

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park on Tuesday, 12 January 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor P M D Godfrey – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker,
P J Downes, P Godley, D Harty, A Monk,
M F Newman and J S Watt.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs M Banerjee.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D B Dew

71. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 8th December 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

72. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

73. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered and noted the current forward plan of key decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet, which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council.

74. STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT (SHLAA)

(Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport was in attendance for this item).

The Head of Planning Services acquainted the Group with the purpose and process of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. The exercise had identified and assessed potentially suitable sites for housing development as part of the Local Development Framework. This had been undertaken by an initial 'call for sites' in June 2009, with those sites submitted being assessed against specific criteria in conjunction with the housing market partnership and followed by a detailed assessment that identified each site's suitability, availability and achievability. The Panel was pleased to note that the process had shown that Huntingdonshire had sufficient land supply for fifteen years and could demonstrate the achievement of a sustainable strategy for growth.

Having regard to flooding problems encountered in St. Ives, the Panel was assured that Anglian Water would be consulted prior to the allocation of sites in that area.

It was noted that public consultation on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment would be ongoing until spring 2010.

75. OVERVIEW OF NEW WEBSITE - FEATURES AND BENEFITS

The Panel received a presentation by the Head of Information Management Division and IT Development Team Leader, on the Council's new website. The Panel was advised that the new website had been developed due to a need to upgrade the existing web infrastructure and in so doing, the opportunity had been taken to improve the functionality and appearance of the website. It was reported that phase 2 of the upgrade would include the development of 'My Council', which would make the website more personal to the user.

Having regard to the website design, the Panel questioned whether downloadable documents could be designed so that they were both brief and legible if printed in black and white. In response, Members were informed that templates were provided to directorates to provide design guidance and training was also given on the use of 'plain English'. In response to a concern over paper wastage, the IT Development Team Leader undertook to enquire whether margins on corporate documents could be altered.

It was reported that the website represented the cheapest form of service delivery and that the Council aimed to persuade all residents who had the capacity to do so, to use the website in view of the savings that could be generated. The design for the new website had taken into account how people had used the previous site, and specialist advice had been sought on its usability. The Panel was acquainted with the features of the new website and special mention was made of the 'what's on' section as a replacement for the arts diary which no longer was being published. Having been questioned on the cost of running both the old website and the setting up the new site, the IT Development Team Leader agreed to report the figures to Members in due course.

It was noted that a soft launch of the website would take place in January followed by more formal publicity in February. Members were advised that further enhancements of the website would continue to be made throughout 2011.

76. CARBON FOOTPRINT REDUCTION

Following the discussion at the headline debate at the Council meeting in December, Councillor Downes addressed the Panel on actions that had been taken by other local authorities in an effort to encourage residents and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint. While recognising that the Council was actively involved in reducing its own carbon footprint, Councillor Downes drew attention to the role of the Council to incentivise local residents.

Members noted that the Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology and the Head of Environmental Management would be attending the next meeting of the Panel to provide an update on progress made since the Council debate on how local councils can challenge, encourage and enable residents and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint and to answer questions from Members.

77. WORK PLAN STUDIES AND WORKING GROUP TEMPLATES

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's programme of studies and informing Members of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

78. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's progress on issues that had been discussed previously.

The Transportation Team Leader was in attendance to update Members on progress towards the provision of cycling routes in Huntingdonshire. The Panel was reminded of the highest priority cycling schemes in the District that had been agreed with the County Council. Members were informed that the first stage of the Yaxley to Farcet route now had been completed and design options were being considered for the next stage. However development would be dependant on sufficient funding being achieved.

With regard to the St. Ives to Huntingdon route, the Panel was informed that discussions were ongoing with the County Council on the design, although funding again would be an issue.

It was reported that a meeting had been arranged to discuss options for the Perry village cycle route with the private landowners affected, following which consultation would be undertaken with residents and the Parish Council in order to inform the Area Joint Committee of villagers' views on a preferred course of action. It was reiterated that the scheme would depend on the sufficiency of the available budget and the programming of work within the wider network programmes.

Having been advised that progress also was constrained by a requirement to use contractors approved by the County Council, the Panel undertook to question the Head of Environmental Management on the possibility of contractors being engaged directly by the District Council. The Team Leader indicated that all Members would be consulted on a review of cycling priorities, although it was likely that the lack of funding would result in the existing list remaining largely unchanged.

79. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest summarising the Council's decisions since the previous meeting.

Chairman