

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Meeting Room 1a/b, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 12 April 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor D Harty – Vice-Chairman in the Chair

Councillors K M Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, P J Downes, P Godley, M F Newman and J S Watt.

Mr D Hopkins

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M G Baker, J W Davies, P M D Godfrey and Mr M Philips.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D Dew

### **88. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 8th March 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **89. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations were received.

### **90. FORWARD PLAN**

The Panel considered and noted the current Forward Plan of Key Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council for the period 1st April to 30th July 2011. Members were advised that reports, which had been requested by the Panel, would be presented to them prior to their submission to Cabinet.

### **91. WIND FARMS**

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

The Panel noted that this item had been included on the Agenda following their request for an update on the Council's position with regard to wind farm applications within the District.

Members were advised by the Head of Planning Services that little had changed with regard to the Council's position following the presentation given by Councillor Dew to Members at the meeting of

full Council in February, when he had informed them of the Council's current policy on wind farm development.

In answer to questions raised by the Panel on the positioning of developments within 2km of a residence and on the number of applications that had been received, Members were advised that all applications were considered having full regard to national planning policy. Current national policy supported the government's commitment to renewable energy. Each application was considered on its merits and should be in a suitable location. Developments would not be supported in areas of nationally significant landscape but there were no such areas in Huntingdonshire. Members were informed that the Council had not adopted a policy that wind farms should not be located within 2km of a residence, however a Private Member's Bill, 'Wind Turbines (Minimum Distance from Residential Premises)', was shortly due to have a second reading in the House of Lords.

The Panel was advised that it was the government's intention to replace the current planning policy document with new guidance, the New National Planning Policy Framework which, in turn, would act as a catalyst for the revision of local planning policy.

In response to questions, Members were assured that the cumulative impact of developments was taken into account by planners; however it would not be possible to sustain a prescriptive policy on numbers as cumulative impact was assessed on the basis of a proposed development's relationship with other wind farms. Members were of the view that there should be more offshore wind farms. They were informed that the government was committed to increasing renewable energy from 10% in 2010 to 20% by 2020 of the total consumed.

Having discussed the siting of turbines and the noise from wind farms, the Panel was advised that so far no complaints had been received from residents living in close proximity to existing turbines in the area. Expert advice on noise would always be sought from the Council's Environmental Health division when applications for wind farms were assessed. Environmental Health Officers were undertaking specific training for this purpose. It was suggested to Members that a site visit to the largest wind farm in the District, Tick Fen, in Warboys, might be useful in order for Members to gauge the impact of the turbines on the area.

In reply to a question on the likely influence of a petition in respect of wind farms that was due to be submitted to the next meeting of Council, Members were advised that planning policy would not be adopted on this basis, however it would be referred to when the policy was reviewed. In that context the Panel requested that they be kept informed of related planning developments as they emerged.

## **92. RURAL TRANSPORT**

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

In response to a request from the Panel regarding a possible future study into rural transport following the reduction in government

funding for it, the Council's Transportation Team Leader updated the Panel on a local transport project being led by Cambridgeshire County Council.

The Panel was advised that the reduction in funding would lead to the phasing out of subsidised transport in the area. The aim of the project, which had been established in conjunction with Inspire East, District Councils, the Health Authority and other relevant partners, would be to look at all forms of transport in the County and to shape a new transport network financed from a central fund, which was expected to be in the region of £23m. The Transportation Team Leader had represented the District Council at the first meeting of the project in March and would attend future meetings. Councillor Dew would represent the Council on the Governance Panel overseeing the project. It was explained that in devising the new network, community infrastructures would have to be reviewed and some areas of the District might be better served by aligning it with neighbouring Districts. Members were advised that the need for better transportation had been a common theme of parish plans and the project might aid the delivery of parishes' aspirations.

The Panel was advised that work to date had been constructive, though there would be difficulties in engaging the health sector as health bodies did not ring fence funds for transport. A bid for £5/6m had been made for community transport from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, making a potential total fund for the District of £8m. Members noted that the County Council, while retaining its statutory responsibilities, had indicated that it would delegate direct management of transportation to local areas. An external organisation, Blue Marble, had been contracted to produce transport modelling. It was decided to invite Blue Marble to a future meeting of the Panel to give a presentation on their work.

Following questions from the Panel on the fund's governance, Members were advised that it would be administered by non-profit making community interest companies with any surplus ploughed back into transport services. It was not yet known how many companies would be needed but they would be expected to have a constitution and terms of reference.

Members acknowledged that the project was be a positive step forward and agreed there was a need for a full review of local transportation. However, they drew attention to the diminishing number of commercial bus routes and the problems that could arise from the statutory requirements on public sector organisations to provide transport, which could be costly. Members also noted the value of the contribution made by the District Council to community transport and to the project.

### **93. CABINET FEEDBACK**

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

The Panel received and noted a report from the Cabinet (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on its response to the Panel's

comments on the Great Fen Project. Councillor Dew advised that, following his recent tour of the Great Fen, he had been happy to present the Panel's views to the Cabinet who had fully supported the request that Members' concerns should be taken to the next meeting of the Great Fen partners. Councillor Dew stressed that the District Council was one of five voting members who would determine the request.

In response to a request from Councillor Downes that his concerns the changes being made to the Great Fen might encourage mosquitoes and their associated health implications in terms of malaria, also be forwarded to the partners, Councillor Dew undertook to pass on these comments. He also reported that a study was being undertaken into this subject by scientists from Cambridge University.

#### **94. WORKPLAN STUDIES**

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of studies being undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels. Members were advised that decisions on gypsy and travellers sites in both Earith and Somersham had been made recently that extended the period of their existing planning permission. They were also informed that meetings of the Tree Strategy Working Group would be arranged by the Planning division who were leading the formulation of the strategy.

#### **95. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS**

With the aid of a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was advised of progress on issues that had been previously discussed. With regard to the update on flooding at St Audrey's Lane St Ives, Members were informed that a new contact officer at Anglian Water was awaiting confirmation of capital expenditure on Broadleas Pumping Station and once it had been received he would meet with interested parties.

#### **96. SCRUTINY**

The Panel received and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest. With regard to the item on recycling credits that had been considered by the Panel at its previous meeting, Councillor Downes stated that reaction from parish councils in his Ward to the change had been negative. Feedback he had received included comments on the amount of time it would take to collect a tonne of textiles and the moral dilemma residents faced having to choose between placing textiles in the new bins and donating them to charities. Councillor Downes also raised a concern over the increase in recycling material being placed in blue bins and suggested that the Panel should revisit the issue in 6 – 12 months time.

In respect to an item on Development Management, Members raised concerns over the implications for education in the Yaxley and Sawtry areas of the proposed urban extension on land north of Norman Cross. Members encouraged co-ordinated working between the

District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council on this issue.

Chairman