

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Select Committee held on 25 October 2011 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. I Bosley (Chairman)
Cllr. J Grint (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr. L Abraham, Cllr. L Ayres, Cllr. K S Bayley, Cllr M Butler,
Cllr. Ms I Chetram, Cllr. P Cooke, Cllr. C Dibsall, Cllr. J Edwards-
Winser, Cllr. A Eyre, Cllr. J London, Cllr. Mrs E Purves and
Cllr. G Williamson

Apologies for absence: Cllr. K Maskell, Cllr. G Ryan,
Cllr. Mrs J Sargeant, Cllr. J Scholey and Cllr. T Searles

Cllr. Mrs B Ayres, Cllr Mrs J Davison, Cllr. Mrs A Hunter,
Cllr. B Ramsey, Cllr. J Thornton and Cllr. R Walshe were also present

20. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON 6 SEPTEMBER 2011

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Select Committee held on 6 September 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr. Cooke declared a personal interest in minute item 27. As the local Member he had been involved in forming the document.

Cllr. London declared a personal interest in minute item 25 as a permit holder and commuter.

Cllr. Williamson declared a personal interest in minute item 25 as a shop owner in Sevenoaks town centre. He abstained from voting on the matter of Christmas parking.

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

The comments of the Cabinet were circulated to the Committee and noted.

23. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

There were no actions from the previous meeting.

24. 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 Sevenoaks Residential Character Area assessment would be presented to the Committee in March 2012.
- A draft consultation response regarding the Gatwick Master Plan would be brought to the meeting in January 2012.
- The Review of Budget Proposals 2012/13 would not need to be brought to the Committee in January 2012 because the matters would be sufficiently covered by the Review of Service Plans.

25. GREEN BELT EXTENSIONS POLICY

The Planning Services Manager gave a presentation to the group about the Allocations and Development Management Development Plan Document (DPD).

The purpose of the DPD was to expand on the Core Strategy and define, at a local level, what would be considered a disproportionate extension or replacement of a dwelling in the Green Belt under national Planning Policy Guidance 2.

The consultation proposed moving from a floorspace calculation to one of volume. The Planning Services Manager felt this would more closely reflect the impact a change in a building's size would have on the openness of the Green Belt. The proposal was for a 30% limit to increases in volume, as opposed to the current 50% limit to increases in floorspace.

Most consultation responses had been about volume calculations. Planning Agents generally preferred there to be no prescriptive figures but asked instead that each application be considered on its own merits. Some responses requested that greater allowance be made for smaller properties to be extended because of the relatively smaller impact they would have.

In response to a question the Planning Services Manager suggested a 100m³ 2-3 bedroom dwelling might be considered small for the purposes of the DPD but no detailed assessment had been made. A Member not on the Committee warned against sliding scale calculations because their complexity could create ambiguity. A Member was concerned that if smaller houses could extend proportionately more then this may reduce the level of affordable housing in the district.

26. ANNUAL REVIEW OF PARKING CHARGES FOR 2012/13 AND CHRISTMAS PARKING 2011

Car Park and On Street Charges 2012/13

The Parking and Amenity Manager informed the Committee that 84% of car park revenue came from Sevenoaks town centre and this rose to 95% once the Sevenoaks station car parks were included.

A motion was moved and duly seconded that the tariffs not be raised for the car parks in Sevenoaks town centre for the year 2012/13. The motion was discussed.

It was suggested that the tariffs not be raised because this would be contrary to the Council's plans to promote the local economy. Shoppers already faced a fall in wages in real terms and so would go instead to out-of-town shopping centres or other towns, in which it was generally cheaper to park.

The Head of Environmental and Operational Services reminded Members that the budget currently planned for a 2.5% increase in income. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Improvement, not on the Committee, added that parking was one of the few areas of income over which the Council had control and if the money was not raised it could result in cuts to other services.

Members suggested that the burden could move instead onto commuters or long-stay car park users. A Member felt commuters were already feeling pressures from increased costs elsewhere. Another Member was concerned that raising the tariff for long-stay parking would result in increased costs for employees in the town.

The Portfolio Holder for The Cleaner and Greener Environment, not on the Committee, pointed out that Sevenoaks had the fewest empty shops in the country, for any comparably sized town.

The motion did not carry.

The Head of Environmental and Operational Services informed Members that income from car parks was currently on target for the year, however on-street parking was currently £22,000 short of target and forecast £40,000 short of target by year end. This was because of income shortfall in day-tickets and parking enforcement.

The budget had taken no account of additional income from the Knockholt station commuter parking scheme. The estimated £59,000 income from this was expected to pay for implementation in 2011/12 and make up the current shortfall in income from 2012/13. The parking scheme was also due to be reviewed in 2012.

Options 2 and 3 offered opportunities to raise additional income to assist the Council's overall budget position. There had been no previous experience of drop-off in use from a rise in prices.

The Chairman took indicative votes on the three options for increases to car park and on-street charges. Option 1 had the most support.

Tariff Structure in Swanley, Knockholt Station and the Sevenokas Rail Commuter Areas

The Parking and Amenity Manager explained that the purpose of the restructure was to bring these areas into line with the rest of the district.

Both local Members for Halstead, Knockholt and Badgers Mount were concerned that this proposal meant significant rises in tariffs in the Knockholt area for 4 hour parking even though charges had only recently been introduced to the area.

A motion was moved and duly seconded that the restructuring go ahead, except for in Knockholt. The motion was discussed.

The Chairman of the Joint Transportation Board, who sat on the Committee, felt it was the wrong time for such the restructuring. The new Knockholt parking scheme should be allowed to settle first.

A Member believed that Knockholt should not be given special treatment. He believed the new tariff structure was also inappropriate for Swanley. Each of the Swanley parking areas were a long way from the town centre and a large car park had also recently closed. Short-term tariffs would be unsuitable.

The motion did not carry.

A motion was moved by the Chairman that the proposals, as recommended in the report be approved. The motion did not carry.

A motion was moved and duly seconded that the change be made in the Sevenoaks rail commuter areas but not in Swanley or at Knockholt station. This arrangement was to be reviewed in 6 months. The motion was carried.

Christmas Parking 2011

The Parking and Amenity Manager told Members that Sevenoaks Town Council and the Sevenoaks Chamber of Commerce had both been of the view that Saturday the 10th and 17th of December were most appropriate dates for the free Christmas parking.

Officers confirmed funding for the loss of income from the proposal came from a supplementary estimate.

Resolved: That Cabinet be recommended to:

- (a) agree option 1 as the proposed increases to car park charges for 2012/13;
- (b) agree option 1 as the proposed increases to on-street parking charges for 2012/13;
- (c) agree the proposed changes to the on-street tariff structure in respect to the Sevenoaks rail commuter areas, but oppose changes in respect of Swanley and Knockholt station which should be reviewed after 6

months; and

- (d) agree free parking throughout the district for two Saturdays before Christmas 2011, with 10th and 17th December as preferred dates.

27. CLEANING OF PRIVATE STREETS

The Head of Environmental and Operational Services drew Members' attention to the £162,000 reduction in the budget for street cleaning in 2011/12. This had already resulted in a reduction of four operatives and a supervisor.

He explained that some private streets continued to be cleaned free of charge because these streets had been on the schedule when the service was first exposed to Compulsory Competitive Tendering prior to 1990. The proposal was to bring these streets in line with other private roads which the Council charged to clean.

In response to a question he explained how residents could pay for the services: a residents' association may agree to pay the Council; residents may form a special group for the purpose; or a single resident could pay and then ask their neighbours to reimburse the cost.

A local Member for Badgers Mount stated that, although many of its streets were affected by the change, residents seemed unconcerned.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that:

- (a) the residents in the private roads listed in the appendix be advised that, with effect from 1 April 2012, the Council will no longer be able to clean these streets free of charge; and
- (b) the Council offer to clean these streets from 1 April 2012, only on a chargeable basis.

28. CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL FOR CHIDDINGSTONE HOATH

The local Member queried the exclusion of Oakenden Lane and most of Chapel Place from the Appraisal. The Officer clarified that the Conservation Area had previously been extended in 2006 and that there had only been one consultation response to the document proposing an expansion of the Conservation Area which related to a different area of land and that the boundaries could be reassessed after adoption. It was clarified that the boundary did include land in the Chapel Place area.

It was agreed that the reference on page 12 to cottages being "mundane" ought be removed and that the reference on page 19 to the Conservation Area being characterised by "leafy green lanes" should be reconsidered.

The local Member felt it important that such documents be considered fully by members of the Development Control Committee when considering

applications in the area.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that the Chiddingstone Hoath draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, as amended, be adopted as informal planning guidance.

29. REVIEW OF SERVICE PLANS

The Head of Finance and Human Resources introduced the report and explained that there were no growth items within the Committee's remit. The one area of risk was Building Control which faced a potential income shortfall in 2011/12 and 2012/13 because of current economic conditions.

The Head of Environmental and Operational Services was asked how the Building Control Team's charges compared against the private sector. They were aimed to be competitive but the Council was subject to new legislation which did not apply to the private sector. The new rules meant that invoice estimates had to be sent to customers beforehand on the basis of cost recovery only.

Resolved: That Members' comments be put to Cabinet for consideration.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.48 pm

Chairman