

THE GREAT FEN PROJECT**(Report by Head of Democratic & Central Services)****1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has taken a keen interest in the Great Fen project since its inception and receives regular updates from the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport and the Director of Environmental and Community Services.
- 1.2 The latest update was given at the Panel's meeting held on 8th March when information was presented on progress in implementing the Great Fen Masterplan and the preparation of an Action Plan to demonstrate the various timescales and target dates that the Great Fen Steering Group are working towards.

2. PROGRESS

- 2.1 The Panel received information on the issues of land ownership and tenancy arrangements and the conditions associated with the phased development of visitor facilities; hydrology studies, work to create new access and new employment created. Information was also given in relation to the receipt of grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which require various actions to have taken place by agreed dates. This will impact on the rate at which land is transformed from arable farming to the uses envisaged in the Masterplan.
- 2.2 The Panel was addressed by Councillors P G Mitchell and P A Swales as local ward councillors. Both expressed their support for the long term vision of the project but drew the Panel's attention to concerns locally about the pace of change from arable production which they thought was occurring more rapidly than had been envisaged locally. At the same time, they also referred to the length of time that might ensue before some of the predicted peripheral benefits for local communities such as tourism and employment creation came to fruition.
- 2.3 As a result of the discussion at the meeting, the Panel felt that it would appropriate to review the pace of change envisaged by the project and, given the importance and value to the local and national economy of arable food production, to retain land in the project area for that purpose while the review was undertaken.
- 2.4 The Panel therefore resolved to request the Cabinet to explore with the Great Fen partners the possibility of land within the area currently in arable production and not yet sown to grass remaining in use for that purpose, pending a review being undertaken of the land that is already under restoration, the development proposals for the visitor facilities and the creation of associated employment opportunities. The Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport undertook to discuss this matter with

Cabinet and, if supported, to raise the proposal with the Council's partners in the project.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Cabinet is invited therefore to consider the request by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) contained in section 2.4 above.

Background Papers

The Great Fen Masterplan

Contact Person

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