
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

Report of the meetings held on 10th March and 14th April 2015.

Matters for Information

43. EAST COAST MAIN LINE CROSSING CLOSURES

The Panel has considered a report on the East Coast Main Line crossing closures. The purpose of the scheme is to close all of the vehicular and pedestrian crossings from London Kings Cross to Edinburgh. The works will be split into two sections: London Kings Cross to Doncaster and Doncaster to Edinburgh. The works on the London Kings Cross to Doncaster section of the line will take three years from 2017 until 2020. As part of the discussions a revised plan for the level crossing replacement at The Offords has been circulated to Members and endorsed by the Panel.

The Panel has been informed that the scheme will not coordinate with the A14 improvement scheme as the schemes will be delivered utilising different Statutory provisions. It is clear that as a result of the scheme a number of roads, roundabouts and bridges will be built. Members have been informed that all roads will be offered to the County Council for adoption however Network Rail will be responsible for bridge maintenance.

Having noted the work undertaken to-date to improve the rail network, the Panel has indicated their support for the proposed scheme.

44. A14 PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel has been acquainted with the details of the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Improvement Scheme. Members have been advised that in the consultation process the Council is a Tier 1 Stakeholder and even though the authority are not required to make a formal representation in order to appear at the Public Examination, a formal representation has been made.

The Panel has been informed that the new bridges built as part of the scheme will be future proofed until 2036. The provision of adequate signage is a concern for the Panel however the details regarding signage will be decided after the contractors have been appointed. Members have been advised that funding has already been committed for the scheme by the Treasury and in addition Councils within the scheme have agreed funding contributions of £100m towards the scheme.

At the conclusion of the discussion on this item, the Panel has endorsed the Council's continued involvement with the Development Consent Order process, together with the contents of the Council's Relevant Representation.

45. HUNTINGDONSHIRE DESIGN GUIDE - UPDATE

Members have received an update on the Huntingdonshire Design Guide from the Planning Service Manager (Policy), Mr P Bland. The Panel have been informed that the guide is designed to be an electronic document as this is seen as the way forward in communicating and reaching the community and stakeholders.

The guide has been designed by Mr M Huntington, Urban Design, Trees and Landscape Team Leader and has the following features: high quality pictures to demonstrate good and bad planning design; simple text so that the public can easily understand the document; and it is interactive with links so that different areas of the document can be accessed. The document will go out for consultation in the near future.

The Panel has been informed that the Design Guide will be a supplementary planning document and will be enforceable. When the design guide goes live then Development Management applications will refer to the guide in their determination.

46. REVIEW OF PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

Further to item no. 36 of the Report to the meeting of the Council held on 25th February 2015, The Panel has received an update on Planning Enforcement and a more detailed review of the service will be completed for discussion at a future meeting in July or September 2015.

Members have commented that complaints are still being received from Parish Councils regarding Planning Enforcement and this may be due to misunderstandings regarding the limitations of enforcement powers. The Panel have been informed that work on the review must manage expectations of Parish Councils and be transparent regarding what can and cannot be achieved.

Arising from a query regarding the current resources in the service and how costs may be recovered. In response, The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing has informed the Panel that costs are rarely recovered, but the focus is primarily on managing expectations and working together with Parish Councils.

Clarification has been requested on timescales; how much time there is between an initial complaint being received and action being taken. The Panel have been informed that timescales often depend on the severity of the breach. Planning Enforcement deal with a large variety of projects and while most are minor, a complicated case may take longer to manage. Where a breach is unauthorised but not

considered unlawful, Planning Enforcement does not have the power to require that planning applications are submitted but the team does spend time encouraging people to submit applications to regularise the development. To help prioritise, the Team are considering a move towards categorisation meaning different types of breach can be targeted more effectively.

The Panel has been informed that Planning Enforcement's discretionary powers are proportionate to any breach and any action is expedient and not based on costs or income. The degree of harm that may be caused is the priority. Greater transparency of procedures and what Planning Enforcement can do may assist in Parish Councils' understanding.

Members have questioned the fee regime utilised by Planning Enforcement and have queried as to whether the Council could charge more for retrospective planning applications; whilst this has been considered by Government, retrospective fees remain as statutory. It was also noted that Planning Officers would like powers to require retrospective applications but this would require a change in national legislation.

The Chairman has acknowledged that enforcement is an emotive issue and has welcomed the progress being made. A further report will be presented to a future meeting of the Panel in Summer 2015.

47. HUNTINGDONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN TO 2036: POSITION STATEMENT

Further to Item no. 35 of the Report to the meeting on the Council held on 25th February 2015, the Panel has received an update on the current position in relation to the preparation of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing has informed Members that a good response has been received to the eight week consultation and that a more detailed report will be completed for the June/July Cabinet in 2015.

In response to a question regarding how the comments collated during the consultation will be analysed and how details of the respondents will be made available, Members have been informed that a variety of Stakeholders responded to the consultation, including the Environment Agency, the Highways Agency, landowners and Town and Parish Councils. Details of the respondents to the consultation will be published on the Council's website.

Concern has been expressed regarding timescales; whereby the Panel has been informed that the Local Plan is still expected to be submitted to the Government Inspector by the end of 2015. The Local Plan will be submitted to the Members of Council at the adoption stage.

Concern has been raised by the Panel relating to the clarity of changes to the Local Plan and the level of printing. The Executive Councillor for Strategy, Planning and Housing has endorsed the

suggestion that any further changes be printed as a supplement to the existing document or any changes be clearly highlighted.

48. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

Members have received an update on the current position in relation to the preparation of the Neighbourhood Development Plans for Huntingdonshire. The Development Team is committed to working with Parish Councils to assist them in developing a plan for their communities and to support them through the process.

The District Council has a duty to support Town and Parish Councils in a range of technical aspects of preparing and processing Neighbourhood Development Plans, for which it receives government funding. Neighbourhood Development Plans need to be prepared in conformity with the strategic policies of the local planning authority's Development Plan. However, the main principle is that the parish or town Council is the promotor and owner of the plan and takes responsibility for co-ordinating its preparation from beginning to end.

A Member has queried whether commercial or industrial development has zero liability for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and it has been confirmed that following a viability assessment B1, B2 and B8 development have zero liability. In discussing CIL it has been noted that the Council undertaken much work to implement CIL successfully.

It has been noted that the Council's draft Corporate Plan for 2015/16 includes a 'Key Action' that the Council will set out community planning offers and support community planning, working with Parishes to complete Neighbourhood and Parish Plans.

Other Matters of Interest

49. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the content of the Notice of Key Executive Decisions, which have been prepared by the Executive Leader.

With regards to the A14, Councillor D Dew has confirmed that the planned timetable is being adhered to.

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

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings. In doing so, Members have agreed to remove the Tree Strategy from the work programme.

With regard to the draft Cambridgeshire Flood and Water Supplementary Planning Document that has recently been prepared, a meeting of the Panel's Flood Prevention Working Group has

recently been convened to review the content of the draft. A Member has raised concern that flooding issues have been passed around too frequently and that they need responsibilities for surface and flood water to be clear. It has been suggested that the District Council needs to consider the implications of the forthcoming change with regards to planning.

Concern has been raised by several Members of the Panel regarding timescales and deadlines – in particular the Whole Waste System Approach/Waste Collection Policies, as no progress has been made since the Working Group last met in June 2014. It has been explained that this delay was due to operational capacity rather than a political decision not to take action on this matter.

The Executive Councillor for Operations and Environment has informed the Panel that the Whole Waste System Approach is part of the Recycle for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (RECAP) agenda. Councillors on RECAP are also frustrated with a lack of progress.

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. This review is overdue and this has been raised with the Head of Services and the Corporate Director. The delay is due to high workloads and conflicting priorities. Dates for consideration of the policy will be determined in the near future.

Similarly, Members have criticised the lack of progress on the Litter Policies and Practices item, including graffiti removal. The Panel has been informed that although there is an existing policy, a fundamental review is planned for the Operations Division and, as a result, no update can be provided at present. The general consensus of the Panel is that the delays in receiving reports that have been requested are not acceptable.

49. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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

The Panel has received a request for a volunteer to be co-opted on to the Affordable Housing Working group led by the Social Well-Being Panel. The Chairman has stated that the offer will be extended to all Panel Members as some were not present at the meeting.

51. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest edition of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein. It has been noted that the Social Media, Networking and Blog Policy is applicable to all Members as well as staff.

The Chairman has extended his thanks on behalf of the Panel to Councillor G J Harlock, adding that his contribution will be missed by the Panel following his retirement.

G J Bull
Chairman