

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 8 April 2014.

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, J W Davies, R S Farrer, D A Giles, G J Harlock, D Harty, Ms L Kadic and Mrs D C Reynolds.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker and I C Bates.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor N J Guyatt.

88. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 11th March 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

89. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

90. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel considered and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Executive Leader of the Council for the period 1st April to 31st August 2014. Having noted that an item on the A14 would be submitted to the Panel's June 2014 meeting, it was reported that the consultation on the Cambridge to Huntingdon Improvement Scheme had been launched on 7th April 2014, and would last until 15th June 2014.

At the Chairman's request, the Panel received an update on the Senior Management Restructure and noted the latest position with regard to the current recruitment exercise being undertaken for the Directors and Heads of Service posts within the Authority. Clarification was received on the number of posts to be recruited to and the membership of the Senior Officers Panel. It was further noted that LGSS and SOLACE would be assisting the Council with the recruitment exercise.

91. DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

(Councillor N J Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

(a) Local Plan to 2036

The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing reported to the Panel on the development of the new Local Plan to 2036. He advised Members that there was a need to ensure the Plan had a strong evidence base, which included the Cambridgeshire Long-Term Transport Strategy. The Strategy would be submitted to the Panel in July 2014 and would be subject to public consultation in June 2014. He confirmed that there was a requirement for the Strategy to be included within the Local Plan.

The Chairman asked whether there were any risks associated with delaying in the production of the Local Plan. The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing responded that sufficient undeveloped land had been identified and that no shortages in this respect were expected in the medium term. The public consultation on the Local Plan would take place in November 2014 with a view to it being adopted in March 2015.

In response to a further question, it was confirmed that joint working with partner authorities and agencies had taken place whenever possible. An example was the Highways Agency's 20 year transport layout for the East of England region. Having queried why the Council could not request funding for infrastructure works from developers at an earlier stage in the development process, Members were apprised of the way developments' viability was assessed, which determined when developers would be required to pay.

At the conclusion of the discussion on this item, the Panel received assurances that all relevant Council strategies and policies had been reviewed to ensure they remained suitable for inclusion within the Local Plan.

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

The Planning Service Manager (Policy) delivered an update on work being undertaken on the Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Wind Energy Development, the consultation period on which had started on 28th March 2014 and ended on 9th May 2014. The Draft SPD now included additional guidance on cumulative landscape and visual impact and revisions to the upper levels of turbine capacity. It was a lengthy and technical document and a summary would be produced and made available to both Members and the public over the next two weeks. It was envisaged that the SPD would be in place by June 2014, in time for the Bicton Wind Farm Public Inquiry, which was scheduled to take place in August 2014.

The Planning Services Manager (Policy) reported on the expectation that Central Government would resist offshore developments in the future, which was likely to have an impact upon onshore developments. However, wind turbine

development in Huntingdonshire had historically been further advanced than in other areas and this could be beneficial to the District.

Members reiterated their previously expressed concerns at the absence of separation distances from the SPD. The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing indicated that in order to withstand the rigours of an appeal, due consideration would need to be given to the character and landscape of a site. He further stated that each application would be dealt with on a case by case basis and that separation distances would only be included if strong evidence to justify them existed. Such evidence was not available at the present time.

In response to further questions by Members, it was confirmed that the views of the consultant previously employed to undertake work on wind turbine development had been incorporated within the Draft SPD and that neighbouring authorities had been consulted on it prior to the launch of the public consultation.

92. A TREE STRATEGY FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE - BRIEFING NOTE

The Panel received and noted the contents of a briefing note prepared by the Arboricultural Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on progress with the production of a Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire. The Strategy would provide a framework to protect, maintain and enhance trees within the District.

The Strategy would be considered by the Panel in June 2014 with prior consideration being given to it by the Tree Strategy Working Group. Trees would no longer be managed in a fragmented and ad hoc manner. Trees for which the Council was responsible would be planned, cared for and protected in a coordinated way for the benefit of all stakeholders.

The Planning Services Manager (Policy) advised that the delay in the Strategy's development was attributable to resourcing constraints within the Planning Department, which had significantly reduced in size since 2011. The Department had to strike a balance with other priorities.

A Member asked a question about the quality of the expertise provided by the consultant employed to develop the Strategy. In response, the Planning Service Manager (Policy) stated that he was satisfied with the standard of work produced and made reference to the invaluable contributions made by the Arboricultural Officer who was nationally recognised as an expert in this area of work. The document had been produced in conjunction with other internal service departments to ensure a coordinated approach to the management of the Council's tree estate was achieved. It also included an outline of residents' responsibilities for the maintenance of their own trees.

93. FLOODING STUDY - SCOPING REPORT

Pursuant to Minute No. 13/83 and with the aid of a report prepared by the Scrutiny and Review Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Members gave consideration to the scope of their study into flooding within the District. Details of the Local Government Information Unit's Scrutiny of Flooding Toolkit were received. Having agreed that investigations into the subject's links to the Local Plan and surface water flooding should be added to the remit, the Panel accepted a suggestion that a Working Group should be appointed to pursue the investigations. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillors G J Bull, D Harty, R S Farrer and Mrs L Kadic be appointed onto a Flooding Working Group to examine:

- the effectiveness of the flood protection schemes already introduced within the District;
- surface water flooding;
- local environmental data;
- links to the Local Plan;
- the outcome of the investigations currently being undertaken by the Local Resilience Forum into Flood Risk Management, and
- whether there are any areas within the District at risk of flooding.

94. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Social Well-Being and Economic Well-Being.

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

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions. A brief update was delivered on the production of a Design Guide for Future Developments, which would be considered by the Working Group at the end of May/early June 2014. Councillor Mrs L Kadic reported that she would be attending two Working Group meetings set up by the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative on 24th June and 1st July 2014. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Panel would have sight of the Huntingdonshire Infrastructure Business Plan at its October 2014 meeting.

In conjunction with the other Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, the Chairman reported on the review being undertaken of the operation of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels. The purpose of the review was to improve current working practices. Following discussion, Members concurred on the need to enhance

the overview element of the Panel's role and for it to have more involvement in pre-policy development work in conjunction with the Cabinet. They also suggested that the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen should include the number of Panels in the review.

96. SCRUTINY

The 143rd Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

At the conclusion of the proceedings, as this was the last meeting of the Panel in the 2013/14 Municipal Year, the Chairman wished those Members standing at the forthcoming election well with their campaigns.

A note of thanks was passed on to the Panel from Dr P Jose, Service Manager for Environmental Management, for the support provided to him and his staff during his time at the Council. In noting that he would be leaving the Authority in June 2014, the Panel extended their best wishes to him for the future.

Chairman