

Decision Digest

Edition 94

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 14th April to 14th May 2009.

REVIEW OF THE HOME-LINK SCHEME AND THE COUNCIL'S LETTINGS POLICY

The outcome of a review of Home-Link, the choice based lettings scheme, has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery). The review examined strategic and operational aspects of the scheme and involved consultation with housing association partners, statutory and voluntary agencies and customers of the scheme. The reported level of users' satisfaction with the scheme was welcomed by the Panel. However the review has revealed that some customers have difficulty in understanding the mechanics of the scheme and that some users require assistance to bid for properties. Continued efforts will be made to inform potential users and raise awareness generally of the support that is available, particularly for those on the Housing Register.

The Panel was encouraged that the review concluded that the Council's Lettings Policy was adequate to meet local need and that only a minor amendment was required. The amendment related to the re-prioritisation of homeless persons by awarding them a Band B priority.

This change was subsequently supported by the Panel. The Panel's views have been considered at a meeting of the Cabinet, where the contents of the revised lettings policy for the Council along with a series of planned enhancements to the Home-link scheme were approved.

SPORTS FACILITY STRATEGY

The Cabinet has approved the contents of the Sports Facility Strategy for Huntingdonshire 2009-2014. The Strategy will help to achieve an adequate range of sports facilities to meet future need.

An attempt has been made to identify all sports facilities available across Huntingdonshire, inclusive of those owned by the private, voluntary and education sectors. Comparisons have been made with national recommended levels of provision and the outcome will be used to inform future provision of facilities in the District. The document has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery); they recommended to Cabinet that the strategy be adopted on the understanding that the Council will not be solely responsible for being the provider of such facilities.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS TO ST IVES TOWN CENTRE

The outcome of a consultation exercise undertaken by the Council as part of the second phase of environmental improvements to the Market Hill and Bridge Street areas of St Ives has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery). The Panel's role is to ensure that the Environmental Improvements Protocol has been adhered to in advance of any works being carried out.

The consultation reveals that there is no clear majority amongst respondents for any of the three options presented for consultation. The Advisory Group which was set up to oversee the environmental improvements scheme has scrutinised the results of the consultation and has suggested, as there appears to be no consensus for any of the options, that the scheme should be deferred from its planned start date of January 2010 to enable a review of the options to take place. The deferment would also be timely given the current economic climate and the impact that works would have on local retailers within the town. In addition, works might adversely affect planned celebrations of the Town's 800th Anniversary.

The Panel has expressed their satisfaction that the Environmental Improvements Protocol has been adhered to and has suggested to the Cabinet that deferral of the scheme is the preferred course of action to take. This would enable the formulation of a scheme which

more adequately suits the requirements of the Town. In addition, the Panel has suggested that financial contributions towards the cost of the scheme should be sought from the County and Town Councils.

Having considered the views of the Panel, the Cabinet has agreed to defer the project for three years to allow time for the production of a scheme which meets the majority of requirements of the interested parties and not to proceed without commitments by the County Council and St. Ives Town Council to make financial contributions to the project. The Cabinet has requested also that the results of the Bridge Street consultation be sent to the County Council to enable them to amend their parking orders relating to loading and disabled bays.

RECYCLING

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has been updated with the outcome of recent negotiations on the contract for the processing and onward sale of recyclable materials. In light of recent trends within the market, the terms of the current contract in respect of gate fees has been varied. This contract would cease in November 2009. A tendering process is currently being undertaken for a new contract in conjunction with Fenland District Council and Cambridge City Council.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007 -

IMPLICATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the Corporate Governance Panel have been acquainted with legislative changes affecting Overview and Scrutiny, which have arisen from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The changes introduce a Councillor Call for Action, which enables any Member of the Council to refer to an Overview and Scrutiny Panel any local government matter relevant to the functions of that Panel. The changes require alterations to the Council Procedure Rules and the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules contained within the Constitution. Both Scrutiny Panels have endorsed the content of a guide outlining the process for making a Councillor Call for Action, and this has subsequently been recommended for adoption by the Corporate Governance Panel to Council.

Attention has been drawn to changes which affect the scope of Scrutiny Panel work and the way in which Overview and Scrutiny reports and recommendations must be responded to. In addition, there now exist provisions for joint Overview and Scrutiny arrangements between the County and District Councils. These changes have taken effect from 1st April 2009. Legislation relating to the scrutiny of crime and disorder matters is likely to come into force at the end of April 2009.

NHS CAMBRIDGESHIRE: STRATEGIC PLAN 2009 - 2014

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has received details of a consultation being undertaken by NHS Cambridgeshire on the content of their Strategic Plan for the period 2009 - 2014. In advance of submitting a response to the consultation, the Panel has decided to meet with a representative of NHS Cambridgeshire to discuss the proposals contained within the Plan in detail. The consultation period ends on 29th May 2009.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 - FORWARD PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has requested sight of items entitled St Ivo and St Neots Leisure Centres - Proposals for Development, Carbon Management Plan, Sustainable Communities Act and Leisure Centres Performance Monitoring Report prior to their consideration by the Cabinet.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has requested sight of the comments on the proposed changes to the policy for gypsies and travellers in the East of England Plan.

PROPOSALS FOR RIVERSIDE PARK, HUNTINGDON

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has considered a report by the Heads of Planning, Operations and Environmental Management Services on the outcome of a consultation exercise on proposed improvements to the Riverside Park, Huntingdon. The Panel has been advised that the

improvements scheme has been split into two phases to reflect the views expressed during the consultation and the financial situation of the Council. The Panel has raised concerns over the allocation of £15,000 for the 'greening' of the traffic island at the Bridge Hotel, as this forms part of the highway, and as such is considered to be the responsibility of the County Council. The Panel has expressed a view that the amount allocated for planting is excessive, and does not support the proposed ongoing revenue expenditure of £20,000 per annum for improved maintenance of the wildlife area at the park. The Panel broadly welcome the scheme but feel that Phase II of the improvements should be regarded as aspirational only at this stage.

Having considered the views of the Panel and the outcome of the consultation exercise, the Cabinet has authorised the Head of Operations to undertake a programme of maintenance only at the park and to liaise with the Executive Councillors for Finance & Environment, Planning Strategy & Transportation and Operational & Countryside Services over the extent and cost of the work to be done.

MASTERPLAN FOR LAND EAST OF SAPLEY SQUARE, OXMOOR

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has endorsed a report and proposed masterplan, which has been drafted following public consultation on the preferred

options for Sapley East and the development of a community enterprise centre. The Panel has commented on the success of the consultation exercise and has noted that local residents welcome the proposals in the masterplan. Subsequently the document has been approved as informal planning guidance by the Cabinet.

HUNTINGDON WEST AREA ACTION PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has considered a report by the Head of Planning Services on the preferred approach for taking forward the Huntingdon West Area Action Plan. Although the Panel has welcomed the proposals, concerns have been raised over the highway implications of the proposals and the possibility that the removal of the viaduct at the Railway station would create an increase in traffic congestion. The Panel has suggested that a more aspirational approach could be taken to secure highway improvements as part of the action plan.

Subsequently, the Plan has been approved for public consultation by the Cabinet.

THE RSS REVIEW – THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE DEVELOPMENT STUDY

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has been acquainted with the basis of a response to the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) by the Joint Cambridgeshire Review Panel (CReSSP) on the review of the

regional spatial strategy. The Panel remain concerned over the proposals and their implications for Huntingdonshire.

The Panel supports the concept of development occurring where employment opportunities exist, and feel that the proposals do not pay sufficient regard to the substantial improvement to public transport in the county. The Panel has been reminded that the District Council will be commissioning its own independent consultants to inform the Council's response to the proposals and evidence at the subsequent examination in public on the regional plan proposals. The Panel has endorsed a recommendation by the Head of Planning Services that the District Council should adopt the following principles when responding to the EERA proposal -

- (i) that the emerging 'Cambridgeshire Growth Strategy' is underpinned by a positive commitment to a highly sustainable approach that will both direct policy development and influence the proposed spatial pattern of development;
- (ii) that the emerging 'Cambridgeshire Growth Strategy' principally reinforces and builds upon the established sequential approach to the direction of further growth within Cambridgeshire;
- (iii) that the emerging 'Cambridgeshire Growth Strategy' acknowledges that

there is limited capacity for additional growth above the established RSS levels and therefore any targets for growth up to 2031 must reflect the lower rather than the higher NHPAU scenarios;

- (iv) that the emerging 'Cambridgeshire Growth Strategy' acknowledges the need to utilise the capacity, of, and the opportunities created by, existing and committed transport and other infrastructure provision;
- (v) that the emerging 'Cambridgeshire Growth Strategy' acknowledges the essential needs to co-locate homes with jobs. As the economic models favour jobs growth in the south of the county and acknowledge the challenges associated with the potential job creation in the north of the County, then that is where the majority of new homes need to be located; and
- (vi) that the emerging 'Cambridgeshire Growth Strategy' recognises that whilst the market towns could sustainably accommodate further growth, and indeed such growth could aid their regeneration, these market towns do have environmental capacities that need to be respected.

These principles together with a suggestion for testing options for higher growth have been endorsed by the Cabinet. At the same time,

the Cabinet has requested the County Council's Cabinet to take appropriate account of the District Council's statements of support and concerns and to amend the basis of its suggested advice to EERA accordingly.

SMALL BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT ACCORD

The Cabinet has agreed to adopt the Federation of Small Businesses Accord, a voluntary code of practice for local authorities which seeks to maintain or encourage a productive dialogue with local businesses.

ENFORCEMENT ACTION

The Development Control Panel has noted action taken by the Council to obtain an injunction to prevent unauthorised occupation of a site for residential development off the A1123, Needingworth Road, Bluntisham. No further development has subsequently taken place on site.

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL - PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Having considered the level of activity of the Development Control Services during the period 1st October to 31st December, 2008, the Development Control Panel has welcomed a report that Government performance targets for the determination of major, minor and other applications within the prescribed timescales had all been exceeded over this period.