
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

**Report of the meetings held on 14th July and
8th September 2009**

Matters for Information

7. GREAT FEN

Following the earlier consideration of issues relating to the Great Fen Project by the Overview and Scrutiny (Service Support) Panel, the Panel has been informed of a proposal for the Council to enter with other organisations into a Collaboration Agreement for the project. (Members of the Social and Economic Well-Being Panels were also invited to attend the meeting for consideration of this item).

The Panel accepts that the Collaboration Agreement offers the most appropriate governance arrangement between the various partners at the present stage of development of the Great Fen Project and has been advised that the agreement will be reviewed once the venture moves into a trading position. The Panel has expressed its ongoing support for the Council's involvement to enable the views of the local community to be represented and provide a democratic focus for the project.

A number of issues were raised by the Panel in relation to the detailed content of the agreement itself to avoid future ambiguity. The Panel also raised a concern that the confidentiality provisions in the agreement might impede future scrutiny and transparency in the management of the project. The Panel has been advised that this is not the intention and that the precise wording will be re-visited with partners.

The Panel has suggested that an annual report be presented to partners on progress towards the achievement of the project's aims and objectives.

The Panel has also been acquainted with the details of the Great Fen Master Plan. (Members of the Social and Economic Well-Being Panels were invited to attend the meeting for consideration of this Item.)

The Panel has welcomed the production of the Masterplan as the next stage in the planning process for the Great Fen Project and reiterated its support for the Council's involvement in the venture.

While Members recognise that further detailed work will be undertaken to produce an action plan, the Panel has however questioned the absence of reference to business planning and long term financial forecast in the document.

The Panel also has questioned the financial viability of the visitor centre and, having regard to its location, concerns have been raised over the condition of the B660 access road which the Panel felt will need to be improved in light of the anticipated visitor numbers.

The Panel is anxious to ensure that there will be no long-term financial implications for the Council arising from the cessation of grants awarded to the project. Members also were mindful of the danger of creating aspirations through the consultation process that it might not be possible to fund in the future. The Panel has been encouraged to learn that some local land owners who initially were not in favour of the project were beginning to approach partners to discuss the possibility of changing their farming methods in line with the project's vision.

The views of the Panel have been passed to Cabinet for its consideration.

8. SCRUTINY OF HUNTINGDONSHIRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The Panel has considered a report which provides background information on the areas that fall within its responsibility with regard to scrutiny of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership (HSP). These include scrutiny of the Environment and Growth and Infrastructure Thematic Groups established under the HSP.

9. ADOPTION OF ROADS AND SEWERS

The Panel has received the final report of its working group which was established to investigate the processes and procedures involved in the adoption of roads and sewers process. The report highlights the problems that can be encountered by house buyers in ensuring that the infrastructure will be maintained at public expense and the difficulties faced by the highways and water bodies in ensuring that roads and sewers are completed to adoptable standard.

The working group's report and recommendations have been endorsed by the Panel for submission to the Cabinet.

10. THE HUNTINGDONSHIRE CORE STRATEGY 2008 – THE INSPECTOR'S BINDING REPORT/ADOPTION PROCESS

The Panel has considered a report which provides information on the Inspector's considerations and conclusions regarding the soundness of the DPD, following his examination of the submitted core strategy. The Panel has been pleased to note that the majority of changes to the Core Strategy had been proposed by the Council and any changes imposed by the Inspector were negligible.

11. SOUTH STREET PUBLIC CONVENIENCE, ST. NEOTS

The Panel has considered a report on the South Street public conveniences, St. Neots. Notwithstanding the poor condition of the public conveniences, it was the view of a local Member that the facility is well used by shoppers. The Panel supports the view that no further expenditure should be incurred in improving the facility but has suggested that St. Neots Town Council be offered the option of improving and maintaining this public convenience before any final decision is made as to their future by the Cabinet.

The views of the Panel have been passed to Cabinet for its consideration.

12. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Council's performance against the environmental well-being targets within the corporate plan "Growing Success" has been reviewed by the Panel. The Panel has been pleased to note that all but one of the indicators where statistics are available were positive.

13. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel has appointed Councillors M G Baker, P Godley, M F Newman and J S Watt to a working group to investigate the development management process.

14. FORWARD PLAN

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

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

The Panel has been advised of progress on issues that had been previously discussed, arising from which the Panel has requested an update on the issue of heavy commercial vehicles parking in the District.

The Vice-Chairman of the Panel has undertaken to write to Anglian Water with regard to the sewerage problems encountered in the St. Audrey Lane Area of St. Ives to expedite a reply. The Panel also has requested updates on the status of the car park constructed at the railway station in Huntingdon and with regard to cycling in Huntingdonshire. Furthermore, the Panel has requested the receipt of the minutes of future Joint Accountability Committee meetings. The Panel has also requested further information about the cycle way planned alongside the St. Ives guided bus way.

16. SCRUTINY

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

P M D Godfrey
Chairman