
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

**Report of the meetings held on 10th January and
9th February 2012**

Matters for Information

39. CAMBRIDGESHIRE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The Panel has considered the terms of a revised Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, which is intended for use as supporting evidence for planning purposes. The Strategy has been supported by the Green Infrastructure Forum and, in light of the demise of Cambridgeshire Horizons, the Panel has suggested that the accountability and reporting lines of the Green Infrastructure Forum should be clarified.

The Strategy is an update of the first Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Cambridge sub-region, which had been developed in 2006. The "Strategic Network" of green infrastructure has been divided into different geographical areas. The areas identified in Huntingdonshire are Huntingdonshire Fens and Woods (including the Great Fen) and Great Ouse. The Strategy will be part of the evidence base informing the Council's future work on updating its development Strategy for the period to 2036. Another important purpose of the Strategy will be to form a piece of evidence to help local communities identify local green spaces and to set realistic and meaningful objectives in neighbourhood plans.

The Chairman has raised concerns over the Strategy's lack of reference to the local agricultural industry and highlighted the fact that food security is of local, national and international concern. As such it ought to be given higher priority and be reflected to a greater extent in the Council's policy framework. Having concurred with these views, the Panel has recommended the Cabinet, bearing in mind the primacy of the agricultural sector and its importance to the local and national economy, to endorse the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy as supporting evidence for planning purposes.

40. ADVANCED WASTE PARTNERSHIP

Members have considered proposals to move the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership (RECAP) to the next level of partnership working. It is hoped that this will enable the partner authorities to gain the maximum advantage collectively from working together.

The Panel has acknowledged that the work of RECAP represents an excellent example of County-wide partnership working which delivers significant benefits to Cambridgeshire. Members have supported the proposal to formalise relationships with neighbouring authorities in order to deliver further benefits to residents. Before any costs are incurred by the Council individual business cases will be brought to Members for comment and approval.

Members have highlighted the fact that the Council's waste collection service has high satisfaction levels and is delivered at a relatively low cost per household. Consequently, the Panel has questioned whether the Council's performance levels will be compromised if there is greater joint working. In response, Members have been advised that joint working should lead to greater savings and improve the trade waste function, which will be of benefit to the business community.

The Panel has referred to the possibility of using waste to generate electricity and has noted that this may be considered in the future. Having questioned whether it is viable to separate waste at the Waterbeach Waste Facility, it has been established that at present the plant is unable to cope with changes in the calorific value of the waste being processed and so this would be costly.

Owing to their involvement in reviewing the business cases for advanced waste projects, a planned visit by the Waste Collection Working Group to the Waterbeach Waste Facility has been extended to all Members of the Panel in order that they might familiarise themselves with its operation and see first hand its potential for service development.

The Panel has recommended the Cabinet to adopt the RECAP Advanced Partnership Working Charter. The outline business cases for advanced waste projects will be reviewed before a decision is made to proceed any further.

41. FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The Panel previously has examined the Council's responsibilities for the maintenance of watercourses in the District. Following on from this a presentation has been received by Cambridgeshire County Council's Flood and Water Manager on flood risk management activities. She has explained that the Cambridgeshire Flood Risk Management Strategy is the product of a series of reviews and Acts that have been passed following nationwide flooding in 2007. The Cambridgeshire Flood Risk Management Partnership is made up of local District Councils, Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, Middle Level Commissioners and three of 63 local Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs). The Strategy contains five objectives one of which is 'to ensure appropriate development in Cambridgeshire'.

The Strategy considers the impacts of climate change and specifies how Cambridgeshire County Council will exercise a strategic

oversight role over flood risk management. As part of this, the County Council has to maintain a register of assets for flood risk management, adopt, approve and maintain Sustainable Drainage Systems in new developments, regulate flows of ordinary watercourses outside IDBs and plan for, and manage any flood emergencies. It also investigates instances of flooding in order to establish responsibility and find solutions to problems.

Although particular examples have been discussed, it is clear that every case is different and it is difficult to make generalisations. The Panel has recognised the need for continued research into the causes of flooding. Equally, ownership of watercourses and land and infrastructure adjoining them can be very complex. The register of assets for flood risk management is, therefore, an important development.

The new arrangements strongly emphasise joint working and the partner organisations have concurrent powers. In this case, the Panel has queried whether this might disperse responsibility. However, under the legal framework that has been established, a single authority usually has statutory responsibilities for particular aspects of flood management with others having permissive powers. The District Council largely has permissive powers.

42. ROLL FORWARD OF CORE STRATEGY – LOCAL PLAN PROJECT PLAN

The Panel has considered a new Local Development Scheme (LDS), which outlines the timetable for the preparation and delivery of the new Local Plan. The LDS contains the proposed scope, coverage and production timetable of the new Local Plan. Members have acknowledged that the process leading to the adoption of the new Local Plan will require significant levels of additional resources. Although the Council's Development Plans Team will take the lead in preparing all Development Plan Documents, monitoring reports and the statement of community involvement, specialist consultants will be required for certain aspects of the Plan's production, which will prove costly. There is already provision in the budget for this purpose.

Having noted that the Plan should be "prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements", the Panel has reiterated its previously expressed concerns regarding the Council's lack of influence over the implementation of infrastructure works.

Members have drawn attention to the difficulties that the Planning Service may face while the new plan is being developed owing to the uncertain policy position that will exist, particularly as the Government has not finalised its position on planning. Although there is a need to complete the process expeditiously, Members doubt whether the Council's partners will be able to complete the work required of them sufficiently quickly to enable the timetable in the LDS to be met.

Members have been advised that contingency plans have been developed in relation to travellers' sites and wind farms that will be used until the necessary policies have been adopted.

The Panel has recommended the Cabinet to approve the new LDS for publication and commencement on 24th February 2012.

43. MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

The Panel has been provided with an update on the receipt and expenditure by the Council of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements. As significant progress has been made in advancing older agreements, Members have decided that in future they will monitor Section 106 Agreements on a biannual rather than quarterly basis.

44. CAMBRIDGESHIRE FUTURE TRANSPORT STUDY

The Chairman has advised the Panel of a joint scrutiny review of the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Project, which had been planned by the County Council and District Councils within Cambridgeshire. Owing to uncertainty over the future of the Project, it has been decided to defer appointing a representative to the review group.

Other Matters of Interest

45. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 – FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with the contents of the current Forward Plan of Key Decisions at each of its meetings. Although a report on Community Infrastructure Levy Governance Principles will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being), Members of the Environmental Well-Being Panel will be invited to the meeting when this item is considered.

46. WORKPLAN

The Panel has reviewed the programme of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

**47. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
(ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) PROGRESS**

Further to their discussions on the Advanced Waste Partnership, the Panel has agreed that developments relating to RECAP are likely to overtake the work of the Waste Collection Working Group and consequently it has been decided that the study should be postponed until further notice.

Following their deliberations on the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Panel has highlighted the need to

consider environmental and agricultural issues in tandem. As a result of this, the Panel has established a Working Group to look at ways in which the local agricultural industry might be properly reflected in the new Local Plan.

48. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest edition of the Decision Digest and discussed the matters contained therein. The latest position on funding for the voluntary sector has been noted.

P M D Godfrey
Chairman