



Minutes of the meeting of the ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE held on THURSDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2005 at 7.30 pm

Present: Councillor Hopkins (Chair)
Councillors Benning, Eaton, Legg, Long (substitute for Councillor A Mabbott), Wicker (substitute for Councillor Carruthers) and Williams

Cabinet Members: Councillors G Mabbutt and McCall

Officers: A Armes (Head of Development and Design), S Crowther (Landscape and Countryside Manager), C Hughes (Highway Network Manager), P Davison (Transport Co-ordinator), J Boothroyde (Overview and Scrutiny Manager) and W Marsden (Senior Committee Manager)

Apologies: Councillors Carruthers and A Mabbott

Also Present: 10 members of the public

EPDC33 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED -

That Councillor Benning be elected Vice-Chair of the Environment Policy Development Committee for the remainder of the Council Year 2004/05.

EPDC34 ROADSIDE SHRINES

The Committee considered the factors that will need to be taken into account in the formulation of a policy on roadside shrines.

The Committee considered an officer briefing note and an example of practice from another authority.

The Committee was informed that roadside shrines were growing in popularity and, due to tragic events on Milton Keynes' roads, more structures were in place. In addition, the Committee was informed that Thames Valley Police (TVP) had been contacted and the TVP Traffic Management Section for Milton Keynes was opposed to roadside shrines.

The Committee received a statement from a bereaved family, and heard from a member of the public, both in support of roadside shrines. The family said that many comments had been sent to the newspaper "The Citizen" in favour of roadside shrines, and the family submitted an 800 signature petition to the relevant Cabinet Member.

The Committee noted the officer viewpoint that the planting of bulbs, flowers and small trees was acceptable, but not the erection of sizeable ornaments or banners.

The Cabinet Member stated that Milton Keynes Council did not have a roadside shrines policy and any recommendation from the Committee would be taken to Cabinet for consideration.

The following points and questions were raised during the discussion:

- Shrines could cause additional danger if they were sited at dangerous locations. However, the opposite view was that shrines could be a calming influence.
- The matter of roadside shrines should be handled with sensitivity.
- The views of Thames Valley Police needed to be taken into account in the determination of a policy.
- There was a difference between floral tributes and more permanent structures.
- That the roadside shrines briefing note be used as a basis for discussion.
- The starting point was grief, and there was no set prescriptive way of dealing with grief.
- There was a very powerful case for tributes and the 'Remember Me' campaign was important.
- The principle of floral tributes and planting schemes was accepted.
- If ornate structures were agreed, what guidelines would be imposed?
- Ornate structures were common in European countries and Ireland.
- There may be a problem with ornate structures in urban areas, especially with public utilities beneath road surfaces.
- The word 'celebration' instead of 'shrine' was favoured.
- Did Milton Keynes Council have power to remove roadside celebrations that had fallen into disrepair?

The Committee was informed that powers existed under the Highways Act. However, the Council would not automatically remove a structure but consult with the people who erected it.

The possibility of a notice to be placed next to a roadside memorial to contact the relevant Council officer regarding neglect, and with a time limit for removal should be investigated.

- Consultation was needed regarding memorials in a dangerous position.

The Committee noted that the Police would have contact with bereaved families and this could form part of their brief.

The Council should contact all bereaved families and invite them to the Cabinet meeting when the matter is discussed.

- The Committee agreed on the following five points:
 1. That there was a need to have a tribute or celebration.
 2. That the laying of flowers, bulbs or small trees be a preferred option.
 3. That the concept of ornate structures was viewed as excessive.
 4. That any process be managed sensitively.
 5. That a Roadside Shrine Policy relates to the 'Remember Me' campaign.

RESOLVED -

That, with the Cabinet Member's agreement, officers draft a policy document that takes on board the five points of consensus; and forward the draft to Group Spokespersons and Thames Valley Police before submission to Cabinet.

EPDC35

OPEN SPACES STRATEGY

The Committee received a presentation from the Landscape and Countryside Manger, which provided a progress report on the Milton Keynes Open Space Strategy.

The Committee was informed that the Open Space Strategy had the two purposes of reviewing existing open space in Milton Keynes to the maximum benefit of the local community and, as Milton Keynes grew, there was a need to provide and develop new open spaces.

The following points and questions were raised during discussion:

- The figure quoted in the progress report of 20% for open space was questioned. It was stated that the figure should be 40%.

The Committee was informed that allotments and playing fields contributed to the 40% in total, the 20% figure referred to public open space.

- The Committee expected the Open Space Strategy to be more advanced and it appeared to have fallen behind schedule.

The Committee was informed that the Strategy was currently about 2½ months behind schedule.

- The Committee heard from a member of the public who introduced an idea for an artificial beach at Willen Lake in Milton Keynes, and asked for a feasibility study to be undertaken.

The Committee was informed that the idea was not something that would be incorporated into the Open Space Strategy. There were problems associated with Willen Lake, principally the quality of water.

However, the concept of a beach incorporating a water feature for Milton Keynes was well received and the Committee thought the concept should be expanded to other locations, as the proposed Willen Lake location could not be supported. The Committee's advice was that, if the member of the public wishes to pursue the Willen Lake location, then the Parks Trust, which has the responsibility for Willen Lake, should be contacted.

The Committee stated that the Council may take the beach concept forward in two ways; first, the Cabinet Member had offered to approach the Milton Keynes Partnership Committee to see if their officers are willing to undertake a feasibility study linked to the growth areas; and second, the Council's own Open Space Strategy could include it.

- The Committee noted the wide range and variation of open spaces.
- There was a defensible space issue and, from a Housing Department point of view, there was a case for reducing open spaces on estates.
- Work undertaken in Kensington and Chelsea had shown that, although there was good density open space, most of it was privately owned.
- There was a huge role for Parish and Town Councils in the Open Space Strategy.
- Open space should be managed by the most relevant agency.

- Concern was expressed that the Council is still providing small play areas that people do not want or use. The Council should provide bigger and more versatile sites.
- The importance of involving the community was stressed, together with a clear understanding of who owned pockets of open spaces between houses.
- The appropriate level of consultation was important. Small open space areas could be managed by Parish Councils, although some Parish Councils will not have the resources.
- What is the open space strategy consultation period?
The Cabinet Member replied that there was normally a six week consultation period and a report would be considered by Cabinet in June 2005.
- It was felt that the Milton Keynes Partnership Committee would succeed if it opposed anything contained in the Open Space Strategy.

RESOLVED -

That, as part of the Open Plan Strategy:

1. there be greater clarity of definitions, funding and support issues and establishment of a consultation process;
2. odd parcels of land be designed out and that the Council ensures better use of planning gain; and
3. the Cabinet Member's offer to approach the Milton Keynes Partnership Committee to see if their officers are willing to undertake a feasibility study for an artificial beach, linked to the growth areas, be noted.

EPDC36

GRID ROADS REVIEW

The Committee received an update on the Grid Roads Review from the Head of Development and Design. The Committee was informed that there would be a higher priority for public transport in the grid road squares, and English Partnerships would fund the public transport investigation.

The following point and questions were raised during the discussion:

- Would the consultant's brief include the consideration of a shift to move people away from the motor car to public transport?
The Committee was informed that the consultants were aware of the issues and it was expected that the issues would be addressed.
- How would the East and West Expansion Areas connect to the grid roads and the Centre?

- Extremely important to have the proper infrastructure in place.
- Must have a balance between the motor car and public transport.
- Parking spaces in the city will diminish as re-development takes place.
- Milton Keynes has been designed as a low density city, which caused a problem for determining a Public Transport Strategy.
- Growth areas will be high density.
- A public transport approach must tie in with older parts of the city, e.g. Bletchley regeneration.
- There should be a debate on alternative forms of transport, e.g. Monorail.

The Committee was informed that a study had taken place two to three years ago, looking at alternative transport. However, for low density areas, buses were the only solution.

- What was in place to educate people to change their thinking about transport polices?
- Any Grid Road Strategy should complement a future strategy for the city.
- People will be encouraged to use public transport by improving bus routes and networks, and by providing quality buses and real time passenger information.
- The best way forward was for Milton Keynes to control expansion and have planned development.
- There was a reliance on the Government to fund the infrastructure. Would infrastructure funding be in place before houses were built?

The Committee was informed that £14 million had been invested into the transport infrastructure for Milton Keynes.

RESOLVED -

1. That there be broader transport solutions for the low density city of Milton Keynes, and this should be linked to the Bletchley Regeneration.
2. That there be a full public debate and broader consultation, especially with the Bletchley Development Board on the regeneration of Bletchley.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10.30 PM