
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

**Report of the meetings held on 12th March and
9th April 2013**

Matters for Information

54. THE GREAT FEN PROJECT – SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY

The Panel has received a summary of a socio-economic study on the Great Fen. The study provides an update on the work being undertaken to deliver local economic benefits through the Great Fen Project. A number of opportunities have arisen including the creation of new jobs and agricultural opportunities, some of which are regarded as exemplar schemes. Further similar opportunities will arise from the Great Fen Visitor Centre and the development of other visitor facilities and services.

The study has found that the area has experienced a shift from the traditional agricultural activities to animal and wildlife management. An example of this change includes the cultivation of reeds for roof thatching.

The Council's contribution towards the development of the Visitor Centre has been made "in kind" and the Great Fen Project Partnership is responsible overall for the Centre's construction. The Visitor Centre is supported by a targeted fund raising campaign managed by the Wildlife Trust. The Trust has the responsibility for raising the necessary funding for the Project. A Community Infrastructure Levy contribution is available and will be used on a strategically important green space scheme.

The Panel has discussed the figures contained within the study's Executive Summary document relating to the number of new jobs created by the Project since its inception. Members have questioned whether the Socio-Economic study recognises the Project's full economic benefits. The Council agreed to be a Partner in the Project on the understanding that it will produce a number of economic benefits for the District. It has been suggested that the Project's wider impact on the economy, such as spending in the area by visitors on tourism including overnight stays and food should be included in the Executive Summary. Members have subsequently received information on the net figure for jobs created and the full economic benefits of the Project.

Information reports will be provided to the Panel as the Great Fen Project continues to develop. A site visit will be held in September.

**55. EMERGENCY PLANNING
(TO INCLUDE COUNCIL'S USE OF SANDBAGS)**

(The following item was considered as a confidential item under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.)

Details of the Council's Major Incident Plan and recent amendments made to the Council's sandbag policy have been reported to the Panel. The sandbag policy has been updated and now requires householders to take greater responsibility for protecting their own properties by introducing flood protection measures within their homes. Such measures have recently been introduced within Alconbury.

The Panel has questioned what the cost is to the Council when flooding occurs within the District. The work involved has not been fully costed but 60 days of overtime has been paid to employees undertaking duties during the November and December floods. The Panel has suggested that the Council should draw on lessons learned from Alconbury and encourage Town and Parish Councils to adopt a partnership approach alongside residents to prevent flooding within their communities. Financial assistance can be sought from external sources such as the Anglian (Central) Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

The Panel agrees that greater emphasis should be placed upon residents protecting their properties and has endorsed the changes made to the Council's sandbag policy. The Council has written to households affected by the recent floods to advise them of their responsibilities. This message will also be communicated to the Town and Parish Councils.

Other matters discussed include the practices employed by other authorities to supply sandbags, the positive perception of the Council that supplying sandbags creates and whether or not the Council should introduce charges. The latter would be difficult as the Council delivers sandbags to drop-off points within communities across the District and not directly to affected households. The Panel has further discussed the training exercises undertaken by the Council on the execution of the Major Incident Plan and the training courses attended by staff at Easingwold College. Details of the Council's training programme have been circulated to Panel Members for information.

56. ENERGY FROM GREEN WASTE – STATEMENT

The Panel has accepted that, owing to long term contractual arrangements with the County Council and Amey Cespa, it would not serve any purpose to undertake a study into the production of energy from the green waste it collects. The Council is tied into a 25 year

agreement that enables green and food waste to be collected together and will be subject to heavy financial penalties if it wishes to terminate the contract.

57. SPEED REDUCTION

Further to Item No 40 of the Report of the meeting held on 15th January 2013, the Panel has had the opportunity to consider additional evidence in support of the proposed roll out to other areas of the District of a speed reduction initiative currently operating in Hilton using stickers placed on wheeled bins in the village. The Executive Councillor for Environment, Councillor D M Tysoe, the Head of Operations and a representative of Speedwatch have addressed the Panel to assist Members' understanding of the issues. It has previously been agreed that speed reduction stickers could be displayed on wheeled bins in Hilton on a trial basis, to establish whether they are effective in reducing the speed of vehicles and thus in promoting road safety. However, the Panel has recognised that the success or otherwise of the pilot has been difficult to measure as data on speeding and road safety had not been collected before the trial commenced.

Although disappointed at the lack of evidence produced by the trial, Councillor Tysoe has recognised that there are other sources which suggest that such schemes are effective. Therefore, Councillor Tysoe has indicated that he is minded to support a proposed change in the policy to allow stickers displaying speed reduction messages to be affixed to the Council's wheeled bins subject to assurances being received regarding the management of potential schemes and the avoidance of consequential liabilities for the District Council. He has also expressed the view that a decision whether to pursue a scheme should lie ultimately with the appropriate town or parish council who also should decide the locations where use of the stickers would be most effective.

Subject to the Head of Operations being satisfied with the design of the proposed stickers and approval of other guidelines, the Panel has recommended that a change is made to the current policy to permit the placing of Speedwatch stickers on wheeled bins for speed reduction purposes on the proviso that any schemes introduced be funded and approved locally by the respective town or parish council.

58. RECAP - WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH

The Panel has been updated on the progress of the RECAP Waste Partnership which involves four District, Cambridge and Peterborough City and Cambridgeshire County Councils. Various options have been developed since 2011 such that partners working together can achieve savings and more efficient operating practices. Three specific areas are currently being pursued by partners and these include the 'whole waste system approach' which comprises a series of work streams relating, for instance, to waste services, joint procurement and cross border route optimisation. In endorsing the principles of a 'whole system approach', Members have noted that a

business case for the project will be presented to the Panel and the Cabinet for approval in the Autumn.

Following concern expressed at adverse reports which have appeared in a national newspaper, the Head of Operations has assured the Panel that material collected is recycled and not placed in landfill. Information to this effect features on the District Council's website.

Other Matters of Interest

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

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings. An update on the latest position with regard to the Landbeach Waste Management Plant has been presented by the Chairman. The latest recycling figures also have been circulated to Members.

Councillor Mrs M Banerjee has updated the Panel on preliminary discussions which have taken place at the County Council on the future of rural transport in Cambridgeshire. The Panel has requested progress reports on drainage issues in Yaxley and the work of the Growth and Infrastructure Thematic Group of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership to future meetings.

Given general interest in the progress and plans for Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, the Panel has expressed the view that Members of all Overview and Scrutiny Panels should be invited when the matter next is discussed by the Social Well Being Panel.

The Panel has agreed to undertake a review the Council's grounds maintenance budget. The Head of Operations will submit a report to the Panel at its June 2013 meeting to initiate a debate on grounds maintenance service standards. Operational efficiencies within the service have already been identified and further savings will require a reduction in the current service standards. The Panel has asked the Council to be mindful of the repercussions of changes, such as the impact it might have upon encouraging children to play in the streets and increased levels of fly tipping in overgrown grass verges. It has been noted that any outcome of this review could not take effect until 2014.

60. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel has received details of the studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

61. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the current Notice of Executive Decisions at each of its meetings.

62. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest edition of the Decision Digest at each of its meetings and discussed matters contained therein.

D Harty
Chairman