
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

**Report of the meetings held on 10th July and
11th September 2012**

Matters for Information

4. LEADERSHIP DIRECTION

The Panel has considered the content of the Leadership Direction which has been prepared by the Executive and Deputy Executive Leader to set out their direction of travel and key milestones over the next few years.

A Member has suggested that residents should be given the opportunity to influence the direction so that it reflects needs identified by the community.

5. BEARSCROFT FARM, URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

The Panel has reviewed the draft Urban Design Framework (UDF) for land at Bearscroft Farm, Godmanchester. The UDF is intended to provide constructive guidance to future developers of the area to the maximum advantage and minimum disadvantage to local residents. A Member has expressed the view that Godmanchester does not have the infrastructure to serve a large scale development. Furthermore, the A1198 could be negatively affected by the proposed development. Members have been advised that the UDF has been the subject of consultation which has enabled residents to have an input into the design of development.

During consideration of the options within the UDF, several Members have expressed a preference for Idea 5 which proposes that a new road is constructed around the southern edge of the development. This will allow for a greater developed area and enable the football pitch and other green spaces to be completely integrated with the rest of the development. Members have expressed concerns at the UDFs lack of provision of a secondary school and highlighted the need to ensure there is a safe route for pupils to take to their chosen school.

Having requested that the views expressed are taken into account, the Panel has recommended the Cabinet to authorise the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, in conjunction with the Chairman of the Development Management Panel and the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy to finalise and approve the Draft Urban Design Framework for Bearscroft Farm, Godmanchester to

inform Council policy and development management decisions on potential planning applications.

6. GROWING AWARENESS – PLAN FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT

The Panel has considered the Council's plan for making continual, measurable progress in reducing its own resource use and for stimulating environmental improvements in the wider district. The Panel has also reviewed the Council's progress against targets so far, and noted that energy usage has decreased by 18% across the Council's portfolio.

Members have been acquainted with details of the Green Deal, which is due to be launched in the coming months. As Councils will be best placed to promote the scheme, Members have stressed the importance of ensuring that the Council provides the best value options for householders. The Panel has also recommended that, as far as possible, local traders should be used to deliver installations.

Attention has been drawn to the fact that the Council has not achieved its target of a 9.5% reduction in the cubic metres of water consumed in Council buildings. Members have been assured that this will become a priority of the Environment Team and will continue to be carefully monitored. Specific reference has also been made to the increase in the percentage of Council employees travelling to work by car and the slow progress made in reducing the amount of waste recycled from the Council's Headquarters. This has highlighted that continual efforts need to be made to reinforce the activities designed to achieve targets and this will be done. In particular, reference has been made to the need to promote the Council's home working policy and its travel plan.

7. WASTE COLLECTION POLICIES

The Panel has reviewed the Council's waste collection policies, which have been updated. The policies have been co-ordinated and some changes have been suggested. They are intended to provide clarity to residents as to the type and extent of service that they can expect. Members have welcomed the fact that the Council's waste collection policies are now available in a single document.

The Panel has endorsed the proposal to provide paper sacks for food/green waste to properties currently receiving weekly bag collections. This will mean that they can be collected fortnightly to fit in with the normal collection rounds. This will save on additional vehicles and crew having to collect every other week.

Members have supported the proposal to collect non-hazardous clinical waste with the normal grey bin collection, which will result in further savings. The Panel has recommended that the Council should provide and publicise guidance on how items, which are prohibited from wheeled bins and sacks, should be disposed of. With regard to Policy 22, which prohibits stickers on wheeled bins, Members have expressed the view that stickers could provide an

opportunity to combine messages, such as local speed restrictions. This approach is taken by South Cambridgeshire District Council and is supported by the Police. Having noted that a pilot initiative is taking place in Huntingdonshire, the Panel has recommended that, subject to feedback from the local community, this practice should be adopted in Huntingdonshire.

The Panel has discussed the feasibility of removing the purple stickers on wheeled bins, which identify residents whom require assistance. Members have raised concerns that this practice identifies vulnerable residents and could potentially create a crime hazard.

8. NEW HUNTINGDONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The Panel has discussed the consultation and engagement process for the preparation of the new Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. Members have been advised that the Local Plan presents them with an opportunity to influence how land will be allocated and have noted the steps in the consultation and plan making process.

As part of the process, all Members are encouraged to discuss their Ward's requirements with the Deputy Executive Leader. Parish Councils will also be engaged. It has been suggested that the Peterborough Evening Telegraph should be utilised for the dissemination of proposals, as this will ensure that the whole of the District is covered. This suggestion has been accepted.

9. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS OF THE ENTERPRISE ZONE

The Panel has received a presentation by Mr P Mumford, Special Projects Manager (Alconbury), on the planning implications of the Enterprise Zone. Urban and Civic, the site owners, are currently undertaking consultation exercises as part of their pre-application work. The consultation process for development at the site will be extensive and exceed the standard consultation requirements.

Having noted that the site's rail link permission has been extended to 2015, the Panel has questioned whether the provision of an additional station would have an impact on the Huntingdon Railway Station. In response, they have been advised that Network Rail are keen to expand and it is expected that a rail link at Alconbury will be an additional facility.

Members have been advised that the Local Enterprise Partnership will be looking to provide 'Transformational Employment' at the site. Subsequently, there is a possibility that commuting patterns across the District will change as traffic towards Cambridge and London could be reduced. Traffic management on and near the site will be a key factor in ensuring its success. Work with the Highways Agency in this respect is already taking place.

The Panel has been informed that Urban and Civic has a strong record of delivering high quality developments in the South of England and the Enterprise Zone at Alconbury should be no exception to this. Members will receive more information once development has commenced.

10. FIXED PENALTY NOTICES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

The Panel has received a report seeking approval for a change in the fine level for Fixed Penalty Notices issued under sections 46 and 47 of the Environment Protection Act. The change is required by an Amendment Order. Given that the Council offers a reduced fine for swift payment, combined with the fact that section 46 notices have rarely been issued and no section 47 notices have been issued by the Council, the Panel has recommended that the change is made.

11. NEW GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES ON THE HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT 1995 (HECA) AND DELIVERY OF THE GREEN DEAL IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Panel has acquainted with new guidance for local authorities on the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 and the delivery of the Green Deal in Huntingdonshire.

Having regard to the Green Deal, Members have expressed the view that safeguards should be put in place to guarantee the standard of work by providers. They have stressed that the Council has a good reputation which could be tarnished by poor work. Furthermore, the Panel has emphasised that the Council's partner companies should employ acceptable sales practices. Members have been assured that these matters will be addressed through a procurement exercise to identify partners, which will realise a single scheme for Cambridgeshire with acceptable sales methods and effective products.

The Panel has recommended that the Council works in partnership with Green Deal providers and community partners to deliver and facilitate delivery of the Green Deal. The Council's role in this arrangement will be to provide leads for potential customers to be followed up by providers. The Council will benefit through the receipt of referral fees. It is estimated that this could produce an income in the order of £150k per annum.

Members have recommended that once the scheme starts to operate, details of accredited partners are published on the Council's website. It has also been suggested that feedback on providers is sought and monitored to ensure satisfactory standards are maintained. This will ensure members of the public receive satisfactory services and protect the Council's reputation.

12. JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Panel has recommended the Cabinet to endorse the Joint Statement on the Development Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by the local authorities.

Members have questioned the Statement's claim that 'major developments, essential regeneration and infrastructure provision in Cambridgeshire's market towns continue to make positive progress' and questioned the evidence base for this assertion. However, they have recognised that the purpose of the Statement is to balance future infrastructure requirements to allow developments to take place.

Having regard to the joint working arrangements, a Member has emphasised that historically Huntingdonshire District Council has delivered its objectives while some neighbouring authorities have failed to do so. In response, the Panel has been assured that joint working will endeavour to understand why this has occurred. The intention is to prevent undue development being forced upon this Council by ensuring that the right development targets are set for each authority.

The Panel has welcomed the joint strategic planning arrangements as a basis for enabling the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough authorities to continue to work together at a strategic level across administrative boundaries and to plan effectively for growth.

13. DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The Panel has received the interim report of its Working Group which has been established to examine concerns raised over the Loves Farm development in St Neots and to make recommendations to inform future developments. The Panel has been advised that a further meeting will be arranged between the Working Group and the Council's Urban Design, Trees and Landscape Team Leader to discuss aspects of the Design Guide in more detail.

The Panel's attention has been drawn to the fact that the Building for Life Assessments, undertaken by the Working Group during a site visit to Loves Farm, have established that the site has been developed to a silver (good) standard.

Members have been assured that lessons have been learnt from the Loves Farm development, specifically the importance of phasing and road construction. Having regard to road adoption, Members have been advised that the District Council is hoping to engage more effectively with the County Council to ensure that roads on future developments are of an acceptable standard to residents. Further to this, it has been confirmed that standards relating to car parking allocations have changed. The Planning Service Manager (Policy) has reported that the new Local Plan will define standards for parking spaces and house sizes. However, the Secretary of State has recently announced an urgent review into local and national

standards with a view to rationalising them, which could affect the Council's ability to influence such matters.

Owing to their importance for the Council's planning function, the Panel has received an update on recent Government announcements on temporary changes to the planning system.

14. THE CONTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURE TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF PLANNING POLICIES

The Panel has received the findings to date of its Working Group which has been established to examine how agriculture and its environmental work is reflected in the Council's policy framework. Given its significance to the local, regional and national economy, the Working Group has formed the view that these issues should have greater prominence in the Council's policies.

The Planning Service Manager (Policy) has advised Members that the new Local Plan will address some of the issues raised by the Working Group, specifically the protection of high quality agricultural land. Further to this, Planning Officers will be looking at 'enabled exceptions' whereby communities will be able to safeguard their own sustainability via community development.

In light of the response by the Head of Planning & Housing Strategy to the Working Group's recommendations, it has been agreed that the Working Group will meet with Planning Officers to discuss the issues raised and agree a way forward for the study.

Other Matters of Interest

15. WORKPLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with the programmes of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

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

Councillor D A Giles has highlighted his concerns over Japanese Knotweed growing in Eaton Socon, some of which relates to Council-owned land and has implications for the waste collection service. In response, the Scrutiny Review Manager has produced a scoping report on this matter in order for the Panel to assess whether a study is required.

Councillor J W Davies has advised Members that there has been a delay in the production of the Tree Strategy, principally due to the voluntary redundancy of administrative support staff within the Tree and Landscape Planning Team. It is anticipated that the Strategy will

be completed by the end of 2012, at which time consultation will take place.

Councillor M G Baker has reported that the Waste Collection Working Group has made good progress with its aim to educate residents as to what items can be placed in which bin.

Councillor Mrs M Banerjee has informed the Panel that two meetings have been held with Anglian Water and the Environment Agency regarding ongoing drainage problems within the District. The Panel has been pleased to note that County Council Officers will continue to meet with representatives from Anglian Water in order to resolve these issues.

17. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest edition of the Decision Digest and discussed various matters contained therein. Councillor J W Davies has explained the reason behind the Licensing and Protection Panel's decision to return the responsibility for licensing pavement cafés to the County Council and the Scrutiny and Review Manager has clarified the current position in relation to voluntary sector funding.

D Harty
Chairman