
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

Report of the meetings held on 11th March and 8th April 2014

Matters for Information

31. RECAP OVERVIEW AND PROGRESS TOWARDS A WHOLE SYSTEMS APPROACH

The Panel has received a presentation on progress made by RECAP with the Whole Systems Approach. This has included details of the outcomes achieved together with the ongoing work to deliver projects and efficiencies across the Partnership. The Executive Councillor for Environment has referred to the length of time it has taken to deliver RECAP projects, which are very complex in nature.

The presentation has covered the vision adopted for the project, its guiding principles, the context for the adoption of a Whole System Approach and the challenges and issues which have arisen during the course of the Partnership's work to date. Details of the work programme have also been received together with the initiatives that are underway for delivery in the short term.

There will be a need for a clear steer from each Partner authority when any future RECAP proposals are developed. There will be a role for Overview and Scrutiny to play in this process and in ensuring the proposals are achieved as planned.

The Panel has discussed the risks associated with the joint procurement of services for the bulking, sorting and onward processing of recyclable materials. Particular attention has been paid to the market value obtained per tonne for the recyclate collected by each authority. Recyclate returns will be generated on a pro rata basis for each Partner authority. One of the benefits of this particular work stream is the sharing of costs associated with tipping, which is expected to generate efficiencies for each authority.

There is a lack of awareness generally by both Members and the public over what happens to both recyclable and residual waste after it has been collected from households. There is a need to educate the public and to enhance Members' own understanding of the process. With the latter in mind, Members have agreed to undertake a site visit to Waterbeach Waste Management Plant. The visit is likely to take place on 9th May 2014.

Members' attention has been drawn to the voluntary work being undertaken by a young resident who encourages and promotes recycling within the community. A PR event has been held in March 2014 at Eastfield House with the individual concerned.

Discussion has taken place on the differing practices employed by Partner authorities and the impact this has upon the Partnership as a whole. The example referred to at the meeting is the burning of residual waste by Peterborough City Council whilst other authorities, including Huntingdonshire, send such waste to be rotted down. This is something the Partnership will have to address. A sound business case outlining all available options will be developed to resolve this matter. In addition, a report will be produced in the summer on cross border route optimisation.

The Panel has been informed that planning permission has been granted for Addenbrooke's Hospital to build an Energy Innovation Centre on the Cambridge Biomedical Campus. The development includes a combined heat and power unit, two biomass boilers and a clinical waste incinerator.

32. FLOOD PREVENTION

As the first step in a study on flooding in the District, representatives of the Environment Agency have advised the Panel of the flood risk management activities of their organisation in Huntingdonshire. The purpose of the study is to enable the Panel to take an informed view of the risks and mitigations associated with flooding in the District.

The Panel has received details of the Risk Management Authorities in Huntingdonshire, the roles of the Lead Local Flood Authority and Environment Agency, Flood Risk Management schemes in Huntingdonshire, future areas of work, Internal Drainage Board schemes and the types of maintenance work undertaken within the District. The responsibilities of riparian land owners, the influence the Environment Agency has upon planning and new developments and the flood warning defences and improvements in Huntingdonshire have also been reported to Members.

The dredging of rivers has been discussed. River dredging primarily has an impact upon low level flooding events and will not provide the District with the capacity to deal with large amounts of rainfall that have recently been experienced in other areas of the country.

The role of the Environment Agency in responding to planning applications, particularly on sites proposed for development on flood plains has been considered. Flood risk assessments prepared for applications are scrutinised and reviewed by relevant departments within the Agency. There is a need to differentiate here between fluvial flooding and surface water flooding. The latter is the responsibility of the County Council. The importance of working with Partners on the management and coordination of flood risk has been stressed to Members. The Panel has been encouraged to engage

with the County Council as the Lead Local Flooding Authority in the course of the study.

Other matters discussed include the powers the Environment Agency has to undertake enforcement and prosecution action and the insurance related support provided to homeowners affected by flooding. It has been suggested that the District Council might need to consider the case for financial contributions to be made for flood management works in the future.

To take the study forward, a scoping report has been submitted to the Panel's April 2014 meeting. Members have noted the content of the Scrutiny of Flooding toolkit produced by the Local Government Information Unit. A Working Group has been appointed comprising Councillors G J Bull, D Harty, R S Farrer and Mrs L Kadic to pursue the investigations further. It has been agreed that linkages to the Local Plan and surface water flooding will be explored as part of the study.

33. CABINET FEEDBACK: FACING THE FUTURE

The Panel has noted the deliberations of the Cabinet on the first phase of the Facing the Future process. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) will undertake a monitoring role of the project as it develops but the Panel will continue to receive specific proposals on service areas falling within its remit.

34. DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

(a) Local Plan to 2036

The Panel has been acquainted with the current position in respect of the new Local Plan. The Plan needs to have a strong evidence base, which includes the Cambridgeshire Long-Term Transport Strategy. This Strategy is due to appear before the Panel in July and will be subject to public consultation in June 2014. The Plan will be finalised for consultation once the Strategy has been approved.

There is some concern over the risks associated with not having a new Local Plan in place. The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing has advised that as there are sufficient areas of identified undeveloped land no shortages are expected in the medium term. The public consultation on the Local Plan is expected to take place in November 2014 with a view to its adoption in March 2015. The advantage of this timescale is that it will allow the Council to learn lessons from other authorities who have already been through the adoption process.

It has been confirmed that joint working with partner authorities and agencies takes place wherever necessary. The example referred to at the meeting is the Highway Agency's 20 year transport layout for the East of England region. The Panel has

discussed the viability exercise undertaken to determine when developers will be required to pay for infrastructure works and received assurances that all Council strategies and policies are reviewed to ensure they remain suitable for the purposes of the Local Plan.

(b) Landscape Sensitivity to Wind Turbine Development Draft Revised Supplementary Planning Document

The Panel has received an update on the Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Wind Energy Development, which has been launched for consultation from 28th March until 9th May 2014. The Draft SPD includes additional guidance on cumulative landscape and visual impact and revisions to the upper levels of turbine capacity. The SPD is a lengthy and technical document and a summary will be produced and made available to both Members and the public over the next two weeks. It is envisaged that the SPD will be in place in June 2014, in time for the Bicton Wind Farm Public Inquiry, which is scheduled to take place in August 2014.

Members have previously expressed views that separation distances should be included in the SPD. The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing has indicated that in order to withstand the rigours of an appeal, due consideration will need to be given to the character and landscape of a site. He has further confirmed that each application is dealt with on a case by case basis. Separation distances are not likely to be effective in an Appeal.

In response to further questions raised by the Panel, it has been confirmed that the views of the consultant employed previously to undertake work on wind turbine development has been incorporated within the Draft SPD and that neighbouring authorities are consulted on it.

35. A TREE STRATEGY FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE – BRIEFING NOTE

The Panel has been informed that work continues to be undertaken to develop a Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire. The Strategy aims to protect, maintain and enhance trees within the District. It is due to be considered by the Panel in June 2014 and prior consideration will be given by the Tree Strategy Working Group. The adoption of the Strategy is welcomed as it means that trees will no longer be managed in a fragmented and ad hoc manner. Maintenance will be planned in a coordinated way for the benefit of all stakeholders.

The delay in the Strategy's development has been attributed to resourcing constraints within the Planning Division, which have significantly decreased since 2011. A balance has had to be struck with other priorities faced by the Planning Division.

Members have discussed the use of a consultant employed to complete this work. The Planning Service Manager (Policy) has

confirmed that he is satisfied with the standard of work produced and has made reference to the invaluable contributions made by the Council's Arboricultural Officer who is recognised nationally as an expert in this field of work. The document has been produced in conjunction with other internal service departments to ensure a coordinated approach in the management of the Council's tree estate. It also outlines residents' responsibilities for the maintenance of their own trees.

Other Matters of Interest

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

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings. Members have been acquainted with the progress on the production of a new Design Guide, which is likely to be considered by the Panel at the end of May/June 2014. Councillor Mrs L Kadic has reported that she will be attending two Working Group meetings set up by the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative on 24th June and 1st July 2014. It has been confirmed that the Panel will have sight of the Huntingdonshire Infrastructure Business Plan at its October 2014 meeting.

The Chairman has reported on the review being undertaken of the operation of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels. There is a desire to improve current practices, in particular to enhance the overview element of the Panel's role by being involved in pre-policy development work in conjunction with the Cabinet. Members have concurred with a suggestion that the number of Panels should be reduced from three to two. They have been encouraged to forward any further comments directly to the Chairman.

37. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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

38. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the Notice of Key Executive Decisions at its meetings. A brief update has been received on the A14, the consultation for which was launched on 7th April 2014. The Panel also has received an update on the Senior Management Restructure and noted the latest position with regard to the recruitment to the Directors and Heads of Service posts for the authority.

39. SCRUTINY

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

G J Bull
Chairman