

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 1a, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 8 November 2011.

- PRESENT: Councillor P M D Godfrey – Chairman.
- Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I J Curtis, J W Davies, P Godley, G J Harlock and J S Watt.
- Co-opted Members Messrs D Hopkins and M Phillips.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Harty and C R Hyams.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, B S Chapman, D B Dew, N J Guyatt and D M Tysoe.

44. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 12th October 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

46. GREAT FEN PROJECT PRESENTATION

(Councillor D B Dew, the Council's representative on the Great Fen Project Board, was in attendance for consideration of this item.)

Following an introduction by Councillor Dew, the Panel received a presentation giving an overview and update on the Great Fen project by the Great Fen Project Manager, Ms Kate Carver, with assistance from Mr John Orr, of the Environment Agency who was also the Chairman of the Great Fen Project Board. Ms Carver had been invited to the meeting by the Chairman following his attendance at the Great Fen Community Forum meeting in October 2011, where the presentation had been well received.

Ms Carver explained that the long term vision for the Project was to create 3,700 hectares of wetland between Huntingdon and Peterborough on land adjacent to the existing national nature reserves of Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen. The Project was managed through a partnership between the Environment Agency, the District Council, the Middle Level Commissioners, Natural England and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire,

Northamptonshire and Peterborough. It aimed to restore the habitat and promote the biodiversity of the area. Financial assistance had been received from the heritage lottery fund, which had helped the partnership to acquire 55% of the total Project land.

Ms Carver advised that the partnership had now been established on a more formal basis. This would put the partners in a better position to achieve the aims of the Project in relation to the natural and historic environment and achieving social, economic and climate benefits. Furthermore, planning permission had recently been granted for a visitor and information centre at New Decoy Farm, which would enhance public access to wildlife areas and a circular walking route.

Mr Orr explained the importance of the Project in terms of conservation and climate change and highlighted the potential for water storage on the land to help the area to cope with fluctuations in rainfall. He also stressed the importance of reversing the process of peat loss.

The Council's Corporate Team Manager with responsibility for Economic Development gave details of the economic benefits that were expected to be created in the area. Ms Donnellan explained that over the next 4 to 6 months her team would be looking at maximising opportunities for tourism and visitor spending. It was also expected that there would be an added benefit through the creation of volunteering opportunities in connection with the Council's job clubs for the unemployed. In answer to questions from the Panel, Members were informed that real benefits could be secured for the surrounding villages by attracting bird watchers to the area and that such tourism initiatives already had been developed and proved to be viable.

The Chairman thanked both Ms Carver and Mr Orr for their presentation.

47. GREAT FEN SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

(Councillor N J Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, was in attendance for consideration of this item.)

Councillor Guyatt introduced a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) updating the Panel on the consultation that had been undertaken in respect of the Great Fen Masterplan. If adopted and following the addition of a preface to the document, the Masterplan would provide planning guidance to inform Council policy and decisions on any planning proposals for the area.

The Masterplan had been prepared in conjunction with the Great Fen partners. It referred to the aims and objectives of the Project as set out under the previous item by the Great Fen Project Manager, and to the themes of the Project, namely: habitats, landscape character and structure, land and water management, visitor gateways and access.

Having questioned how the two existing nature reserves would be joined together to form the Great Fen, Members were advised that this would be achieved by converting existing intensively farmed land to arable use and wetland. Although some development would be

possible via permitted rights, other development would be required to follow due process. In response to a further question by Councillor Watt, Members were assured that responses recorded in the consultation document would have been taken from formal written responses.

The Chairman expressed his support for the decision to carry out a new socioeconomic study, which he thought was important given the unexpected speed at which the Project had progressed. He also supported the implementation of the business development study led by Ms Donnellan's team. Having commented that the number of expected visitors to the Project was likely to have been underestimated, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to approve the Preface text attached at Appendix A to the report now submitted and adopt the Great Fen Masterplan as Huntingdonshire District Council Planning Guidance to inform Council policy and guide Development Management decisions.

48. 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) which had been prepared by the Executive Leader of the Council for the period 1st November 2011 to 29th February 2012. Having commented on the high number of items in the Plan that fell within the Panel's remit, Members were advised that the item on Gypsies and Travellers had been withdrawn. The item on the Roll Forward of the Core Strategy would be submitted to the Panel's December meeting.

49. CARBON MANAGEMENT PLAN

(Councillor DM Tysoe, Executive Councillor for the Environment, was in attendance for this item).

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Environmental Management (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing an update on progress against the targets contained in the Council's Carbon Management Plan (CMP). Members noted that achievement of a 15% reduction in its carbon emissions meant that the Council was on course to meet the target to reduce CO₂e by 30% in the period to 2013. A 7% reduction in energy costs had also been achieved over the previous 2 year period.

Members were advised of ongoing works to determine which efficiency saving measures would be most appropriate for each of the Council's 10 main sites and noted that over 70% of the Council's total energy spending had been on the five main sites, which included three leisure centres.

The Panel was informed that the terms of a three year programme to install solar photovoltaic (PV) panels at the Council's main sites had been based on pay back figures using the Government's feed-in tariff. The cut off date before which PV schemes would qualify for income at

the current rate had recently changed and, therefore, figures shown at Annex C of the report would need to be revised. In addition, the recommendation relating to the installation of PV systems would be subject to a reassessment of their viability. The Panel was advised that owing to the change and the resulting decrease in the return on investment which was now expected to be around 6.2%, it was still considered to be advantageous to install PV panels up until 31 March 2012, when the return would be further reduced. However, it might be necessary to reduce the number of site installations.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that the Council would be looking at reducing carbon emissions as well as saving energy and the Salix Energy Fund would be utilised in this respect. Research continued to be undertaken in conjunction with the leisure centres and other departments in order to identify the most suitable measures with the shortest payback times. Owing to the fact that the market in PV systems was fluctuating, the Panel recommended that the payback calculations should be updated to reflect current market rates.

The Panel was informed that although the Council would not benefit directly from the Government's Green Deal, it would, in conjunction with other local authorities, have a part to play in promoting such energy saving schemes to residents and businesses.

RESOLVED

that on the understanding that that the payback calculations are updated and further analysis of the viability of the project is undertaken in light of government policy changes, the Cabinet be recommended to

- (a) note the good progress that has been made towards the implementation of the Council's Carbon Management Plan and the positive impact this has had on energy use and energy bills at the Council's main sites;
- (b) support ongoing cross-functional energy reviews to maximise cost savings and the continued use of the Salix ring-fenced funding and Environment Strategy Capital funding to implement further energy saving projects, and
- (c) support the installation of Solar PV panels at the Council's main sites which will generate a significant ongoing revenue stream for the Council.

50. LOVES FARM, ST NEOTS

(Councillors Mrs B E Boddington and R J West, Ward Councillors for Gransden and the Offords, Councillor B S Chapman Ward Councillor for Priory Park and Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Councillor N J Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, were in attendance for this item.)

Councillor Mrs Boddington addressed the Panel on her concerns over

the appearance of the Loves Farm development in St Neots. Councillors Mrs Boddington and West had been approached by residents of the development because of their membership of the Development Management Panel and the close proximity of their Ward to the area.

Councillor Mrs Boddington highlighted the density of housing within the development and problems associated with it. Residents had complained about the poor appearance of the extremities of the development, which they felt was caused by its design. Attention was drawn to wood cladding that had started to deteriorate and a lack of utility space. Residents also had complained at the narrowness of roads, the lack of footpaths and the absence of street names, all of which caused problems for emergency vehicles. Whilst residents appreciated the excellent work done by the Community Development Officer they were disappointed at delays in the provision of a community centre.

In concurring with Councillor Boddington and residents' views, Councillor West commented on the closure of the rail bridge. He also identified a need for developers to bring roads swiftly up to an acceptable standard in order that they could be adopted without delay.

It was acknowledged that there could often be tensions and differences in priorities between developers and the planning authority but it was stressed that there was a need not only to address the current problems but also to learn from them and to inform the design stages of future developments.

In response, the Head of Planning explained that as with all developments, the planning authority had given due regard to Government policy which at the time Loves Farm was developed, had dictated the housing density levels. Mr Ingram reported that among the positive outcomes from the development had been the provision of a new primary school, which had been completed at an early stage. He also stated that the wood cladding was intended to show signs of weathering and that other issues could be referred to registered social landlords.

The Chairman thanked the Councillors for their comments. The Panel requested a synopsis of the matters that had been discussed and decided that a working group should be convened in the New Year to examine them and make recommendations to inform future developments.

RESOLVED

that Councillors Curtis, Godfrey and Harlock be appointed to a working group to meet with Councillors Mrs Boddington and West to examine the matters raised at the meeting and to make recommendations to inform future developments.

51. HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY - DRAFT CHARGING SCHEDULE AND DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT.

(Councillor N Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, was in attendance for consideration of this item.)

Councillor Guyatt introduced two reports by the Head of Planning Services (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book) updating the Panel on the outcomes of the recent consultations on the Huntingdon Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) draft charging schedule and the draft Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The CIL draft charging schedule, which had been amended following the consultation, would be submitted for Cabinet approval prior to a final statutory four week consultation period in November/December 2011.

The Panel was informed that the documents represented the Council's framework for charging in relation to the majority of new developments across the District. The CIL had been introduced by the Government in 2010 to allow local planning authorities to raise funds to pay for the infrastructure required as a result of development. It would be based on identified community infrastructure needs and, subject to some exemptions, would be payable per net square metre of floor space. The charges had been calculated following viability testing and would be complementary to the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which would be subject to consultation at the same time.

It was explained that, following the consultation, the SPD would be considered for adoption by Cabinet in December 2011. Once adopted, it would operate alongside the CIL. Following public examination, it was expected that the draft charging schedule would be adopted in Spring 2012.

The Panel was informed that the SPD would provide policy guidance for securing Section 106 planning obligations for a range of site related infrastructure. In response to a question, Members were advised that CIL contributions would be fixed whilst Section 106 contributions, which would run in association with the CIL for larger developments, could be negotiated. Members were informed that the CIL would introduce a charge for smaller developments but that larger developers were likely to pay less than at present. Having questioned the level of charge associated with health related projects, the Panel was advised that the levy had been rigorously tested and it had, in fact, been set at a lower rate than had been deemed viable.

RESOLVED

that the reports by the Head of Planning Services on the Huntingdonshire Community Infrastructure Levy - Draft Charging Schedule and Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document and on Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document be endorsed for submission to Cabinet.

52. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) informing them of studies that were being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

53. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic 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 CCTV, Members were informed that a report was to be submitted to the Cabinet on developments that could enable the service to be maintained.

The Panel was advised that a petition regarding drainage issues in Yaxley had been submitted to full Council in November by a member of the public. Councillor Godfrey had agreed that the petition should be considered by the Panel at their December meeting. Having discussed writing to the Chief Executive of Anglian Water on the matter, it was suggested that the Panel might also make contact with representatives of Anglian Water.

54. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest summarising the Council's decisions since the previous meeting. Having commented on the success of the Council's food hygiene rating scheme, Councillor J W Davies advised Members of the impending migration of it to the Food Services Agency's own scheme.

Chairman