

<b>STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 9</b>
<b>7 MARCH 2012</b>	<b>Public Report</b>

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## **MEMBER REFERRAL - Consultation in respect of the trees in Bridge Street and Long Causeway**

### **1. PURPOSE**

1.1 Councillor Sandford has made a referral to the Committee in accordance with Part 4, Section 9, paragraph 8.1 of the Constitution – Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Commission Procedure Rules

8.1 Any Member may require the Proper Officer to place an item relevant to the functions of the Committee or Commission on the agenda for the next meeting. On receipt of such a request the Proper Officer will ensure that the item is included on the next available agenda. The item will be discussed by the Committee or Commission and it will only be pursued further if the Committee or Commission agree to do so.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 The Committee is asked to consider Councillor Sandfords request and how it wishes to proceed.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 Councillor Sandford has requested that the Committee consider and seek an explanation for the way in which the Cabinet and officers have carried out the consultation in respect of the trees in Bridge Street and Long Causeway.

### **4. KEY ISSUES**

4.1 Councillor Sandfords reasons for making this referral in his words are set out below:

“On 13 February, the Council announced in a press release that it had been decided to go ahead and remove a third of the trees in Bridge Street and Long Causeway, despite the fact that a public consultation had shown that almost 60 per cent of respondents wanted them retained. This consultation had been carried out at the request of the Scrutiny Committee and the then Director of Communications, following concerns that the original consultation was biased and involved asking leading questions.

There are still differences of opinion about whether trees should be removed and if so how many. Concerns have been expressed that what the Cabinet is proposing is not in accordance with 2008 arboriculturalist’s report which was talking about tree removal over a timescale of up to 40 years. However, most of the public comment (for example on the Evening Telegraph website and on Radio Cambridgeshire) in the days following the Council decision has focussed on why the Council is apparently ignoring the clear results of its own consultation and also a 200 signature petition submitted at Full Council calling for retention of the trees.

There is also an issue of how the decision was taken, when it was taken and by whom. We are being told that it is an officer decision taken by Mr Edwards. Yet in the Council press

release, Cllr Cereste was quoted. On Radio Cambridgeshire on Tuesday 14 February, the cabinet advisor, Cllr Goodwin, stated that the decision had been taken when the public realm strategy was agreed several years ago. The question then arises, if the decision had already been made, why was a public consultation carried out and was it merely an attempt to placate public opposition by appearing to consult the public but with no intention of acting on the results of the consultation? If the decision had not previously been made, then why is it being put through as an officer decision and not a cabinet member decision, bearing in mind the evidence that cabinet members have clearly been involved and making it an officer decision means that it cannot be subject to challenge through the call in process.

This is not the first time that concerns have been expressed about the Council's approach to consultation and the committee may want to hold a more detailed discussion at a future meeting on some of these wider issues and concerns."

## **5. NEXT STEPS**

5.1 After consideration of Councillor Sandfords referral the Committee will decide:

- a) whether the requested item will be added to a future agenda where a full report would be received or
- b) the requested item will not receive further consideration by the Committee

## **6. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

6.1 None

## **7. APPENDICES**

7.1 None