



Minutes of the meeting of the ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE held on WEDNESDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2006 at 7.30 PM

Present: Councillor Hopkins (Chair)
Councillors Butler-Ellis, Eaton, Ferrans, Fraser, Holroyd and Tamagnini-Barbosa

Officers: G Beck (Head of Environmental Services), D Lawson (Senior Engineer-Highways Development Control), M Boscott (Senior Emergency Planning Officer), C Hughes (Highway Network Manager), T Dove (Traffic & Transport Manager), F Bower (Overview and Scrutiny Officer) and P Taylor (Committee Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Eastman, D McCall, and Williams

Number of Public Present: 3

EP22 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

That the Minutes of the Environment Policy Development Committee held on 20 July 2006, and the meeting held on 27 September 2006, be approved and signed by the Chair as correct records, subject to the following amendments:

- That the resolution noted in EP08 be amended to read as follows: "that the Parking Standards Review Group be reconvened to consider parking issues and report to the Committee, prior to the presentation of its findings to Cabinet".
- That EP20 refer to Northamptonshire County Council and not South Northants Council.

Councillor Williams (Cabinet Member responsible for Transport and Planning) informed the Committee that, further to minute EP18, changes had been made to the subsidised bus network, and that an update could be provided at a future meeting of the Committee.

EP23 PETITION – ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AT MONKSTON PARK

The Committee received a petition from Councillor Eastman, representing residents on Monkston Park, in reference to continuing disturbances caused by anti-social behaviour at the Harlesden Close Play Area. The petition called on Milton Keynes Council and English Partnerships (EP) to take appropriate action by relocating the play

area. It had been brought to the Committee to inform the Council of residents' concern, before the site was adopted from EP.

The Chair advised that the petition should be presented to the next meeting of the Milton Keynes Partnership Committee on 7 December 2006.

RESOLVED –

That the petition be forwarded to Milton Keynes Partnership Committee for attention.

EP24

UPDATE OF POLICY RELATING TO ROADSIDE SHRINES

The Committee received an update from the Highway Network Manager on Council policy relating to roadside shrines. Members were informed that there had been no request for new shrines and that the policy was working well. It was noted that there had been a negligible level of media and public interest recently in what had started out as a particularly emotive issue.

Members made the following comments:

- That the three original shrines had set a precedent that had resulted in additional shrines at new locations.
- That roadside shrines posed a considerable safety risk both to passing drivers, whose attention was diverted from the road, and to people paying their respects or maintaining shrines, who often had to park on busy roads in order to access the site.

In response, the officer informed Members that although it was acknowledged that there was a concern regarding motorists being distracted by the shrines, it had previously been agreed that the three original shrines could remain, although ultimately the Council reserved the right to remove them.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That further consideration of the subject be accommodated into the Committee's work programme for 2007/2008.

EP25

EMERGENCY PLANNING UPDATE

The Committee considered an update from the Senior Emergency Planning Officer.

The Committee was informed of the following:

- That the most common problem during an emergency revolved around the issue of communication, both between organisations and with the public. It was noted that the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 intended that organisations work better together, and that consultation was currently taking place within Milton Keynes

Council on the matter and would be jointly considered by the Milton Keynes Strategic Co-ordination Group (MKSCG).

- Following on from the Greenleys area water supply failure of Saturday 1 July 2006, the Senior Emergency Planning Officer had visited Anglian Water to discuss the provision of potable water in the case of water supply failure. Further talks were being sought to establish a suitable protocol for use in hot weather conditions.

Councillor McCall informed the Committee that draft proposals to deal with the possible impact of a bird flu pandemic were to be considered by the Emergency Planning Group.

Members made the following comments:

- That Parish Councils could be utilised to a much greater extent in the case of an emergency, particularly as regards communicating with the public;
- Anglian Water employ communications officers, who should inform the Council of developments more quickly than they do;
- Bottled water should be provided by Anglian Water, rather than water that needs to be boiled before it can be used;
- Ward Councillors should also be informed of what actions were being taken in such a situation, as they were often an early port of call for concerned residents.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Committee work together with the Senior Emergency Planning Officer to identify areas of risk and what resources might be available in the event of various types of incident.

EP26

PARKING STANDARDS REVIEW GROUP

The Committee received a report from the Senior Engineer-Highways Development Control on the Parking Standards Review Group.

Members were informed of the following:

- That liaison was required with EP and Milton Keynes Partnership Committee, as the guidance issued locally by these organisations was misleading, with the minimum amount of parking acceptable to the Council having been taken as the maximum that EP was prepared to accept. It was noted that this issue was compounded by Government guidance, which clearly favoured the provision of maximum standards for parking. It was suggested that Milton Keynes Council adopt a range of parking

standards, with specific emphasis on the need for a lower threshold.

- That there was an obvious tension between restricting the numbers of parked cars on streets, whilst also ensuring that there were sufficient spaces provided, so as to avoid indiscriminate parking on streets, verges, and footways etc.
- That there was a cost concern as regards turning down applications at the Development Control Committee solely on the basis of parking standards. It was noted that legal advice had clearly indicated that it was likely that any appeal against such a decision would be successful.

The Traffic and Transport Manager informed Members that Coventry and Derbyshire Councils had achieved successful resolution of the problem of parking on grass verges and pavements, through relatively affordable publicity measures. Other options might be blanket restrictions and the targeting of known hotspots.

Members made the following comments:

- There was a balance between providing adequate car parking and providing a disincentive for the use of public transport.
- Developers were providing inadequate car parking provisions, inconveniently located, which did not get used.
- The Council's own Planning Department should maximise the opportunities available to it, as standards for off-street parking did not affect the amount of on-street provision that could be made.
- Garages were too small to be realistically considered as a place for people to park their cars.
- Narrow streets posed a problem with emergency vehicle access and hence a safety risk in the event of an emergency.
- There remained an opportunity for the Council's own Planning Department to pioneer solutions to the problem of on-street parking.
- Consultation needed to take place with EP and MKP, regarding their interpretation of Milton Keynes Council parking standards.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That English Partnership and Milton Keynes Partnership Committee be informed of Council guidelines regarding parking standards.

3. That the Parking Standards Review Group be reconvened and that Councillors Butler-Ellis, Ferrans and Legg be appointed to serve on it.

EP27

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES: IMPACTS OF THE GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Committee was informed of the service level impact and opportunities provided by the Government White Paper for Local Government on Environment services.

Areas that were briefly highlighted included greater public involvement in the design of local services, something that the Council had already focused on, for example, during the consultation strategy for waste collection. It was also recommended that the public's views be the core test of local performance.

It was noted that the White Paper proposed a framework of choices, built around the principles of partnership, greater leadership role and engaging citizens. This allowed flexibility for local areas to choose the systems, which meet their needs. As the Lyons Report and Comprehensive Spending Review had not yet been published, it was not known how much of an effect the White Paper would have on the way that the Council worked.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

EP28

PROGRESS REPORT ON WASTE CONTRACT

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Environmental Services on progress regarding the Waste Contract.

At its meeting on the 8 November, the Cabinet had agreed to a recommendation that further investigation of joint working between Northamptonshire County Council and Milton Keynes Council be undertaken, by means of the development of a business case for the joint procurement of waste treatment facilities. Northamptonshire County Council was to consider the proposal at its Cabinet meeting on 13 November 2006. Further consultation would be sought with the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) regarding the possibility of securing Private Finance Initiative credits and other additional resources to support the procurement process.

Further consultation regarding joint working in areas other than waste treatment was also being considered, and emphasis was placed on the importance of pursuing options in these areas due to the value of the existing contracts.

Members were informed that the results of the consultation process on the Waste Development Plan were that the preferred site for a

waste treatment facility remained Old Wolverton. The plan was to be taken to Cabinet on the 19 December. Councillor McCall (the Cabinet Member responsible for Environment and Localities) reminded the Committee that at present it was only intended that a site for a treatment facility be secured; the method of treatment had yet to be decided.

The Head of Environmental Services informed Members that the issue of communication had been complicated by the uncertainty over the issue of joint working with Northamptonshire County Council. A communication specialist had now been employed to manage communications concerning the waste contract.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 9.50 PM