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## **Cabinet**

### **Report of the meetings held on 16th and 18th March 2010**

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#### **Matters for Information**

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#### **75. CALL-IN - CAR PARKING REVIEW UPDATE**

Further to Item No. 70 of their Report to the meeting of the Council held on 11th February 2010, the Cabinet has been advised of the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) in relation to their call-in of the Cabinet's decision relating to car parking charges. (Item No. 53 of their Report refers.)

The Panel had disagreed with the Cabinet's decision to accept the Car Parking Working Party's recommendation to provide 38 spaces offering two hours free parking in the de-marcated area at the Riverside Car Park, St. Neots. The Panel felt that the implementation of charges and the limited number and duration of free car parking spaces would:-

- ◆ lead to more cars and vehicles parking in areas adjacent to the car park and an increase in use of the town centre car parks;
- ◆ create additional congestion in the High Street and town centre;
- ◆ increase pollution in the High Street, an area identified by environmental health as having above acceptable levels of pollution;
- ◆ exacerbate the reduction in retail footfall currently being experienced in St. Neots; and
- ◆ reduce visitors and tourism opportunities.

The Panel was of the opinion that the Cabinet should introduce a more extensive free parking policy for 3 hours for the whole of the car park.

The Cabinet has debated a variety of issues relating to the enforcement of the Panel's proposal, the financial implications of extending the free area, environmental considerations and the impact of the proposals on footfall levels in the town centre. In terms of income, Members considered the possibility of recouping any loss in income by introducing a higher charge for parking after 3 hours. On balance, the Cabinet decided that the original decision (38 spaces free for 2 hours) was the best approach to providing some free parking for park users while achieving the aims of the car parking strategy.

The Cabinet was conscious of the fact that the proposals will be the subject of public consultation as part of the statutory order making process which would provide the public with an opportunity to express views on the proposal. With that in mind, the Cabinet has agreed that the Off-Street Parking Places Order 2010 should be prepared and published for public consultation including the provision of 38 spaces offering 2 hours free parking in a demarcated area at the Riverside Car Park, St. Neots.

**76. REQUEST FOR A LOAN TO THE WILDLIFE TRUST FOR BEDFORDSHIRE, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH**

The Cabinet has approved a loan of up to £1.2m to the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough, subject to the Director of Commerce and Technology and the Head of Law, Property and Governance, in consultation with the relevant Executive Councillor, being satisfied with the terms, interest rate and security being offered.

The loan will enable the Trust to acquire the leasehold of land considered to be key to progress the Great Fen Project.

In reaching this decision, the Cabinet has had the benefit of the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) which are summarised in Item No. 50 of their Report elsewhere on the Agenda.

**77. RURAL STRATEGY FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE 2010 - 2015**

The Cabinet has considered the contents of the Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire produced by Cambridgeshire ACRE on behalf of the Cambridgeshire Together Board. The Strategy has been prepared to identify the challenges of living and working in a rural community. In discussing the priorities accorded to the strategy's three themes of living in the countryside, economic well-being and land and environment, the Cabinet has considered a summary of Officers' comments on each of the proposed actions. In so doing, the Cabinet has concurred with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) that the Strategy:-

- ◆ lacks evidence of partnership working and that any work carried out under the strategy should be carefully co-ordinated;
- ◆ could potentially lead to a duplication of service provision;
- ◆ fails to consider the need for retirement homes in rural areas, to enable the elderly to remain close to their families and communities;
- ◆ refers to "widening transport options" which requires action on a national scale; and
- ◆ fails to address the difficulties faced by residents living in rural areas who do not have their own transport and are reliant on other transport providers to attend health and other public service facilities.

Therefore, the Cabinet has requested that these views be included in the Council's response to Cambridgeshire ACRE.

## **78. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS WORKING GROUP**

Following a presentation by Councillor M Baker on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) the Cabinet has considered the findings of a study by a Working Group regarding the Council's Development Management process.

In considering the Panel's recommendations, the Cabinet has been advised that several of the proposals have already been implemented by the Development Management Service. In concurring with the Panel that the current process was working well, while recognising that some areas mostly relating to enforcement and public speaking at the Development Management Panel could be improved, the Cabinet has:-

- ◆ requested that the possibility of charging developers for pre-submission advice be investigated further;
- ◆ agreed to consult relevant consultees and neighbours again on amended plans, except for those of very minor significance;
- ◆ suggested that care should be exercised to consult households that abut a development site, including the over-printing of envelopes with a suitable message to indicate that it is an important communication concerning a planning application;
- ◆ agreed that applicants be advised in the clearest terms at the outset of the process that they are unlikely to receive any further communication until all of the consultees' views have been received, which could be towards the end of the 8 or 13 week determination period;
- ◆ suggested that members of town and parish councils be encouraged to undertake training on all aspects of the Development Management process;
- ◆ invited the Development Management Panel to give consideration to the possibility of a mechanism that allows external speakers to respond to what they perceive to be factually incorrect information so that the Panel can make well-informed decisions, as part of the next review at the public speaking procedure; and
- ◆ requested that the Council continues to reinforce the message wherever possible that development that takes place without permission is discouraged and adopts an appropriate and robust approach concerning the retention of the development where permission is subsequently refused.

**79. SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE FOR NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF**

*(The following Item was considered as a confidential item under Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.)*

The Cabinet has approved a supplementary estimate of £20,000 for the National Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Budget for 2010/2011 to enable an application for hardship relief to be processed.

I C Bates  
Chairman