

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, 13 March 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor P M D Godfrey – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, I J Curtis, J W Davies, P Godley, G J Harlock, D Harty and J S Watt.

Co-opted Members Mr D Hopkins and Mr M Phillips.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor M G Baker.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D M Tysoe.

82. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9th February 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

83. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

84. 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 March to 30th June 2012.

Members were advised that the Statement of Community Involvement, which set out the Council's proposed methodology for involving the community and stakeholders in planning matters, would be available for the Panel to consider in April.

85. CAMBRIDGESHIRE RENEWABLES INFRASTRUCTURE FRAMEWORK AND CAMBRIDGESHIRE COMMUNITY ENERGY FUND

(Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for the Environment, was in attendance for this Item.)

Councillor D M Tysoe introduced a report by the Heads of Environmental Management and of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Cambridgeshire Renewables Infrastructure Framework (CRIF) and Cambridgeshire

Community Energy Fund (CEF). The Head of Environmental Management then presented the case for the development of a framework for delivering action on the renewable and low carbon agenda in Cambridgeshire. Having outlined the environmental targets the County would have to meet by 2038 and the potential economic benefits of the CRIF project, Members were informed of the project's aims and objectives, the current position with regard to renewable sources of energy and the level of changes that would be required to achieve various scenarios. They were advised that the CRIF provided a robust evidence base which would promote and deliver the right projects in the right places. They also were advised of investment opportunities the project presented and the ways in which communities would be involved.

Members welcomed the news that solar panels had been installed at Eastfield House which would provide the Council with electricity for its own use and would provide a significant return on the investment.

The Head of Environmental Management then addressed the Panel on how the CEF would channel funds from development projects into low carbon infrastructure and carbon emission reduction projects. He outlined the potential benefits of establishing a CEF, the framework within which it would operate, the timescale for its introduction, how it would be collected and spent and the kind of projects that might be delivered.

Members recognised that developers were likely to challenge the inclusion of renewable energy policies in the new Local Plan. It was, however, accepted that the Council needed to have in place policy provisions to ensure that CEF income was retained locally. Having discussed detailed planning aspects of the CRIF and CEF, concerns were raised that applications for developments with high levels of renewable features would be looked on more favourably than others. It was, however, the case that such development would have to meet other planning requirements. Some Members expressed the view that the removal of the requirement for planning permission to be obtained for the installation of renewable features was having a detrimental effect on the appearance of some properties.

With specific reference to wind power, Members suggested that the Council should try to influence where wind turbines were located as it was acknowledged that wind farms worked better in some locations than others. It was reported that under the new National Planning Policy Framework the Council would be able to specify areas where wind farms would be more suitable. In making this recommendation it was accepted that there was no upper limit that could be imposed on the amount of wind turbines in an area. At present Huntingdonshire was dependant upon wind and photovoltaic power for its renewable sources of energy, which did not provide a constant source of energy. Members suggested that it would be necessary to make use of the full range of other options for renewables to fill gaps in energy supply. In light of the recent visit to Waterbeach Waste Management Park, the Panel recommended that the options should include deriving energy from waste.

The CEF presented commercial opportunities for both public sector organisations and commercial businesses. This was emphasised by

the fact that it was significantly cheaper to install renewable measures during construction than retrofit existing properties. Having discussed developer contribution rates, it was suggested that they should not be set at such a level that developers only provided on-site renewable measures. Given that Huntingdonshire had the greatest renewable potential in Cambridgeshire it was possible that the District could be a net beneficiary of CEF funds.

Having drawn attention to the possibility that the CEF could require considerable management and monitoring, the Panel recommended that the Cabinet should exert control over the arrangements put in place for these purposes to ensure they did not proliferate.

Owing to the complex and technical nature of both the CRIF and the CEF, the Panel strongly recommended that a clear communication strategy was developed for it. This should comprise simplified messages and emphasise the cost savings that could be obtained from renewables rather than carbon emissions. It was suggested that reference also ought to be made to energy conservation as this appeared to be missing from the current documents.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to:-

- a) note the work undertaken, formally sign off the CRIF/CEF projects and to endorse the future approach to energy and renewables outlined in the report;
- b) delegate authority to the Managing Directors to carry forward work on energy and renewables in the District, to deliver the best possible outcomes for business, the community and public sector, within the framework of the CRIF, and;
- c) note that the Managing Directors will consider the merits of setting up a CEF as outlined in the report.

86. CAMBRIDGESHIRE FUTURE TRANSPORT STUDY

Pursuant to Minute No. 11/78, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs M Banerjee be appointed to the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Overview and Scrutiny Review.

87. 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 being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

88. 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 previously been discussed.

Having noted that the Panel was due to receive a presentation on the planning implications of the Enterprise Zone, in response to a request, the Scrutiny and Review Manager undertook to circulate a plan of the area included within the Enterprise Zone.

With regard to the ongoing drainage issues in Yaxley, Councillor Mrs Banerjee reported that an on-site meeting had been held with the Council's Project and Assets Manager who had subsequently alerted Anglian Water to the fact that there was a problem with the surface and foul sewerage system. Having expressed concern over the long running nature of the problem, the Panel requested that a letter was sent to the Environment Agency asking that enforcement action was taken.

The Chairman advised Members that the Working Group looking at land use for agricultural purposes in the context of planning policies and agriculture's contribution to the local economy was progressing well and, following his attendance at a Working Group meeting, Dave Felce, the Linking Environment and Farming representative, had extended an invitation to the Panel to visit his farm.

89. SCRUTINY

The Panel received and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the Council's decisions since the previous meeting.

Chairman