

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 8 February 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor P M D Godfrey – Chairman.
Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker,
J W Davies, P Godley, D Harty, M F Newman
and J S Watt.

Mr M Phillips

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs M Banerjee and P J Downes and Mr D Hopkins.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D Dew

68. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 7th December 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

69. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor D Harty declared a personal interest in Minute No. 71 arising from his membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

70. 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.

In so doing, Members requested sight of the report on the Payment of Recycling Credits at the March meeting, prior to its consideration by Cabinet. The Panel was informed that the report on the Community Infrastructure Levy Supplementary Planning Document had been delayed and was expected to be available in October.

71. LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN

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

(See Members' Interests)

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Planning Services on the adoption of a new Local Transport Plan (LTP3) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

Members were informed that the current LTP a County-wide document containing transport policies and programmes for the period 2006 -2011 would expire in March. The County Council was therefore required to produce a third LTP for the period from April 2011 until 2016 after consultation with District Councils and other stakeholders.

The Panel was acquainted with the policies and strategy of LTP3 contained in an executive summary to the LTP3 document (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) attached to the report now submitted.

In terms of the implications for Huntingdonshire, attention was drawn to a reduction of funding by 25% compared to the previous Plan period. Although the maintenance funding had fallen by 9%, the reduction in funding for integrated transport was being cut by 48% which would have a significant impact on the transport infrastructure.

Also attached to the report was the District Council's statement which would form part of the LTP3. It was pointed out that although the District Council had spent in excess of £2 million on transport related projects during the Plan period 2006/11, the reductions in the Council's own budget meant that little funding would be available for 2011/16 and expenditure would be wholly dependent on funding from external sources such as Government grant and development related income.

Under the circumstances, the Panel endorsed the recommendations to Cabinet in the report expressing regret at the greatly reduced level of integrated transport funding and encouraging the County Council to pursue all possible alternative sources of funding including the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. In a predominantly rural area such as Huntingdonshire, the Panel particularly was concerned over the impact on rural transport and the need for adequate bus services to ensure accessibility and social inclusion.

In answer to questions the Panel was assured that there was evidence that cycling and walking had increased in the District following expenditure on cycleways and footpaths. Additionally the Panel was made aware that as a growth area pressure would continue for trunk road improvements and that funding would become available from the new community infrastructure levy and Section 106 agreements for highways and transportation schemes. With regard to the latter, the Transportation Team Leader confirmed that the County Council had now made information available linking the receipt of S106 contributions to highway schemes.

RESOLVED

that the report and recommendations be endorsed for submission to Cabinet.

72. HUNTINGDON WEST AREA ACTION PLAN: ADOPTION PROCEDURES

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

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) informing Members of the results of the Planning Inspector's report of his examination of the submitted Huntingdon West Area Action Plan (AAP).

The Panel was informed that the Inspector had found the AAP to be sound, thereby enabling the Council to adopt the AAP as part of the Development Plan for the District. Members were advised that this would form the framework for retail development in the Huntingdon West Area. Adoption of the Plan also would ensure that the most up to date policies would be applied in respect of planning proposals for the area which would help to facilitate positive change and redevelopment whilst supporting the town centre and appropriate redevelopment of Chequers Court.

Notwithstanding its support for the Plan the Panel raised the issue of the proposed link road and the possible congestion that might result as a consequence. Members were assured that collaboration with the County Council was ongoing in order to try and secure a satisfactory balance between an efficient road system and a vibrant town centre.

In reply to a question on the possible loss of the temporary car park opposite the railway station, it was explained that alternative provision was being considered for joint office accommodation and parking on land between the link road and the railway.

RESOLVED

that the report be endorsed for submission to Cabinet

73. PLANNING CONSERVATION WORKING GROUP

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

Further to Minute No. 10/13 and with the assistance of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor M G Baker acquainted the Panel with the outcome of the deliberations of the Working Group which had been established to consider and evaluate the role of the Council's Planning Conservation Team in the preservation of Huntingdonshire's built heritage with particular reference to conservation areas and listed buildings.

In considering the working group's report, attention was drawn to the key issues that the Group had addressed and its recommendations. The Panel acknowledged that planning conservation was an emotive and contentious subject, which by its nature, could generate strong feelings which could influence the views of users of the service. The Working Group had found overall that the planning conservation

process worked well in Huntingdonshire comparing favourably with other authorities and they had commended the hard work and enthusiasm of conservation officers. Nevertheless, the Working Group felt that the treatment of applications and communication between conservation officers and residents could benefit from further improvement.

As a result of the extensive consultation that had been carried out to ensure evidence based recommendations, the Working Group had recommended that the Planning Division should hold regular meetings with a representative of Kimbolton and Hinchingsbrooke Schools with the aim of developing a good working relationship on conservation issues and future maintenance requirements. The Panel was informed that as a result of the working group's deliberations the Head of Planning Services had already instigated a system for such meetings and it was suggested by the Panel that Councillor R West be nominated as the intermediary between the Division and the schools due to his position as the Council's heritage champion.

With regard to the finding that the Division's performance compared favourably with other authorities, it was reported that while the supporting evidence had been anecdotal this had been obtained from a number of professional sources.

The Panel was advised that for town and parish councils while training on heritage and conservation issues could be provided, this would have to be balanced against the Council's current financial position and the staffing resources available.

In summary the Head of Planning Services indicated that the working group's recommendations were feasible and could be implemented if accepted by the Cabinet.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Panel's appreciation be expressed to the Members of the Working Group and the support officers for an extensive and well balanced report; and
- (b) that the Working Group's report and recommendations be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

74. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

The Panel was advised of progress on issues that had been previously discussed.

Members were informed of the attempts being made to identify a new contact officer at Anglian Water to provide the Panel with an update on the flooding at St Audrey's Lane, St Ives and elsewhere.

75. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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 Scrutiny Panels.

In light of the conclusion of the Panel's study into Planning Conservation, Members were invited to suggest subjects for future studies. In view of the imminence of the elections in May, the Panel decided to defer the choice of another subject until the meeting in June. In the interim, it was agreed that given the recent high profile in the District, the relevant executive councillor and the Head of Planning Services be invited to the April meeting of the Panel to give a presentation on the Council's current position with regard to wind farm development in the District.

76. 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