



Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities held at the
Bourges/Viersen Room - Town Hall
on 27 July 2009

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors D Over (Chairman), M Collins, R Dobbs, D Harrington, B Rush and W Trueman

OFFICERS PRESENT:

Richard Astle, Langdyke Trust
Jenny Horsfield, Lawyer - Property
Alex Daynes, Senior Governance Officer
Mike Heath, Commercial Services Director

1. Apologies for Absence

An apology was received from Cllr Nawaz.

2. Declaration of Interest

None were declared.

3. Langdyke Trust

The commission received a report and presentation on the Langdyke Trust and was requested to identify any areas of good practise and make recommendations about the future establishment and benefits to rural communities of land trusts and how these trusts could be supported by the City Council.

The commission received information about the different sites that the Trust had gained which were Swaddywell Pit, Torpel Manor Field, Bainton Heath and Eton-Maxey Pits and turned to nature reserves.

Questions were asked and responses provided including:

- Local, enthusiastic people were they key to the Langdyke success.
- Funding had never been a problem.
- Local people are willing to help; must engage early on to maintain interest.
- The Neighbourhood team within the Council might take on the development of such groups.
- Key enablers would need to get together to develop a strategy to establish similar land trusts possibly through the Rural Working Group at Greater Peterborough Partnership or Parish Council Liaison.
- The use of S106 obligations could enable public access provision to sites.

ACTION AGREED

To include an agenda item at the next Parish Council Liaison meeting to raise the issue with Parishes to determine and encourage local support for establishing similar initiatives.

4. A Rural Definition

The commission received a report and was requested to determine what was meant by 'Rural Communities' to ensure scrutiny function is focused correctly on rural communities.

The Chairman proposed a definition as follows:

“Rural areas are wards with a significant rural character and also wards with important areas of countryside”.

Members of the commission agreed that this definition was inclusive of all areas of the city that had rural or countryside aspects and would not exclude any area.

ACTION AGREED

To recommend that the Leader of the Council recommends to Cabinet that the following definition is used to identify rural areas and communities when discussing rural policy or developing strategies that would affect rural areas of the city:

“Rural areas are wards with a significant rural character and also wards with important areas of countryside”.

5. Fix it Van

The commission received a report and was requested to consider the role of the Fix It Van Service and its relevance to the rural communities and to decide whether this was a service that was fit for purpose and met the needs of the localities it served.

The report included four recommendations for the commission to determine:

1. The service continues to be provided with two vehicles in its current format.
2. All Parish and rural communities be encouraged to take the opportunity to make better use of the service and become involved in its operations.
3. That we continue to use the Fix It Van brand.
4. That we request the Parish Council Liaison meeting to consider: are there any other services that could be provided through the Fix It Van Service?

The Commercial Services Director advised members of the background and history of the service to provide context for any recommendation that might be made. Questions were asked and responses given including:

- Operatives already received certifications for use of some equipment.
- The scope of the service could be extended but would need input from Parishes.
- There is space on the schedule should Parishes wish to use the service more.
- More support for large jobs can be provided from other Council resources.
- Cost has risen since its inception due to fuel costs, salaries and equipment cost increases.
- Vehicles are usually leased rather than bought outright but the two vehicles will need replacing soon and costs to buy or lease are always compared first.

- The Fix It Van is specifically for rural areas as other services already exist for the rest of the city.

ACTION AGREED

1. To recommend that the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood, Housing and Community Development recommends to the Commercial Services Director that the four recommendations below are carried out:
 - (i) The service continues to be provided with two vehicles in its current format.
 - (ii) All Parish and rural communities be encouraged to take the opportunity to make better use of the service and become involved in its operations.
 - (iii) That we continue to use the Fix It Van brand.
 - (iv) That we request the Parish Council Liaison meeting to consider: are there any other services that could be provided through the Fix It Van Service?
2. That the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood, Housing and Community Development recommends to the Commercial Services Director that any further recommendations following consultation with Parish Council Liaison are considered for incorporation in the continuation of the service.
3. The relevant Officer request the Chairman of the Parish Council Liaison meeting to consider whether there are there any other services that could be provided through the Fix It Van Service. Any recommendations following consultation with Parish Council Liaison are considered for incorporation in the continuation of the service.

6. Rural Economy

The commission received a report advising on the role Opportunity Peterborough has played in supporting the rural economy and businesses. The commission was requested to make recommendations on the future approach to developing and supporting the rural economy and businesses in rural areas.

Members discussed ways that support could be offered to rural businesses from the Council and Opportunity Peterborough including planning regulations, business rates and advertising. The commission was advised that some suggested assistance conflicted with LAA (Local Area Authority) targets and other legislation.

ACTION AGREED

1. Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Regional and Business Engagement recommends that Cabinet considers and develops a strategy to assist rural businesses to include promotional activities and ways of alleviating the burden of business rates.
2. Recommend That the Cabinet Member for Regional and Business Engagement recommends that Cabinet request Opportunity Peterborough to amend the wording of the report concerning the Magna Park development; paragraph 3.4 should read “may provide further stimulus to employment”, rather than “will provide further stimulus to employment”.
3. Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Growth and Human Resources recommend to the Executive Director - Operations that Rural Businesses must be able to erect signs to advertise their businesses.

4. Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Growth and Human Resources recommends to the Executive Director - Operations that guidance on acceptable sign design should be provided for rural businesses; permanent and temporary signs.
5. Recommend that Leader of the Council recommends that the Cabinet and Opportunity Peterborough confirm that they recognise that the rural economy is made up of a variety of businesses and industries and not just farming and food production.

7. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The commission received the latest version of the Forward Plan and was asked to identify any items that the committee wished to consider at a future meeting.

Members identified the Older People's Accommodation Strategy as an item that could affect the rural communities in Peterborough.

ACTION AGREED

Recommend that information on the Older People's Accommodation Strategy is brought to a meeting of this commission.

8. Work Program

The commission received the work plan for the coming municipal year and requested agenda items for forthcoming meetings. The commission requested that meetings of this commission should be held in rural areas and not the Town Hall in order to provide opportunity for greater engagement from rural communities.

ACTION AGREED

1. 5 October meeting: Sign Posting, Traffic Mitigation (speed limits), Rural Housing Strategy, Bus Routes.
2. 23 November meeting: Cycle Routes, Rail links, School Admissions, Fly Tipping.
3. 25 January 2010: Children's Play provision, Sure Start programme.
4. To conduct meetings of this commission away from the Town Hall.

9. Date of the next Meeting

5 October 2009, 7pm.

CHAIRMAN
7.00 - 8.30 pm