
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

**Report of the meetings held on 14th January and
11th February 2014**

Matters for Information

23. RENEWAL OF GREAT FEN PROJECT COLLABORATION AGREEMENT

The Panel has reviewed a proposal to renew the Great Fen Project Collaboration Agreement, which is due to expire in March 2014. The Project had been initiated in the 1990s and the District Council is one of the five founding Partners alongside the Environment Agency, Middle Level Commissioners, Natural England and the Wildlife Trust.

The role of the Steering Group in governing the work of the Project has been explained to the Panel. The Steering Group has a budget monitoring function that is undertaken on a quarterly basis. One of the benefits of being involved in the Project is that the Council has the ability to provide technical expertise and guidance on a number of Project related matters such as assisting with planning applications and providing advice on the design of the new Visitors Centre.

The Project has been able to demonstrate that it has produced a number of economic benefits for the area such as the creation of new agricultural jobs, enhanced levels of local contracting, increased volunteering opportunities and attracting rising numbers of visitor to the District.

The Council matches the funding provided by the other four founding Partners of the Project. The Council's contribution is used to fund the Great Fen Project Manager's post and to stage ad-hoc promotional/educational events. Peterborough City and Cambridgeshire County Councils are "observing Partners" on the Steering Group but it is hoped they both will become Project funders in the future.

The Visitor Centre will be developed during the life of the new agreement. The Centre will be owned by the Wildlife Trust and this means there will be no financial risk to the Council as a result of this development.

The Panel has expressed support for the renewal of the Agreement and placed on record its wish to continue to monitor the development of the Project as it develops.

24. HUNTINGDONSHIRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE THEMATIC GROUP

The Panel has been acquainted with the work of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership – Growth and Infrastructure Thematic Group. The Group's main role is to identify key infrastructure projects within the District and to recommend priorities for the allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership Board and the Cabinet. To assist them with their work, the Group develops an Infrastructure Business Plan each year.

Members' attention has been drawn to the difficulties that have been encountered in securing a Town/Parish Council representative as a member of the Group. Whilst an approach has been made to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils, it has not been possible to make an appointment and it remains a concern that whoever is appointed will not be able to represent the views of all the District's Towns and Parishes. As a way forward the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing will be writing to all Towns and Parishes asking them to offer alternative solutions.

Whilst the Council is already receiving CIL funding, Members are mindful that the transition between CIL and Section 106 Agreements is having an effect on income levels. Greater receipts from CIL are expected in future years.

The Panel is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in place and that a clear audit trail in respect of the bidding process for infrastructure work is in place.

25. FACING THE FUTURE – SUGGESTED PRIORITIES

(Part of the discussion on the following item was considered as a confidential item under paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.)

The Panel has received an update on the Facing the Future process at its January meeting and all Overview and Scrutiny Members have been invited to participate in the discussions at the February meeting on the Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen's recommended approach to managing the ideas for savings that have emerged through the Facing the Future process and priorities for further research.

Members have discussed the potential implications of the Council's approach to shared services and outsourcing and of individual savings suggestions. Some Members have questioned whether the Council should pursue options for shared services or outsourcing on the grounds that the Council would lose an element of control of transferred services. However, it has been recognised that this has to be weighed against the possible savings that might be achieved.

Decisions on shared services and outsourcing will not be taken without a detailed appraisal of all the Council's options.

The Panel has requested that reports on progress of the overall Facing the Future Project, the effect of the Project on the performance of the Council against the Corporate Plan and on individual savings proposals are submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels as the Project proceeds. Subject to changes to the way some items should be treated, the lists of suggestions for savings have been approved for submission to the Cabinet.

26. CORPORATE PLAN

The Panel has endorsed the decision to incorporate reference to the people of Huntingdonshire as a key theme running throughout the new Corporate Plan. Having queried whether there might be a more appropriate way of describing the Council's approach to homelessness, the Panel has expressed support for the draft Corporate Plan and expressed an interest in receiving performance data in due course.

Other Matters of Interest

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

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings. Updates have been received on the work being carried out for the Tree Strategy and Design Principles for Future Development Working Groups. Members have also been acquainted with the latest position on the Landscape Sensitivity to Wind Turbine Development – Draft Revised Supplementary Planning Document, which will now be submitted to the Panel in April 2014.

Progress with the work of RECAP has been slow and the Executive Councillor for Environment has advised that there is a desire amongst Partners for the project to gain more momentum. A meeting to discuss how the work might be expedited was held on 7th February 2014.

Town and Parish Council representatives are encouraged to attend consultation meetings being held by the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative. Finally, the Panel has removed Recycling in Flats from its work programme because residents of some flats' inability to recycle waste materials is the result of inadequate provision within their buildings. This is the responsibility of the landlord and it is largely a Ward matter.

28. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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

29. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the Notice of Key Executive Decisions at its meetings. Clarification of the purpose of the Huntingdon West Masterplan document has been received. There is a possibility that the A14 item might be brought forward from April to March 2014, but this is largely dependent on the Highways Agency making a decision on the next stage of the consultation.

30. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest editions of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein.

G J Bull
Chairman