

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES
HELD ON
TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2010 AT THE BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOM - TOWN HALL**

Present: Councillors D Over (Chairman), R Dobbs, D Harrington, D Sanders and J Stokes.

Officers Present: Mike Heath, Commercial Services Director
Louise Tyers, Scrutiny Manager
Anne Senior, Economic Participation Programme Manager
Richard Kay, Policy and Strategy Manager
Peter Tebb, Team Manager - Network (Planning, Transport & Engineering Services)
Ruth Lea, Lawyer Growth Team
Maxine Grimes, Partnership Officer
Matthew Hogan, Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer
Stephen Emeny, Governance Officer

Also in attendance: Georgette Rouncefield, Women's Enterprise Centre Manager

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Shaheed and Nawaz. Councillor Stokes attended as the designated substitute for Councillor Nawaz.

2. Declaration of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2010 were approved as a correct record.

4. Responses to Recommendations Made by the Commission

The report provided an update of the responses to recommendations made by the Commission at previous meetings.

School Transport

Members were directed to the response of the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and University in relation to the Commission's previous request to reconsider the current school transport service between Eye and Arthur Mellows Village College. The Cabinet Member had advised that there would be no changes to the provision of transport for the year 11 students at this time, however the situation would be monitored by the Council's Passenger Transport Team and the College. The College had recently reported that there had been no significant problems with the service so far.

Rural Policing

The Chairman read to the Commission a letter received from Chief Constable Simon Parr, which responded to the Commission's previous request for further support for the rural policing teams. The Chief Constable had advised that the Roads Policing Unit and Tactical Firearms Unit already provided regular support to rural communities as part of their general

patrolling, and also supported initiatives of the Rural Community Action Team when required. As a result of the current financial climate and the challenges facing the Constabulary, the Chief Constable advised that he was unable to guarantee increasing support to rural areas.

The Chairman advised that he had also corresponded with the British Transport Police with a view to developing an agreement around the policing of level crossings and how they were used by commuters in particular, and encouraging a more conspicuous police presence in rural areas.

Further Education in Agricultural and Farming Industry

The Governance Officer advised that in response to an earlier Commission recommendation, Anglia Ruskin University had responded that it does not currently offer courses in agricultural or farming related industry and had no plans to do so in the future.

ACTION AGREED

It was agreed not to take any further action at this time in relation to gaining extra support for Rural policing unless any significant problems developed in the rural areas, and to revisit the issue in twelve months time to reinforce why extra support is needed.

5. Peterborough Women's Enterprise Centre - Engagement with Women in Rural Communities

The Economic Participation Programme Manager, Partnership Officer and Women's Enterprise Centre Manager gave the Commission an update on work undertaken to promote the services of the Women's Enterprise Centre in rural areas following the recommendations of the Commission in July 2010. Officers advised that in response to these recommendations, Women's Enterprise Centre (WEC) information had been distributed to village halls, community centres and village shops, and contact had been made with parish councils and the Women's Institute (WI).

The WEC Manager gave an update on her work to engage with the rural communities, and made the following comments regarding the WEC's 'Feet on the Street' programme:

- Many villages had already been visited.
- Promotional materials had been made available in all libraries, mobile libraries, post offices and village shops. Work was being done to gather contacts for parish newsletters so that the WEC could advertise its services regularly.
- The WEC Manager had recently attended a WI conference where the WEC promoted its centre and services and explained that it was felt that working with the WI important in facilitating the delivery of enterprise introduction, business start up and personal development workshops in the local communities. It was anticipated that opportunities to give presentations through the WI would be available in the new year.
- A leaflet drop had recently been undertaken in Wittering, Eye and Glinton which had already shown an increased use in the service by women from rural communities.
- The WEC Manager had engaged with RAF Wittering and would attend a women's pamper evening in November to promote services and to engage with women. The WEC offered a programme called 'Base Opportunities' which was aimed at supporting service wives to start businesses which they could take with them when their spouses transferred.
- The WEC Manager had been working with Cllr Walsh, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion, Safety and Women's Enterprise to engage with parish councils.

It was acknowledged that whilst there had been a modest increase in service users from rural communities, it was felt that this ongoing work would see an increase in the coming months.

In response to questions raised by the Commission, officers advised:

- Women were setting up a variety of different businesses including business services, holistic therapies, falconry, catering, artists, jewellers. A list of the businesses being set up by women using the centre would be provided.
- Yaxley had been included due to the lack of clarity around rural boundaries.

The Chairman thanked the WEC for its work and increased engagement with women in rural areas.

ACTION AGREED

It was agreed that the WEC would continue to work with the Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion, Safety and Women's Enterprise to engage with parish councils and give presentations at parish council meetings, and to keep members of the Commission informed regularly of work being undertaken so that Members could offer assistance where possible.

6. Update on Speed Limits in Rural Areas

The Team Manager – Network Network (Planning, Transport & Engineering) presented the report of the Executive Director of Operations which sought to inform the Commission on progress achieved regarding the:

- Government's current position in relation to the publication of the National Road Safety Strategy and the potential lowering of the speed limit on rural roads to 50mph; and
- Proposed implementation of 20mph speed limits around rural schools.

The Team Manager Network (Planning, Transport & Engineering) advised that the publication of the National Road Safety Strategy had stalled with the change of government, with a review published on the 16th of June which had made many recommendations. Consequently, the 50mph issue had effectively been put on the back burner.

With regard to the implementation of a 20mph speed limit around rural schools, the The Team Manager – Network (Planning, Transport & Engineering) advised that since the last meeting of the Commission, speed survey had been undertaken at all primary schools in rural areas during peak and off peak hours. Informal consultation had also taken place with ward councillors, head teachers and parish councils, which showed that the scheme received support for implementation. Funding had also been identified through the Local Transport Plan to implement the change.

The Team Manager – Network (Planning, Transport & Engineering) advised that the speeds that had been recorded were already very low in the main, with average speeds in the low 20s for most of the schools and whilst there had been cars travelling in excess of the limit, and in some cases notably, the volume in comparison to other traffic was relatively small.

The thrust of this change was to improve safety, and accident data for incidents outside schools showed that there had been four accidents; 2 in Eye and 2 in Glinton, and whilst all those took place on school days and not necessarily during school hours, 1 incident involved a child suffering a slight injury.

The Team Manager – Network (Planning, Transport & Engineering) asked the Commission to reconsider its recommendation on the basis of the cost implications associated with implementing the change when weighed against the benefits expected to be derived.

Councillor Kirt of Glinton Parish Council addressed the Commission and made the following comments:

- The Team Manager – Network (Planning, Transport & Engineering) had done an excellent piece of work in looking at this issue and whilst the evidence suggests that the change shouldn't be implemented so as to save £16,000 on the basis of 2 key considerations, being the average off peak and peak of below 30mph, and that in the last 5 years nobody had been killed or seriously injured.
- Whilst the average speed was recorded in the mid 20s, depending on the village, the peak speed could be excessive. Peakirk Parish Council did a speedwatch, and vehicles were caught going 56mph and 80 mph in the 30mph zone. As a result, peak speeds need to be taken into consideration.
- The Department for Transport (DFT) had issued information which suggested that if you are hit by a car, the speed that car is going has a great impact on your chances of survival, with a lower speed greatly improving your chances.
- Glington is used as a ratrun, and many rural villages are not happy with being treated this way. A change in speed limit may have a profound effect on how motorists view villages and may start to avoid them, which would lead to decreased noise and traffic and would revert back to a quiet village atmosphere. As an environmental city, the Council should consider reducing speeds as a way of reducing carbon emissions.
- In conclusion, it has been extremely lucky that there has been no fatality or injury when considering the peak speeds noted in the village speedwatch. It was acknowledged that whilst there were compelling arguments for keeping things as they were and for lowering the limit to 20mph, to not reduce speed limits and to then have a fatality or injury in a few months time would be disastrous.

The Commission thanked Cllr Kirt for his comments and agreed that the change would make a statement to motorists that villages would like motorists to monitor their speed whilst travelling through our communities.

In response to the matters raised by Cllr Kirt, the The Team Manager – Network (Planning, Transport & Engineering) made the following comments:

- Whilst conscientious motorists would likely slow down to 20mph, those already speeding would likely show disregard for any speed limit.
- Could not argue the fact that the lower the speed you are hit at, the better your chance of survival.

The Commission determined that to lower the speed limit was the desire of the rural majority and that the Commission should be listening. It was clarified that the lowering of the speed limit applied to outside rural primary schools only and included Arthur Mellows in Glington, for easier signage and to ease congestion in the area.

ACTION AGREED

That the Commission continue to support the implementation of the 20 mph speed limits in rural areas.

7. Planning and Policy Strategy in Rural Areas

The Commission received a report which provided an update on a number of rural planning and housing issues, together with a request for comments on items which would subsequently be considered by Cabinet.

(a) Village Design Supplementary Planning Document – draft for consultation

In presenting the item, the Policy and Strategy Manager informed the Commission that a Village Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD):

- Supported an overarching planning policy of the Council. The Council already had policies around design issues in rural areas, but Village Design SPDs allowed for specialised detail to be included.
- The Village Design Statements previously prepared by villages and parish councils had held virtually no weight in the planning system since 2004 when changes to government rules were introduced.
- Village Design SPDs were able to capture the most important parts of the village design statements to ensure that these issues once again held weight in planning matters.
- The document presented to the Commission was in draft format, but in summary these documents should be seen as an important tool for the Planning Committee when considering any rural planning application, so as to ensure good quality design and layout of buildings. Village Design SPDs were not about the allocation of new sites for development.
- The Principal Built Environment Officer had been working closely the parish councils on developing each village's Village Design SPD. This draft document was brought to the Commission to seek its views. The draft would be considered by Cabinet in December 2010 with public consultation to take place in January 2011, following which it would be further considered by the Cabinet.
- The Village Design SPDs were structured in two parts, the first which was to have some generic design policies which apply to all villages about building materials, brick walls, railings, frontage issues etc, and then more specific policies relating to the individual village, so that when a planning application for a new house is received, all of these criteria will be taken into consideration.
- The Village Design SPDs gave some power back to parish councils when it came time to comment on planning applications and to planning officers to negotiate, and grounds upon which Planning Committee may refuse applications.
- The preparation of Village Design SPDs were nearly complete for all villages and parish councils were very much welcoming the work.

During consideration, the following points were noted:

- The wording within the Policy Village Design SPD 1 had been lifted from the existing village design statement, and it was agreed by the Policy and Strategy Manager that some of the wording was open to interpretation. This would be reviewed and strengthened by the Policy and Strategy Manager to eliminate any possible legal loopholes and to enable them to be used by planning officers.
- Some Village Design Statements have been found to be up to 8 or 9 years old. The Principal Built Environment Officer has been working closely with Parish Councils to update these to make them relevant to today.

(b) Rural Housing Delivery Partnership

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer advised that the items raised in the report came out of work done around the Rural Housing Strategy, which was adopted in June 2010 and produced as a joint response by the Peterborough City Council & Greater Peterborough Partnership (GPP) to housing actions highlighted in the Rural Vision & Strategy. The Strategy focussed on three main priorities, being the provision of affordable housing for local people in rural areas, energy efficiency and fuel poverty, and village design.

The Rural Housing Delivery Partnership was the major item to come out of the Housing Strategy, and was established in April 2010 to increase supply of affordable housing available for households in 26 parishes around the city. The Partnership comprised 2 housing associations (Accent NENE and BPHA), 1 rural enabler (Cambridgeshire ACRE) and Peterborough City Council.

During consideration, it was noted that:

- The Chairman believed that delivery of affordable housing in rural areas for rural people was critical as villages often only had housing that was affordable to older people and not younger people looking to start their first household. Affordable housing was key and was important for the sustainability of villages.
- Cllr Sanders, whilst acknowledging the Chairman's comments, suggested that not all villages were comfortable with the idea of increasing affordable housing in their villages.

(c) Community Land Trusts

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer informed the Commission that Community Land Trusts (CLTs) were a means of creating and securing community ownership of land and facilities for community benefit. Trusts were set up to acquire assets, for example houses, land, public houses, and to hold those assets in perpetuity for the benefit of the local community.

In response to questions raised by the Commission, the Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer:

- agreed that community acquisition of a failing pub with associated buildings and land for conversion to a shop, with affordable housing or sheltered accommodation, was the kind of work that the CLTs were designed for. Communities could involve Foundation East, a social bank that develops and finances CLTs and other community led organisations, for financial backing and support.
- Advised that any affordable housing or building works to be included in any work done by a CLT would need to go through the usual planning routes, and any local desires regarding appearance that formed part of the Village Design SPD would have to be taken into consideration.

It was noted that the forthcoming localism bill was expected to include a scheme called 'community right to buy' which allowed communities to acquire assets they feel strongly about, however officers were unsure as yet of how the scheme was to work.

ACTION AGREED

That the Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer approach Helpston and Barnack parish councils to talk about Community Land Trusts.

(d) Peterborough Site Allocations DPD

The Policy and Strategy Manager gave an overview of the Site Allocations Document which is part of the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) and converts the headline of the core strategy into a map detailing the areas identified as being suitable for various forms of development. In 2009 all the possible sites known to the Council were put out for consultation. In March and April 2010, the Council put forward preferred sites.

The document had already been presented to the public via the Neighbourhood Council meetings throughout September 2010.

The Policy and Strategy Manager confirmed the following changes had been made to the Site Allocations Document, regarding the key services areas, since consultation with the public in March 2010:

- After comments and objections received from residents in the village of Eye regarding the development of land to the east of the village, plans for two hundred and fifty houses had been reduced to fifty houses. Other sites identified had not been changed.

- One site in the village of Thorney that had been previously rejected on transport and environmental issues had now been resolved and could now be included in the site allocations.
- Following a large number of objections regarding developments in Helpston, the density of proposed housing had been reduced from approximately fifty to thirty.
- The size of the development near Newborough had been changed so that it was a better fit within the existing village.
- Allocations for proposed developments in Wittering did not receive a significant number of objections.

During consideration, the following points were noted:

- The development of a new village would require an update to the Core Strategy as it currently did not provide for this.
- Any new developments in key service areas would need to include an increase in the infrastructure of local facilities so that additional pressure was not placed on existing services and to ensure the sustainability of new developments.
- The next stage for the core strategy would be for the independent inspector to issue a Binding Report, due to be issued in December 2010 or shortly after. The core strategy would then go before Council in February 2011, and legally Council have only two options at that point, being to accept the Binding Report in its entirety, or to not accept the report and to start writing a core strategy afresh.

Cllr Sanders made the following comments in relation to the site allocations document as it related to the villages of Eye and Thorney:

- A re-write of the core strategy was supported by the local MP and he supported this view as he did not agree that the current Core Strategy is in keeping with the views of villages surrounding Peterborough and contained more houses than required.
- Comments from local residents regarding the developments in Eye were incorrectly portrayed to the Planning Committee. Comments were made by the Planning Team that Eye Parish Council had no issues with growth outside of the village envelope. The Planning team did not meet with Eye Parish Council, only the Chairman, Clerk and one Parish Councillor. Councillor Sanders had met with every member of Eye Parish Council and that they were aggrieved that they had been misquoted and had requested a transcript of the Planning Committee meeting where this issue was discussed.
- Cllr Sanders had attended a meeting where Planning Officers advised the Planning Inspector that Eye Parish Council did not have a Village Plan, however the village plan had been submitted to the City Council on 10 July 2010 to Peterborough City Council. Due to staff turnover, there had been a delay in the plan being processed however this was now under way.
- Cllr Sanders reiterated the comments from the Rural North Neighbourhood Council meeting that Eye residents did not want growth outside of the current village envelope in Eye or Eye Green. The fifty houses currently contained in the Site Allocations Document were still too many.
- Cllr Sanders stated that he did not want the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities to support the Site Allocations Document in its entirety. The residents of Eye Village did not want future growth in any way, shape or form outside of the village envelope, and that this view had been well documented at two public meetings. Further, Cllr Sanders stated that residents of Eye wanted the removal of the village from policy SA5, of the Core Strategy Document.

Cllr Sanders submitted a letter from a resident of Eye to the Chairman, which Cllr Sanders believed reflected the views of the majority of the residents in the village of Eye and requested this letter be submitted to Cabinet and be adopted within the minutes of this meeting.

ACTION AGREED

That the letter submitted by Cllr Sanders be included, unedited, as an appendix to the draft minutes of this meeting and that those and the comments raised in relation to the Peterborough Site Allocations DPD Document be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 8 November 2010.

(e) Emerging National Initiatives

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer advised that details were still emerging from central government regarding the impact of the anticipated localism bill on local housing trusts and on planning in general. The Strategic Planning, Policy and Enabling team would keep a close eye on information as it became available. The Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer reiterated that the work coming out of the Rural Housing Strategy was extremely relevant to the localism agenda, and the emerging Peterborough Housing Strategy would also lend its support to community led housing initiatives.

(f) Rural Exception Sites

The Policy and Strategy Manager gave an overview of what rural exception sites were in planning terms, explaining that these had always been an option for rural areas but were seldom used. Rural Exception sites were a means by which villages could bring forward affordable housing, as the planning system would give more favourable consideration to a an application for 100% affordable housing on a site that wasn't on the site allocations map, when compared with a development proposed by the private sector for profit.

It was noted that parish councils had only become aware of Rural Exception Sites in the last 18 months to 2 years and that parishes may see these sites as a type of conservation policy, for example that an exception site means that no development will take place, but it means the opposite as it means a site that is an exception to planning policy.

ACTION AGREED

That information outlining Rural Exception Sites and their use be circulated to Parish Councils.

(g) Rural Housing Strategy

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer gave an update on the implementation of the Rural Housing Strategy, and highlighted the following actions and progress for the Commission's attention:

- Best Practice for Rural Affordable Housing Delivery: Peterborough City Council had been working at establishing better contacts with other local authorities who had a high proportion of the population living in rural areas in order to establish best practice regarding the delivery of rural affordable housing. Links had been made with Northumberland County Council and the Development Trust Association, which had lead to working with Foundation East with regard to Community Land Trusts.
- Energy Efficiency Project Toolkit: Officers were working to produce a toolkit that sets out how energy efficiency programs, such as the Green Ginton Project, can be replicated across Peterborough. This was to be implemented by the Environment Capital Officer of the Greater Peterborough Partnership however this post was now vacant. Once the outcomes of the proposed restructure in the Operations Directorate were known, it was hoped that the most appropriate officer could be identified and this work could continued.

- Roll out community energy challenge to rural areas of Peterborough: Officers had previously secured £3,000 in funding which was used to purchase the 60 energy meters being used by the Climate Change Team in the Community Energy Challenge. The challenge seeks to have two communities compete to see which can reduce its energy consumption the most over a set period of time. The Climate Change Team had approached members but were experiencing difficulties in engaging with rural communities.
- Your Footprint Counts Campaign: The energy efficiency campaign run by the Climate Change Team, was to be further promoted in rural areas over autumn and winter, with the Team using thermal imaging cameras in villages to identify areas of high energy inefficiency.
- To promote Planning Aid: To encourage rural communities to engage with an organisation called Planning Aid, which seeks to assist rural communities in getting involved in the planning system. Now that the GPP's Rural Working Group has temporarily disbanded, officers are looking for the most appropriate means by which to promote the group.

8. Forward Plan

The latest version of the Forward Plan, showing details of the key decisions that the Leader of the Council believed the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would be making over the next four months, was received.

No items on the forward plan were identified as areas for scrutiny.

9. Work Programme

The Commission reviewed and confirmed its work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

10. Date of the next Meeting

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities was scheduled to be held on Tuesday, 11 January 2011 commencing at 7.00pm.

The meeting began at 7.00 pm and ended at 9.00 pm

CHAIRMAN