
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

Report of the meeting held on 4th February 2015

Matters for Information

**35. LOCAL PLAN TO 2036 –
TARGETED CONSULTATION ENERGY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Panel has received an update on the current position with regard to the preparation of the draft Local Plan to 2036. The Stage 4 Draft Plan has now been published for a targeted consultation with Town and Parish Councils, District and County Members and other relevant stakeholders. The consultation will run from 23rd January to 20th March 2015 and will enable organisations and individuals an opportunity to make comments on the contents of the document without the constraints imposed by the formal statutory engagement process. The Panel have been reminded that there is an opportunity for any Member to submit individual representations during the consultation period and that they should also encourage Parish Councils to submit any comments which they might have by the deadline.

In terms of the timetable for the adoption of the new Local Plan in Winter 2016, the Panel has been informed that the next stage will be the preparation of the proposed submission Local Plan which will be presented to Cabinet in June and then published for a six-week statutory consultation. After this stage the Council will produce a submission document to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination. Members have discussed the possible outcomes of the examination and the implications for the Authority.

Having welcomed the decision by the Council to undertake additional targeted consultation at this stage, Panel Members have discussed a range of matters including gypsy and traveller sites and the provision of affordable housing and rural exception sites. Whilst rural exception sites will not form part of the Local Plan, the need for affordable housing within the District was well recognised and a target of 35% for new development will be included.

In response to a question as to whether there was a plan for the delivery of infrastructure the Executive Councillor has outlined the difficulties in negotiating with the County Council under their new political management arrangements and suggested that a mechanism will need to be found to drive this forward. Members have suggested that the message should also be conveyed to the local Members of

Parliament that financial assistance will be essential to the delivery of the Local Plan and that further effort is required to help to achieve this.

**36. CORPORATE PLAN –
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT (QUARTER 3)**

In conjunction with the Panels for Social and Economic Well-Being, the Panel has been acquainted with progress on the key activities identified within the Council's Corporate Plan during the period 1st October to 31st December 2014. The Panel is responsible for monitoring the key actions and activities within the strategic theme to 'Enable Sustainable Growth' and Members have reviewed where progress is on track, is within the acceptable variance, or is behind schedule within this theme. Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing was in attendance to answer Members questions on specific issues.

In reviewing the action to invest in initiatives that will deliver affordable housing, the Panel has sought clarification as to the levels of affordable housing that are provided within new developments and whether a minimum target should be incorporated into the Local Plan for both strategic and non-strategic development sites. Members have been advised that the Council aspires to provide 35% affordable housing in all sites. However in practice this is more achievable within the non-strategic sites as the competing infrastructure requirements within the more strategic sites may mean that the levels of affordable housing are driven down during negotiations. The Panel has been advised that it will be difficult to state a minimum level within the Local Plan, and that efficiencies in the delivery of other infrastructure elements can be pursued.

The Panel has noted that vacancies within the Planning Policy Team have now been filled and the Executive Councillor was confident that the update to the 2011 Buildings at Risk Register would be started in Quarter 4. Members have suggested that this should be treated as a priority for 2015.

With regard to enforcement, Members have commented on the growing number of complaints that they are receiving from Parish Council's on this subject and have been informed that the Cabinet are currently considering the Council's whole range of enforcement activities with a view to making improvements. To clarify the enforcement actions which can be undertaken by the Authority in relation to listed buildings and the current level of activity, the Panel has requested that a report should be submitted to a future meeting. The Executive Councillor will be invited back to discuss the matter further at this time.

In terms of the processing of planning applications, the Panel has noted that delays in validating applications and the issuing of older/out of time applications has continued to impact on performance figures in the quarter. In response to questions from Members as to whether it will be possible to recover from the current position, the

Executive Councillor has explained that plans are in place to ensure that all applications will be validated within one week and older/out of time applications determined before the end of the financial year. Members have commented on the impact that this may have on the size of future Agendas for the Development Management Panel.

Having noted that the Executive Councillor is confident that the Authority will be able to get back to where it should be and meet nationally set performance targets from 1st April 2015, Members have also received an update on work which will be undertaken to improve the efficiency of the planning application process, to make Planning Officers more accountable and improve the operation of the Development Management Panel. Members have been advised that there will be an opportunity for them to consider the proposed changes to the delegation arrangements in the Spring.

**37. HUNTINGDONSHIRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP –
GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE THEMATIC GROUP –
ANNUAL REPORT**

The Panel has received an annual update on the work of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership – Growth & Infrastructure Thematic Group. The Group's role is to support and co-ordinate the strategic growth and infrastructure development for Huntingdonshire and to act as Project Board for the delivery of the Infrastructure needs of the District. The Group makes informed recommendations to the Council's Cabinet on the prioritisation and potential funding opportunities for capital projects. It also acts as a conduit for the expenditure of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts.

As part of the presentation, the Panel has received an update on the CIL. Details of the demand notices that have issued to developers for CIL payments, the reliefs and exemptions authorised and the monies that have been transferred to Town and Parish Councils by the District Council have also been provided. Members have raised a number of specific questions with regard to self build exemptions which have been responded to by the Planning Policy Manager.

The Panel has discussed the requirement to transfer a proportion of CIL receipts to the Town or Parish Council in the area of development. Although parishes are required to produce an annual report detailing their expenditure from this money, there have been none received to date. The Panel has emphasised the importance of obtaining feedback from those to which CIL receipts have been paid and have asked the Executive Councillor as Chairman of Hemingford Grey Parish Council to be an exemplar in this regard. The Panel has also noted the intention of the Planning Policy Team to send out a reminder to Parish and Town Councils shortly.

Having noted that those Parish Councils who have a Neighbourhood Development Plan in place are able to receive 25% of receipts, Members have expressed concerns that a number of parishes did not understand the neighbourhood planning process and the implications of producing one. In response to which the Corporate Director

(Delivery) has undertaken to bring a paper to a future meeting outlining the current position.

In terms of the Growth and Infrastructure Thematic Group itself, Members have noted that the future role of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership is currently unknown and a review of external partnerships is being undertaken. The Panel is of the opinion that the operation of this Group does bring value to the District Council, however Members would welcome further information on its operation.

38. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) - PROJECT MANAGEMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

Following a variation to the membership of the Panel at the Council meeting in December, the Panel has appointed Councillor R S Farrer to replace Councillor B F Hyland on the Select Committee on Project Management.

Other Matters of Interest

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

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies. In doing so, Members have received a report from its Tree Strategy Working Group who had met to review the content of the Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy prior to its publication on the Council's website later in the month.

Having noted that a draft Cambridgeshire Flood and Water Supplementary Planning Document has recently been prepared, a meeting of the Panel's Flood Prevention Working Group will be convened shortly to review the draft. Members have also noted that additional resources have been brought in to help undertake the survey work to inform a review of the Council's waste collection policies.

40. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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

41. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the content of the Notice of Key Executive Decisions.

42. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest edition of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein. In doing so, Members have commented on the study work which is being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) with regard to neighbourhood planning given that this activity falls within their remit. In a similar vein, the Panel has also acknowledged the need to give further consideration to the allocation of performance indicators between the Panels to ensure that they are consistent with the Overview and Scrutiny remits.

G J Bull
Chairman