examination, with Planning Officers and the Town Council agreeing to the modifications and supporting the recommendation to Cabinet. The Panel made a recommendation to Cabinet that they should act upon the Examiner's report and recommended modifications, and progress the Neighbourhood Plan to referendum.

25. BUSINESS RATES DISCRETIONARY REVALUATION RELIEF SCHEME 2017/18

The Panel was reminded that Business Rates are set nationally but collected locally. The Discretionary Revaluation Relief Scheme is one of three additional relief schemes announced as part of the Government's Spring 2017 budget and the report proposes how the Council's allocation of funding will be shared between businesses based in the District over four years.

While the proposed policy has been designed using the principles used by Government to determine the level of funding available, the Head of Customer Services explained that one significant change is proposed by specifically excluding multi-national companies through the qualifying criteria.

Members discussed the policy and were supportive of the decision to support smaller local businesses and the proposal to retain some of the funding as a contingency pot for use on a case-by-case basis to make awards to businesses adversely affected by the revaluation that do not meet the qualifying criteria. It was confirmed that the impact on local businesses has been modelled and the benefits of the relief scheme are spread across the district with both market towns and rural communities receiving a fair share.

There was discussion of whether reviews under the right of appeal should be carried out solely by a Head of Service. Members were advised that the Head of Customer Services would undertake these reviews independently from the team administering the policy and awarding relief but the Panel felt that Executive Member involvement should be considered.

The Panel made a recommendation to Cabinet that, subject to considering amending the right of appeal in section nine to require Executive Member involvement in reviews, they approve the Business Rates Discretionary Revaluation Relief Scheme for 2017/18 and delegate authority to the Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources to agree the revised Business Rates Revaluation Schemes for the next three consecutive years.

26. STRATEGIC REVIEW OF CAR PARKING TASK AND FINISH GROUP - VISION

The Executive Councillor for Operations outlined work undertaken by the Member Task and Finish Group (TFG) and the stages to follow agreement of the Parking Vision. The Panel was reminded that the scope of the TFG's work does not include reviewing car park fees and charges.

Timescales for future stages were discussed, with strategy development due to commence after the Vision has been agreed. There is a lot more evidence gathering and research to do to inform the strategy and following stages, with no fixed end date set for the final stage as there is a desire to do the work right and the amount of work involved in each stage still needs to be confirmed. The Executive Councillor for Operations will prepare a forward plan.

Members discussed the need to manage public expectations following the survey, with a suggestion that information could be published to set out the next steps and projected milestones. It was felt that in communicating the Vision there would be a need to be clear about why this focuses on Council-run car parks rather than wider car parking issues raised by the public. There were some concerns about the impact of changes to car park ownership since the timescales for asset disposals may require decisions before the parking strategy is likely to be completed.

Members welcomed a proposal to invite the Head of Operations to explain the complexities of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) to the Panel and suggested that other Members could be invited to attend for this. Findings from the CPE study could be presented to the Panel when ready.

One Member expressed disappointment with the number of survey responses. While the 1,177 participants were a fraction of the number of residents and car park users who could have taken part, the market research company undertaking the survey was impressed with the response.

Panel Members who are members of the TFG confirmed that they were happy with the direction of their work and all Panel Members were in favour of the Parking Vision. The Panel made a recommendation to Cabinet that they endorse the Parking Vision developed.

27. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel reviewed the latest work programmes for each of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

The Chairman had met with the Corporate Director (Delivery) and the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) who will bring ideas forward from the Panel's September meeting, some of which may involve joint Panel working.

Items relating to the Local Plan or which the Planning Policy team are responsible for are being held back as the team continues to focus on the Local Plan. Such items will be scheduled in after Local Plan work concludes.

The Panel is due to receive updates on devolution from the Executive Councillor for Devolution and Growth and representatives on the Combined Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its November meeting. Members are keen to hear about how well the Combined Authority is working and how its activities are impacting on Huntingdonshire.

Members are keen to be involved in scrutiny of asset disposal proposals. This is likely to be led by the Performance and Customers Panel but could be achieved through a joint meeting or by inviting interested Members to attend another Panel's meeting.

Following some recent issues, Members would like the Performance and Customers Panel to request an update or review of Legal shared services.