
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

**Report of the meetings held on 17th June and 15th
July 2014**

Matters for Information

**1. FLOOD RISK IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE – PRESENTATION FROM
MIDDLE LEVEL COMMISSIONERS**

The Panel has received a presentation from the Clerk and Chief Executive of the Middle Level Commissioners on the Commissioners' work, its relationship with the nine Internal Drainage Boards within the District, how funding is apportioned across the Middle Level area, the significance of the St Germans pumping station, planned works at Bevills Leam Pumping Station and Salters Lode Lock and the extent of work undertaken with Partners on water management, which includes the Great Fen. As the Council's representative on the Middle Level Commissioners, Councillor P G Mitchell has drawn Members' attention to the Internal Drainage Board and Middle Level Commissioners' cost to the District.

The St Germans Pumping Station has a budget life of around 75 years. A replacement is expected before this period expires as there has already been some expenditure on renewing the pumps. The Middle Level also has a bank raising policy to prevent land shrinkage. This is a costly process and attempts are being made to secure grant aid for this work in the future.

Internal Drainage Boards are responsible for looking after arterial water courses to ensure the free flow of water across the Middle Level area. The Panel has noted the difficulties that encouraging riparian landowners to maintain their water courses present and the extent of maintenance work undertaken to clear silt, weed and blockages from rivers.

The Panel has enquired whether new housing developments have an impact upon the Middle Level area. Water from these developments does find its way into Internal Drainage Board systems. All planning applications are subject to a robust flood risk assessment as part of the planning process.

The information provided to the Panel will greatly assist the Working Group with its investigations. Owing to changes with the Panel's Membership, Councillor R J West has been appointed on to the Working Group.

2. ACTION ON ENERGY SCHEME

The Panel has been acquainted with the progress that has been made towards the delivery of the Action on Energy scheme within the District. Cambridgeshire has been awarded £7.8 million of grant funding from the Government's Green Deal for Communities Fund awarded. The money will be allocated on a first come first served basis to eligible households across the Cambridgeshire area.

The Scheme had been launched in November 2013 and is designed to provide residents with a trusted local authority backed route to obtaining home energy efficiency improvements. The funding will help residents primarily to meet the costs of the installation of solid wall insulation and to incentivise major energy efficiency improvements within the private rented sector. Members' attention has been drawn to the terms of the Government's Green Deal Home Improvement Fund, which offers residents a "cashback" incentive to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. The Council also has been allocated £26,000 of revenue funding to assist with the cost of Officer time spent distributing the funding and a further £10,000 for the St Ives Green House to showcase new products and technologies for green deal measures. It has also been confirmed that the Council will have disposed of the two Green House properties by the end of the financial year.

The Panel has discussed various aspects of the scheme. Publicity for it has been designed to target qualifying households. The Panel has also noted that a scheme to insulate park homes is also currently being trialled in St Neots. To date, 18 companies have achieved green deal accreditation with more in the pipeline. Any works undertaken by an accredited installer is guaranteed for 25 years. In the event that companies go into liquidation in that period responsibility remains with the Government who will seek an alternative accredited provider to undertake remedial works. It has been confirmed that there is no financial liability placed upon the Council.

3. WASTE POLICIES

The Panel has considered proposed revisions to the Council's Waste Collection Policies in relation to the collection points for wheeled bins/sacks from more remote properties (farms and lodges) and to additional green bins. Members have agreed with the Executive Member for Environment that the proposed policy on collection points for wheeled bins/sacks from more remote properties (farms and lodges) should be deferred for more detailed consideration pending completion of further work. A survey will be undertaken of all affected properties with a view to identifying a full range of options before any final decisions are made. Health and safety rules associated with refuse collections and their impact upon collection crews, vehicles and additional costs to the Council have been highlighted to the Panel.

The Panel is disappointed that Members have not been provided with prior communication about the proposals in advance of letters being sent out to affected residents. Assurances have been received from the Executive Member for Operations and the Environment that the terms of a protocol for communications with Members on these and other future changes will form part of the further investigations.

Strong views have been expressed over the potential impact of the proposals on those residing on private roads and unadopted roads and on new housing developments. The Panel has stressed the need to ensure that the circumstances of those in these positions are taken into account. Members have also suggested that more robust data should be obtained on the number of properties that might be affected by the proposed changes as, for example, RAF Wyton contains 600 houses on unadopted estate roads.

The Waste Collections Policy Working Group comprises Councillors M G Baker, G J Bull, D A Giles and G J Harlock. It has met with the Executive Member for Operations and the Environment and the Head of Operations to devise a plan to review the policy in respect of collection points.

The Panel has expressed support for the policy amendments proposed for additional green bins.

4. WIND ENERGY DEVELOPMENT IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE 2014 SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

The Panel has expressed support for the contents of the revised Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Wind Energy Development in Huntingdonshire 2014. The new SPD takes into account major changes in national and local planning policy as well as the granting of various permissions and the related construction of a number of turbines of all sizes throughout the District. The revised document will strengthen the Council's case at Public Inquiries and in the general course of the planning process.

The matter of separation distances is addressed within the SPD. This has previously been raised by Members and has been the subject of a study undertaken by consultants. Recent cases have established that the Council should not specify absolute numbers but that it can identify where cumulative effects are likely to occur. The Panel has been advised that the SPD is sufficiently robust to withstand an appeal.

5. A14 CAMBRIDGE TO HUNTINGDON – RESPONSE TO HIGHWAYS AGENCY DEVELOPMENT CONSENT ORDER PRE-APPLICATION STATUTORY CONSULTATION

The Panel has endorsed the Council's response to the statutory pre-application consultation being undertaken by the Highways Agency on the Development Consent Order for the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon development on the proviso that paragraph 4 (g) of Annex C is strengthened to include the words "The District Council

reserves its position on matters of detail, such as the mitigation of the impact of the development on affected villages, on which it will negotiate with the Highways Agency”.

The Panel has discussed various aspects of the scheme. Two changes have been made to it; namely the alteration to the realignment of the A1/A14 corridor west of Brampton and that tolling will no longer form part of the scheme. The Highways Agency plans to commence construction works in 2016 and this work is likely to take up to three years to complete. A number of mitigation measures are included within the Council’s response to protect villages affected by the development. The removal of the Huntingdon viaduct is likely to take around 18 months to complete and will commence after the construction works for the new A14 have ended.

Strengthening the mitigation measures proposed within the Council’s response will explicitly state the Council’s ongoing role as a Tier 1 partner in protecting areas of the District affected by the development. This role includes applying expertise on local circumstances to the plans such as traffic projections, for example, for Thrapston Road, Brampton.

6. CAMBRIDGESHIRE FUTURE TRANSPORT INITIATIVE

Councillor Mrs L Kadic has been appointed as the Panel’s representative on the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative.

7. A TREE STRATEGY FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Panel has endorsed the content of A Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire and has commended Officers on the production of the document. The Strategy has been subject to prior review by the Panel’s Tree Strategy Working Group the Members of which are satisfied with its content. It seeks to provide a solid framework for the protection, maintenance and enhancement of trees within the District and introduces a coordinated approach to tree management. It is a lengthy document but is intended for use as an electronic resource for interested stakeholders. The Panel welcomes the inclusion of the associated policies and guidance notes on tree care and, in particular, the note referring to trees and development, which will form the basis of a forthcoming supplementary planning document. The policies and guidance have been compiled in accordance with national best practice and Government guidance and have been peer reviewed.

Issues often arise relating to the ownership of trees so, as the Action Plan identifies, an attempt will be made to map the Council’s tree stock on a computerised tree management system. The Panel recommends that a further mechanism is introduced to identify responsibility for trees that are perceived to be in public ownership. The Panel recognises the importance of Local Tree Warden Coordinators. They are regarded as a significant local resource. It will be beneficial to promote their role and to seek to establish a Warden in every Parish. The Panel has discussed the need to maintain the

level of resources required to deliver the Strategy and made a suggestion the level of resources dedicated to the tree service is increased when the Council's financial position allows. The Strategy also reduces the risk to the Council in terms of claims made against the authority and will help to control the Council's future insurance costs.

The Panel has made a further recommendation that the commercial opportunities that the Strategy presents should be explored.

8. CAMBRIDGESHIRE LONG-TERM TRANSPORT STRATEGY

The Panel has endorsed the Cambridgeshire Long Term Transport Strategy and the refresh of Local Transport Plan 3 on the grounds that they are essential to the growth agenda. The Strategy has been developed in conjunction with neighbouring authorities to ensure a coordinated and collaborative approach to transport planning arrangements is adopted.

Members' attention has been drawn to the schemes planned for delivery in the period from 2014 to 2021, which includes proposals for Huntingdon, St Ives and St Neots together with details of planned and potential rail service improvements in the Cambridgeshire area. These plans are essential to the delivery of the growth agenda and are critical in terms of the Local Plan. Improvements to the A428 are assumed at this stage and its position will be confirmed when the Highways Agency releases its "Route Based Strategy" in March 2015. A new rail station is proposed at Alconbury Weald, which has been welcomed by the Panel.

The Strategy represents a radical change in approach to achieving transport based solutions across the Cambridgeshire area which, the Panel has been advised, has political support. It has been stressed that developments should be planned in the context of the transport system as a whole rather than individual project. The point also has been made that transport infrastructure improvements will be needed before housing growth takes place. Importantly, if the Council is to deliver such growth, Government funding will be required to meet the cost of the works.

The Panel has discussed the risks associated with the Strategy and its underlying links with the planning process. Reference has been made to the Northstowe development, where a planning condition prevents the second phase of development from proceeding until the new A14 has been completed. This has had an unexpected effect on the local planning policy position. The general point is that all steps should be taken to prevent such unintended consequences from arising in Huntingdonshire.

9. DRAFT HUNTINGDON AND GODMANCHESTER MARKET TOWN TRANSPORT STRATEGY

The Panel has been advised that a new Market Town Transport Strategy (MTTS) for Huntingdon and Godmanchester has been

produced and has expressed its support for its publication. The Strategy contains up to date detailed projects that will enable funding opportunities from a number of sources including Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funding to be taken advantage of.

The Panel welcomes the key proposals outlined in the MTTs and acknowledges that difficult decisions will need to be taken because the challenges identified cannot be avoided. Solutions will have to be found whether or not they are the preferred option. The example referred to at the meeting is the Hartford and Godmanchester link road.

The Panel has paid tribute to Councillor Mrs L Kadic for the way she has chaired the MTTs meetings.

10. SHARED SERVICES BUILDING CONTROL PROJECT – SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Panel has supported proposals for the Council to explore four options for establishing a Building Control shared service. The proposals will seek to maximise the potential to generate income, increase resilience to drive competitiveness and enhance the customer experience, create efficiencies by maximising other shared infrastructure including IT and maximise staff development opportunities.

A Project Team and Project Board have already been established with relevant individuals from both authorities. The Panel has been assured that staff are being engaged with from the outset and that career and development opportunities will emerge. The Panel does not wish local knowledge and expertise to be lost as a result of the shared service. To prevent this from happening, it is likely that local teams will be established within the shared service.

The Panel is of the view that there is a need to develop the business case for shared services as soon as possible as the Building Control Service is in direct competition with the private sector. The Panel has encouraged the Cabinet to give some priority to completing the investigations into those Options that cannot be completed immediately as a matter of urgency.

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. In doing so, the Chairman has requested Officers to arrange a site visit to the Great Fen and to extend an invitation to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) to attend. Similarly, a request has made that the Panel's site visit to the

Alconbury Transfer Station and Waterbeach Waste Management Plant is rearranged.

At the Chairman's request, an item entitled Litter Policies and Practices, to include graffiti removal, has been included in the Panel's work programme.

12. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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

13. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the Notice of Key Executive Decisions at its meetings. It is likely the items entitled Huntingdon West Master Plan, Civil Parking Enforcements and Carbon Management Plan will be submitted to the Panel's September and October 2014 meetings.

The Head of Operations has informed the Panel of the outcome of the tender process for the Recycling Contract, which was considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 19th June 2014.

The Panel also has received presentations from the Executive Members for Operations and Environment and for Strategic Planning and Housing on the areas of responsibility falling within their respective portfolios.

14. SCRUTINY

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

G J Bull
Chairman