
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

**Report of the meetings held on 9th July and
10th September 2013**

Matters for Information

8. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY TO WIND TURBINE DEVELOPMENT DRAFT REVISED SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

In conjunction with the Cabinet, the Panel has examined the Landscape Sensitivity to Wind Turbine Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and the supporting technical evidence. The Draft Revised SPD takes into account new national policy guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Council's approach to assessing landscape sensitivity to wind turbine development since 2005. Guidance on the siting and design of smaller scale wind turbines is now included in the Draft Revised SPD and it has been clarified with an additional piece of commissioned work entitled 'The Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines in Huntingdonshire'. The latter details all operational and consented wind turbine developments in the District together with those that are currently awaiting determination.

The content of a letter from a representative of Molesworth Action Group has been discussed by the Panel. He is concerned about various aspects of the proposed SPD and has referred to the perception that guidance on wind turbine developments has been relaxed, the separation distances between wind turbines and residential properties and the definition of the term "historic village". The Panel is satisfied with the Council's position on each of these matters and a written response has been made to the letter.

The Panel regards the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines in Huntingdonshire document as an important piece of work. In order to give the Draft Revised SPD further weight and to strengthen support for it to make it better able to withstand the rigours of an appeal, the Panel has suggested to the Cabinet that the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines in Huntingdonshire should undergo a separate public consultation exercise.

The Panel has commented upon the fact that the terms "adverse visual impact" and "material harm" do not appear in the SPD. Whilst they are in the Core Strategy, the Panel is of the view that explicit

reference to these terms should be incorporated within the future planning policy framework.

Concerns remain over the wind turbine group sizes proposed within the SPD. The Panel is not satisfied that the group sizes have been satisfactorily justified, particularly when considering the District's unique landscape characteristics. The Panel has reiterated the view expressed in January 2013 when the draft revised SPD was considered prior to public consultation, that the SPD should not include the proposed upper limit for large groups of wind turbines and echo their comments made that the specification of an upper limit will provide developers with an indication of the level of development they could expect to receive approval for, and in some cases, they might expect to exceed that level. It is felt that the SPD should be strengthened to provide more rigidity in this respect. To support this argument, it has been pointed out that the previous Land Use Consultants Study has been used to inform the existing and the revised SPD group sizes but it has been based on areas with differing landscape characteristics to those of Huntingdonshire. Furthermore, Table 1 of the SPD provides a summary of potential capacity for wind turbine developments, and indicates that there is, at best, moderate capacity for large groups with some of these limited to groups of 13-15. In addition, Table 6 shows that some areas of the District are already reaching saturation point and conditions placed on existing developments severely restrict further development. Members have argued that if capacity for turbines at the upper end of the large group size is so restricted, the large group size should not be set at 24. The Panel has recommended that further work is undertaken significantly to revise downwards the size of the groups.

The introduction of a separation distance between wind turbines and residential properties has also been discussed by the Panel. It is felt that a minimum distance of 2km should be introduced either within the draft Local Plan or the SPD itself. Members have suggested that Officers should be requested to produce terms for such a policy for approval by Members.

Whilst the Panel recognises the need for the Council to have in place a SPD for wind turbine developments, the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines in Huntingdonshire document demonstrates that the District has reached saturation point in certain landscape character areas. Government policy, therefore, presents a particular challenge. Furthermore, there appear to be fewer wind turbine developments in neighbouring local authority areas.

Other matters discussed include the guidance on wind turbine developments due to be issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government, National Grid connections and the use of photo montages. Having regard to the former, it has been reported that the impact of the announcement is not yet known but it will need to be taken into account in the future.

9. YAXLEY SEWERAGE

The Panel has been acquainted with developments in tackling sewerage problems in Yaxley. The issue had previously been drawn to the Panel's attention in December 2011 via a petition submitted by Yaxley Parish Council. Having carried out a number of improvements, Anglian Water is currently liaising with affected residents to lay a new surface water sewer. This work is expected to be completed at the end of the financial year.

One problem remains. No one accepts responsibility for the maintenance of the surface water balancing pond off Mere View. The land is owned by the Crown as the company who built it as part of a residential development failed to transfer it to Anglian Water and has now gone into liquidation. The problem is that silt builds up in the balancing pond and can lead to flooding. The fencing around the pond also requires repair. The Council has written to Anglian Water to request that it takes responsibility for the balancing pond but agreement to do this has not been received. The Council will continue to pursue this matter.

One of the key findings of the Panel's work is that residents are encouraged to report any flooding to Anglian Water and the County Council's Flood Team so that they are recorded. This strengthens the case for Anglian Water to carry out works. This study has now been completed.

10. JOINT MATERIALS RECYCLING FACILITY PROCUREMENT

The Panel has expressed support for a proposal jointly to procure a material recycling facility operator to manage and process all the recycling materials collected across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The proposal has been developed by the Recycling in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership and will confirm the waste collections authorities' commitment to continuing with it. Members have recommended that the decision to award the contract is delegated to the Head of Operations after consultation with the Executive Councillor for the Environment.

Although the proposal only relates to the bulking, sorting and onward processing of recyclable materials, the Panel has discussed the possibility that requirements for the presentation of materials could influence the way they are collected. If this is the case, Members have sought assurances that the level of service in Huntingdonshire is not lowered, that is, any "levelling" will be to at least the District's current standards. Equally, the Panel is of the view that there should not be restrictions on the future development of the service nor on the Council's ability to change the way it is delivered should that be necessary.

It is stressed that the proposals relate to "back office" functions and will not affect the delivery of front line services. Whilst market forces will influence the level of income generated, the overall risk to the Council will be no greater than if the District let its own contract. On a

related subject, there has been some doubt about awarding the contract to a single organisation; however, it may be that there will be separate contracts for different types of recycle. This will mitigate the risk of dealing with one company, which is in a strong negotiating position. A further area of concern relates to the actions of partners wishing to terminate from the contract. Members have been assured that the terms of the contract will be legally binding and that there will be financial penalties in such cases.

Finally, the Panel has drawn attention to the fact that the proposal does not contain any reference to scrutiny of the new arrangements. It has been suggested that the Governance Agreement should be amended to include provision for scrutiny of the contract and its effect on the waste collection service individually or collectively by the partner local authorities.

Other Matters of Interest

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

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings. A brief update has been delivered on the work being undertaken by the Corporate Plan Working Group on the development of the Council Delivery Plan. The Panel then has agreed to remove local bus services within Towns and the impact of large scale housing developments upon the A428 from the future study programme as these matters will be addressed through the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative and the Local Plan to 2036 respectively.

The Panel has asked the Tree Strategy Working Group to reconvene to consider the terms of a draft Strategy with Planning Officers. A meeting will be arranged shortly for this purpose. A position statement on areas where household recycling is not taking place will be submitted to the Panel's November 2013 meeting. Having regard to the management of the Council's car parks, the Chairman has reported that this work will proceed once the Cabinet has completed its own work in this respect.

12. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel has received details of the studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels. The Chairman has reported that the Economic Well-Being Panel has put on hold its Working Groups to focus on the Council's financial position over the next few years.

13. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions at each of its meetings. Members will have sight

of items on the Carbon Management Plan and Green Deal prior to their submission to the Cabinet.

14. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest editions of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein. The Panel's concerns over Occupational Therapy waiting times and CCTV coverage in St Neots have been referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) for investigation.

G J Bull
Chairman