

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 6th December 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor T D Alban – Chairman.
Councillors R E Bellamy, S J Criswell,
J W Davies, Ms A Diaz, K I Prentice,
Mrs S Smith and D R Underwood.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B S Banks, S Bywater and Mrs J Tavener.

38. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2018 was approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

40. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st December 2018 to 31st March 2019.

41. ECOLOGY PLANS - A14 CAMBRIDGE TO HUNTINGDON IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

Representatives from Highways England were in attendance to present their ecology plans for the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme. The presentation focused on the A14 improvement scheme within Huntingdonshire.

Members were informed that Highways England, where possible, avoid areas of ecological importance. Where avoidance is not possible then the areas are either protected or mitigation measures are put in place.

In terms of wider biodiversity, a number of species have been affected and trees have been felled. The Panel was informed that twice as many trees will be planted than are lost through the scheme and that the tree planted will be native to the area.

Highways England fund a Legacy Project and communities who are affected by the scheme are able to apply for funding for community projects. In response to a question the Panel was informed that there is no arbitrary geographical criterion only that the community has to

have a link to the A14.

Following a question the Highways England representatives outlined the position on badgers. Members were informed that badgers aren't rare; however there is legal protection for badgers and their sets. It was explained that where necessary affected sets are closed under licence and that artificial sets are created. Work to close the sets is only carried out at a certain time of year.

The Panel was informed that as soon as the scheme is complete then replanting will begin. It was explained that the process will take time and that it might take 15 years, depending on conditions, until the density returns to pre scheme levels. It was reiterated that if it is possible to avoid removing vegetation in a particular area then Highways England will not remove it.

In response to a question about increasing the quantity of Huntingdonshire Elm Trees in the District, Members were informed that the problem with planting Huntingdonshire Elm Trees is that Dutch Elm disease has not been eradicated.

Air quality management for section six (Huntingdon Town improvement works) was discussed. It was explained that the Huntingdon section of the A14 was a 'pollution hotspot' and that the most effective way to reduce/remove pollution is to remove the pollution source, i.e. the traffic. Removal of the viaduct will significantly reduce through traffic. It was explained that, in terms of air quality, the benefit of removing the viaduct would vastly outweigh any impacts from the creation of replacement local road links.

42. GREAT FEN PROJECT

The Great Fen Project Manager, Kate Carver, was in attendance to present to Members progress of the Great Fen project. The Great Fen Masterplan was outlined to the Panel.

The Masterplan includes the four aims which are:

- Natural and historic environment – to create a new resilient fenland landscape delivering sustainable wildlife and heritage benefits.
- Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation – to plan, design and manage the Great Fen to benefit climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Social – to create an accessible, inspiring and tranquil environment for recreation, education, health and wellbeing.
- Economic – to contribute to diversification and development of the local economy, consistent with environmental and social objectives.

Members were informed that, in order to achieve economic development, the Great Fen aims to expand and that tourist infrastructure will accompany the expansion.

In response to a question on the affordability and availability of land, the Panel was informed that the last tranche of land purchased was previously owned by the Crown Estates and that the Great Fen applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funds. The Great Fen can't

transform all the land as soon as they purchased it as there are still tenant farmers who have the right to continue farming for the length of their leases.

In relation to working with other attractions in the area, it was confirmed that the Great Fen work with other attractions and that work is ongoing to develop a tourist network. In addition, the Great Fen has developed their website in order to encourage visitors to the area.

A discussion ensued on UNESCO biospheres and Members were informed that the Great Fen is working with over 30 Non-Government Organisations and other bodies across Cambridgeshire towards achieving a UNESCO Cambridgeshire Fens Biosphere.

In response to a question about access for wheelchair users, it was confirmed that there is wheelchair access but not everywhere across the Great Fen is wheelchair accessible.

43. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was presented to the Panel.

Members were informed that the scoping document for the Task and Finish Group on Health has been drafted and will be reviewed by the Group before work commences.

Chairman