
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

Report of the meeting held on 9th November 2010

Matters for Information

27. GREEN HOUSE PROJECT

Following a tour of the two properties in St. Ives and St. Neots modernised by the Council as part of the "Green House Project", the Panel has suggested that the cost savings associated with the energy saving measures should be widely publicised to householders alongside the reduction in carbon emissions.

With regard to the staffing implications of having the houses manned whilst they are open to the public, Members have been advised that it will be possible for officers to work from the houses due to the availability of wi-fi capability.

28. ABANDONED SHOPPING TROLLEYS

The Panel has been advised that at the previous meeting of the Huntingdon Neighbourhood Forum complaints had been raised by members of the public about the number of shopping trolleys being abandoned by customers of town centre shops. Members have been informed of the powers available to the District Council if Section 99 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 were to be adopted which would enable the Council to seize shopping trolleys that appeared to have been abandoned and store them for up to six months. The cost of seizing, storing and returning a trolley can be recovered by the Council from the owner of the trolley if the company asks for its return.

The Panel has been advised that the Council has only received eight complaints of abandoned shopping trolleys since 2004. Furthermore, good working relationships have been established with the major supermarkets, some of which have engaged a company to collect abandoned trolleys, while others will collect their own abandoned trolleys if the locations are reported to them.

With regard to the possibility of adopting Section 99 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Panel has been advised that the Council has limited storage facilities for any trolleys that are collected and that the low number of complaints together with the co-operation of supermarket owners make such a venture unnecessary.

29. ST. NEOTS EAST URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Prior to its consideration by the Cabinet, the Panel has considered a report on the development opportunities for land east of the railway line, St. Neots. The Panel has also received the comments of the Development Management Panel on the Urban Design Framework document.

The Panel's principal areas of concern were highways and educational provision. Members support the aim of integrating the eastern expansion into St. Neots as a whole and have acknowledged that, without careful planning, there is a danger of a separate community developing which is not integrated with the remainder of the town.

The Panel has accepted that the idea of a third secondary school in St. Neots located within the eastern expansion might exacerbate the sense of a separate identity and therefore Members have not supported the recommendation of the Development Management Panel in this respect. Nevertheless, the Panel has suggested that an adequate financial contribution be secured from the developers to ensure that the existing secondary education establishments in St. Neots can be expanded to meet the anticipated increase in pupil numbers.

With regard to primary education, the Panel has been advised that the County Council had sought a minimum of three new schools as part of the development as there is under capacity west of the rail line in existing establishments. The land use plan suggests an allocation of land for two new schools in addition to the existing primary school already provided as part of the Loves Farm development. However, the Panel has queried whether this is sufficient for a projected development of 5,000 homes. Notwithstanding their support for integration of the new development, Members did not consider it appropriate for children of primary school age to have to travel far to school as this could lead to traffic congestion and reduce the number of children walking or cycling to school. The Panel has queried the proposed distribution of sites for primary schools within the eastern expansion with those houses in the north-eastern sector of the new development being some distance from the primary schools proposed.

The Panel has also commented on the proposed highway provision and particularly the uncertainty over improvements to the A428 before the development takes place, with a new development creating greater pressure on the already congested road. The Panel has supported ongoing efforts to encourage investment in the upgrading of the road to accommodate the inevitable traffic growth. The Panel is also keen to ensure that there are sufficient vehicular links between the development and the town in addition to those proposed for cyclists and walkers as a failure to do so could lead to unacceptable congestion on those which currently exist via Cambridge Street and the A428.

This matter was considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 18th November 2010. Item No. 46 of their Report refers.

30. PLANNING FOR SCHOOLS DEVELOPMENT CONSULTATION

A Member has drawn attention to a recently published Planning for Schools Development consultation exercise which invites views on the Government's proposals to make changes to the General Permitted Development Order to give permitted development rights for a change of use for school development. The purpose of the proposals is to support the Department for Education's policy on new "free schools" but there is a concern that a proposed absence of any requirement for planning permission will prevent local objection to the opening of a new school, dispense with the requirement for a traffic impact assessment and remove any democratic involvement in the process.

Under the circumstances it has been agreed that an ad-hoc working group be established comprising Councillors Downes on behalf of the Panel, Councillor P G Mitchell as Chairman of the Development Management Panel and Councillor D B Dew as Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport to draft a response to the consultation document for consideration at the next meeting of the Panel prior to the closing date for comment of the 10th December 2010.

Other Matters of Interest

31. WORKPLAN

The Panel has reviewed its workplan and received details of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels. Members have been advised that the first meeting of the Local Drainage Liaison Group has been held and a progress report is now awaited from Anglian Water's Collection Manager.

The Panel have also been updated on the work to date on the preparation of a tree strategy and it has been agreed that Councillor M G Baker be co-opted onto the Tree Strategy Working Group in view of his interest in the subject and to ensure that this has cross party representation.

P M D Godfrey
Chairman