

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Select Committee held on 6 September 2011 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Grint (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)

Cllr. K S Bayley, Cllr M Butler, Cllr. P Cooke, Cllr. J Edwards-Winser, Cllr. A Eyre, Cllr. J London, Cllr. K Maskell, Cllr. Mrs E Purves, Cllr. G Ryan, Cllr. Mrs J Sargeant, Cllr. J Scholey, Cllr. T Searles and Cllr. G Williamson

Apologies for absence: Cllr. I Bosley and Cllr. Ms I Chetram

Cllr Mrs J Davison were also present

10. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Select Committee held on 7 June 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on any matter discussed at the meeting.

12. FORMAL RESPONSE FROM THE CABINET FOLLOWING MATTERS REFERRED BY THE COMMITTEE AND/OR REQUESTS FROM THE PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

The Committee noted the comments of Cabinet.

13. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

There were no actions from the previous meeting.

14. FUTURE BUSINESS, THE WORK PLAN 2011/12 (ATTACHED) AND THE FORWARD PLAN.

The Committee discussed the Work Plan and the following comments were made:

- The Conservation Area Appraisal for Chiddingstone Hoath would be reported to the October meeting of the Committee.
- The Annual Review of Parking Charges was moved from January 2012 to October 2011.
- The bus companies would be invited to the January 2012 meeting.

- The Planning Service Manager noted that the Conservation Area Appraisal for Edenbridge would possibly be reported to the January meeting of the Committee.
- The Committee agreed that sustainability of supply of energy sources should be removed from the Work Plan.
- Members had previously requested an item regarding street furniture be discussed at a future meeting. It was clarified that this specifically related to the excessive use of street signs. It was suggested that this item could be discussed at the March 2012 meeting and Members agreed to email any specific issues in their Wards to the Head of Environmental and Operational Services before January 2012.
- Local Listing would be reported to the Committee once responses were received from parish and town councils.

15. **WINTER MAINTENANCE**

The Chairman welcomed Carol Valentine, Kent Highways Service Highway Manager for West Kent to the meeting.

Ms. Valentine explained that the existing Winter Service Policy was being updated for 2011/12. She noted that the Policy went through an internal process including being approved by the appropriate Cabinet Member. Kent Highways Services (KHS) were required to produce the Policy and its main aim was to keep the roads free from ice and snow as far as reasonably practicable. Ms. Valentine drew Members' attention to the Winter Service Policy 2010/11 and made the following comments:

- The primary cautionary salting routes were prioritised into two classes. A schedule of the routes was available on the Kent County Council (KCC) website.
- The winter season started in mid October and continued through to mid April each year.
- KHS used a weather information service that was tailored toward the roads in order to receive the most accurate data available.
- Snow clearance issues tended to arise when there was heavy snow. Ms. Valentine highlighted, as set out in the report, the areas of first priority during a snow emergency. She also noted that last winter KHS had agreed areas, within particular districts, that would be cleared by the local authority in a snow emergency. This had been very successful and would continue in the coming winter.
- KHS regularly received a high number of requests for salt bins. Bins were either allocated on a scoring system and the top 60 paid for by KCC, paid for out of the local County Councillor's Highway Fund or parish and town councils could purchase the bins which were then

filled by KCC.

Members asked Ms. Valentine a number of questions which received the following responses:

- Liaison with district and borough councils in Kent with regard to snow clearance had helped to reduce the number of calls from the public and had received good feedback from local authorities.
- Guidance had been received from Government with regard to parish councils clearing footpaths following snow. This was available on KCC's website and generally explained that so long as the conditions were not being made worse, it was unlikely that a parish council could be sued should an accident occur. However, this could not be guaranteed.
- It was possible for parish councils to pay KHS for filling salt bins in their areas. However, it was noted that the purchase did not guarantee that priority for filling would be given during a snow emergency.
- KHS would be meeting with neighbouring County authorities with regard to overlapping winter maintenance services.
- KHS would continue to discuss winter services with town councils as well as parishes.
- The Policy was backed up by a Winter Service Plan which was due to be updated soon.
- Roads outside schools were not cleared outside term times. Salting of the roads was prioritised based on whether they were on a primary or secondary route. KHS was currently working with schools to ensure they also had their own winter plans.

Ms. Valentine noted that it was not possible to salt all bus routes. During a snow emergency a schedule would be posted on KCC's website.

A Member was concerned that saline solution was not an effective alternative to salt.

Ms. Valentine noted that there were predetermined routes for agricultural services during snow emergencies. KHS also liaised with farmers to ensure they had the right equipment to manage during the winter. She asked farmers to contact KHS if they wanted to be included in the scheme.

The Head of Environmental and Operational Services noted that Officers from both the District and County Councils would meet soon to discuss winter maintenance in the District. Members were invited to forward him any specific issues they would like raised.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Valentine for attending the meeting and for dealing fully with Members' questions

16. BUSINESS SUPPORT

The Head of Community Development explained that the report followed a request by the Committee for information on business support in the District. She explained that Business Support was not a statutory function of the Council but planning for the economic wellbeing of the District was. The main types of business were highlighted in the report. Tourism was felt to be an important part of the local economy. The main focus of Officer work was currently support for businesses, working with other organisations to ensure the District's economic needs were addressed, improving information for businesses about Council services and raising the profile of opportunities to improve broadband services and possibly assisting communities and businesses to access these.

It was noted that a replacement website for Business Link South East had been set up by Government alongside a network of mentoring. Business Link had run some very successful workshops and K College had offered to continue to provide these at no cost.

In response to a query, the Head of Community Development noted that in order to achieve one of the priorities of the Community Plan, which was to have vibrant town centres, the Council was happy to make its programme available to support any business that occupied shops, including charities.

It was noted that it was difficult to persuade landowners to allow the temporary occupation of empty shops when they were based outside the local area.

The Head of Community Development explained that , because of the importance of business support in the current climate a small team reorganisation had helped to devote additional officer hours to the service. She also noted that economic development was considered in consultation with other key service areas, such as Housing and Development Control and outside organisations.

It was noted that the Council worked together with the Chamber of Commerce to provide a useful link for businesses in the area.

Cllr Abraham noted that the next meeting of the Kent Association of Local Councils would focus on support for the provision of broadband.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

17. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK BRIEFING

The Planning Service Manager gave a detailed presentation on the Local Development Framework (LDF) including where the Council currently was in the process, how this had been achieved and what would happen in the future.

It was explained that under the Localism Bill the National Planning Policy

Framework would replace all existing national planning policies. It included a presumption in favour of sustainable development and required local authorities to obtain a certificate of conformity for all existing plans. The Planning Service Manager hoped that the Council would be able to obtain the certificate for the LDF Core Strategy which had been completed in 2010.

In response to a query, the Planning Service Manger explained that the Regional Plan would be abolished and the Localism Bill would require cooperation between local authorities.

Following concern regarding Residential Character Area Assessments, the Planning Service Manager explained that the process was collaborative and began with the Council's independent consultants and local community representatives identifying key areas to provide a starting point for proposals. He noted that should parishes feel the Council's assessment did not reflect their own parish plans an agreement could be reached.

Data from Parish Plans could be used to create Neighbourhood Plans. The difference being that a referendum was required at the end of the Neighbourhood Plan and that Neighbourhood Plans were subject to independent examination..

The Planning Service Manager explained that Government had recently advised in its recent consultation on Travellers policy that local authorities needed to make provision for Gypsy and Traveller sites to meet local needs. He noted that the Council could lose appeals should sites not be provided. The Council's current policy stated that sites would be provided, but it did not specify where.

Under the Localism Bill, Local Authorities would be required to introduce the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). However, currently only one authority in the Country had adopted the CIL.

Following a query, the Planning Service Manager clarified that in this District a "neighbourhood" could best be described as a parish. Although parishes were free to split their areas further in relation to Neighbourhood Plans. Should the parish be split, the referendum would need to cover all those living within the "neighbourhood" area.

As part of the Core Strategy, the Council was required to provide 165 new dwellings in the District between 2006 and 2026. Currently the Council was able to demonstrate that it could meet this provision. Planning applications could not be refused simply because they exceeded the figure.

The Planning Service Manager noted that the biggest issue arising out of consultation on the Development Plan Document related to extensions in the Green Belt. Further discussions would take place to clarify the issues and a Members briefing has been arranged for September 21st.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

18. KENT BUS NETWORK REVIEW

The Planning Service Manager explained that Kent County Council (KCC) were proposing to withdraw the 409 commuter bus service between Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill from 1 January 2012. The main reasons cited were that the service required a high level of subsidy and that it duplicated the service of the 477 bus route. Members were asked to agree the draft response to the proposal.

A Member was concerned that the 477 became overcrowded at certain times of day and asked that more emphasis be put on providing more services throughout the day.

Resolved: That, subject to officers emphasising the need for additional 477 services throughout the day, the draft response, as set out in Appendix A of the report, be agreed with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Improvement and sent to Kent County Council as Sevenoaks District Council's representations on the proposed withdrawal of the 409 Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill service.

19. CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISALS - CHIPSTEAD VILLAGE AND BRITAINS FARM

The Planning Service Manager explained that the report sought Members' support for the Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans for Chipstead Village and Britains Farm. In light of current Government guidance, the central purpose was to update the current Plans and no changes to boundaries were suggested. The main emphasis was to identify the positive character of the areas and conserve what was already there. No adverse comments had been received for either Plan.

The local Members for both Chipstead and Britains Farm supported the Plans.

It was noted that current guidance suggested Conservation Area Appraisals be updated every five years.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that the Chipstead Village and Britains Farm draft Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans, attached as Appendices B and C of the report, be adopted as informal planning guidance.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.00 pm

Chairman