
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Support)

**Report of the meetings held on 10th February and
10th March 2009**

Matters for Information

39. REGIONAL SCALE SETTLEMENT STUDY

The Panel has considered the contents of the Regional Scale Settlement Study which analyses various potential levels of future growth suggested by the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit. The study identifies potential locations for regional scale growth and regional scale new settlements within the East of England.

In so doing, the Panel noted that Huntingdon/Alconbury has been identified as a possible new growth location, which would comprise a minimum of 20,000 new homes. The Panel has expressed concerns relating to the timing of the study, its lack of analysis and justification for the preferred location. The Panel was informed that the County Council, in partnership with the District Councils in the County has commissioned consultants to prepare a Cambridgeshire Development Study to establish the sustainability of different levels of growth. In addition the District Council intends to commission its own independent consultants to inform the Council's response to the proposal and provide evidence at the examination in public of the regional plan amendments.

The Head of Planning Services suggested to the Panel that growth on the scale envisaged at Huntingdon/Alconbury would not be sustainable and also that there is general concern over the scale of growth being proposed by the Government in the current economic climate. Members acknowledged that development of the size proposed at Huntingdon/Alconbury would have a significant impact on the character of the District, and would further exacerbate the imbalance between housing growth and a shortfall in local employment, leading to greater out-commuting from the District and subsequent road and rail congestion.

The Panel has recommended the Cabinet to rebut strongly the findings of the EERA study, and support the need for the

Council to invest in commissioning its own consultants to provide evidence for the response.

The Executive Councillor for Planning and Transportation and the Head of Planning Services have agreed to attend a future meeting of the Panel to report on the outcome of the Cambridgeshire Development Study and the District Council's response to the Regional Scale Settlement Study.

40. LOCAL INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK

The Panel has endorsed the content of a Huntingdonshire Local Investment Framework which has been compiled by the Council to determine the level of local and strategic infrastructure required to meet the target of new homes identified for Huntingdonshire in the core strategy up to 2026.

The study has identified the infrastructure needs of the growth locations in the District and analysed what contributions developers could make by way of Section 106 Planning obligations. A projects database model has been drawn up to deliver the required infrastructure which will be updated in line with changing circumstances. Evidence from this study will be used to prepare a supplementary planning document for planning obligations which will link to the core strategy and produce a total figure for planning obligations expressed as a tariff per dwelling.

Members were informed that later in the year, regulations are anticipated on the introduction of the community infrastructure levy under the Planning Act 2008. It is expected that the Local Investment Framework will provide evidence when producing a charging schedule for developers under the levy regulations which will be the subject of debate in due course.

The Panel's comments were conveyed to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 12th March 2009. Item No. 81 of the report to Cabinet refers.

41. CONSULTATION ON CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE AND LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY

The Panel has considered a proposed response to a consultation exercise on the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

In considering a report by the Communities and Marketing Manager, the Panel was concerned that the growth in electronic communications is not adequately reflected in the code and that there is a need for greater Member awareness and compliance with the Code arising both from the development of electronic communication and the fact that failure to have regard for the Code is a potential breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.

The Panel's attention also was drawn to the County Council's practice when issuing press releases of including the contact details of a spokesperson of the opposition political party which the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy has undertaken to consider in the case of press releases issued by the District Council.

The Panel's comments were conveyed to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 12th March 2009. Item No. 85 of the report to Cabinet refers.

42. MONITORING OF SECTION 106 (PLANNING OBLIGATIONS)

The Panel has been updated on the receipt and expenditure of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements by the Council. In so doing, the Panel noted that a number of developers have requested the re-negotiation of trigger points due to the current economic climate.

43. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Council's performance against the targets within the Corporate Plan "Growing Success" has been reviewed by the Panel.

The Panel has been pleased to note that all of the indicators where statistics are available were positive with the exception of the external funding strategy. In the latter case Members were advised that the External Funding Officer has been asked to concentrate on an application for an external source of funding, and as a result, completion of the strategy has been delayed slightly.

44. SECTION 106 WORKING GROUP

The Panel has considered and endorsed a report by a working group which was established to investigate the Section 106 process operated by the Council. A series of recommendations has been forwarded to Cabinet with the report and the Cabinet's response is contained in the report. (Item No. 84 of its report refers).

45. FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the Forward Plan of forthcoming decisions prepared by the Leader of the Council.

46. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel has been advised of progress made to-date on its programme of studies.

47. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT) - PROGRESS

The Panel has been advised of progress on actions required as a result of recent decisions, as part of which further information has been requested from Anglian Water regarding the ongoing problems with the foul sewerage system in the St. Audrey's Lane area of St. Ives and clarification is sought as to whether planning permission has been granted for the car park being constructed at the train station in Huntingdon.

48. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest editions of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein.

Members have been given an update in respect of the improvement works at Huntingdon and St. Neots Rail Stations, where a decision on the issue of permitted development rights is still awaited. The Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport has reported on the outcome of his discussions with Stagecoach with regard to bus timetabling matters. Members have been invited to contact the Head of Planning Services if they have any specific concerns relating to development control enforcement action and the length of time taken to resolve any outstanding cases.

J A Gray
Chairman