

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

GREENER SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2010

Councillors Present: Roger Hunneman, Tim Metcalfe, Tony Vickers (Vice-Chairman) and Emma Webster (Chairman)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Peter Argyle

Councillor(s) Absent: Councillor Howard Bairstow

PART I

16. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7th September 2010 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

17. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Tony Vickers declared an interest in Agenda Item 5, but reported that, as his interest was not personal and prejudicial, he determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

18. Waste Management

The Committee considered a verbal update (Agenda Item 4) concerning actions arising from their previous discussion regarding flytipping and waste management.

Andrew Deacon, Waste Manager, attended the meeting to answer the questions raised by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission and any other questions Members had.

Members informed Andrew Deacon that representatives from Sovereign Housing had indicated that fly tipping had increased since the Council removed free of charge bulky waste collection. There had been incidents of furniture being left in tenants front gardens as they did not wish to or could not afford to have them removed.

Andrew Deacon replied that incidents of fly tipping were recorded and that since the new waste management contract had been introduced there had been no noticeable change in the level of fly tipping and last year saw a drop in incidents. Data for fly tipping of large bulky waste was reported by the Environment Agency, and this could be monitored and reported back to the Select Committee every six months if required.

With regards to Sovereign Housing's view that fly tipping was on the increase, Members were informed that this was due to the way Sovereign Housing recorded their figures. The Council recorded incidents of fly tipping whilst Sovereign Housing recorded the number of items that were dumped. The Council were working with Sovereign Housing and the wardens to get a better understanding of the situation and how best to record data.

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It was noted that if a resident left bulky items on their own property this would not be classed as an incident of fly tipping by the Council.

Councillor Webster Joined the meeting.

Members asked how much fly tipping collection cost the Council and if there had been an increase in dumped waste that also saw an increase in vermin and how the Council helped deal with such problems. The Committee were informed that there was no separate cost code for the collection of waste fly tipped as this was covered under duties laid out as part of the new waste management contract. The Council had not recorded an increase in fly tipping and with regards to vermin the authority's environmental officers provided advice to the public on how best to deal with any vermin infestation.

With regards to recycling centres not accepting paint pots, Andrew Deacon informed the Committee that if the paint was solidified, for example by mixing it with sand, than the Newtown Road recycling centre would accept paint pots. The centre also had a containment unit for dangerous liquids. Members requested that this information be added to resident's newsletters.

Councillor Webster took the chair.

19. Rights of Way Improvement Plan

(Councillor Tony Vickers declared that he was a Member of the Local Access Forum. As his interest was neither personal nor prejudicial, he determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter).

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 5) regarding the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Elaine Cox, Senior Rights of Way Officer, and Dr Janice Bridger, Local Access Forum, attended the meeting to present the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and its associated action plan.

Elaine Cox informed the Committee that the Council had a statutory duty to produce a ROWIP, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The ROWIP was produced as a means of identifying changes, for both the management and improvement, to the Council's rights of way network.

The ROWIP formed part of the Local Transport Plan and was also being included in the Local Transport Plan Three that was currently out for consultation.

Whilst developing the ROWIP an extensive consultation exercise had been undertaken with the responses being divided between improvements to the management of the rights of way network and improvements to the network itself.

The action plan had been developed after consultation and was set at a strategic level rather than concentrating on individual improvement projects. Parts of the action plan were already being implemented and these included cost saving exercises such as improved enforcement work to get land owners to carry out their responsibilities rather than the Council having to act, by identifying other funding streams and by providing support for other groups who wished to improve the network. Members were informed that each year there was about 1700 volunteers working on the rights of way network.

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The Council also worked with Parish Councils on their development of Parish Plans if they wished to include elements of public access.

Janice Bridger informed Members that as well as being a member of the Local Access Forum she had also worked with Chieveley Parish Council on their Parish Plan. Members were informed that whilst undertaking consultation for the Chieveley Parish Plan 82% of respondents valued their access to footpaths, bridleways and byways. 68% of those who used the byways had concern regarding their safety when the byway used the local road network.

Members were informed that the Local Access Forum were working with parish councils to help improve access with joint working with other agencies. Improvements was not just a matter of increased funding but also better working relations with landowners.

Whilst considering the report the Committee raised the following points:

- A lot of users of the rights of way network undertook circular routes that more than often took them onto the public highway. As mentioned this raised concerns about road safety, especially on minor roads.
- Highway engineers needed to be mindful of all users of our road network rather than concentrating on motorised vehicles.
- It was important to bring together people representing different agencies and backgrounds to help maintain and improve peoples access to the rights of ay network.
- The report highlighted the size of the task required to maintain the current network and how this was a huge undertaking for the local authority. It was suggested that local parish and town councils might be better able to undertake this responsibility due to their local knowledge and ability to raise funds via the precept.
- Members noted the excellent work undertaken by the Council in this field considering the level of funding.
- Members were encouraged by the example of how in Cornwall the council worked with its parish councils to show them what legislative powers they had to help improve the local network. Members supported the idea of holding a similar workshop.
- It was important to remember the security risks associated with allowing people greater access under rights of way legislation. Members agreed that there was a difference between the improved security of having more people witnessing potential incidents in the countryside, than that of opening access to both rural and urban centres to those of ill repute.
- Although increased access to the countryside was important there were problems for farmers with some of the new swing gates that although allowed better access to the countryside also allowed livestock to escape.
- There needed to be better education or information made available to the type of access that was permitted under right of way legislation.
- It was noted that the majority of people who broke the speed limit on country roads was local traffic.
- As the Local Transport Plan encouraged joined up cycle routes it should also include joined up walking routes.

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- It was suggested that the Council should consider joint service arrangements with other authorities to help maximise resources and help others learn from the good work undertaken in west Berkshire.
- Parish Councils should be encouraged to develop community circuits to improve access and highlight problem areas throughout the district.
- The Council should ask national Government to simplify legislation to make it easier for compromises between landowners and interest groups to be met. It was felt that current legislation was a hindrance when trying to find compromises when looking at rights of way access.

Resolved that: The report and evidence given be noted.

20. Renewable Energy in West Berkshire

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 6) regarding renewable energy in West Berkshire.

Adrian Slaughter, Building Energy Officer, attended the meeting to present a report responding to two motions of Council regarding renewable energy.

Members were informed that recently there had been a number of developments relating to sources of renewable energy, encouraging administrations to adopt a more proactive stance to national and local targets.

When the Government extended the benefits that could be gained under the 'Feed in Tariff' officers talked to suppliers to assess the best way of increasing the amount of renewable energy the authority could produce locally.

Three options were considered in helping the Council meet its obligations; they were leasing Council property roof space to private investors, the Council investing in new technology itself or a combination of the two options.

Members were informed that the Council and private investors only had until March 2012 to take advantage of the current level of tariffs.

So far the Council had not leased space on its properties to private companies due to the complex break clauses that would be detrimental to such arrangements. The Government were looking at introducing a policy framework to make it easier for such contracts to be established.

In consideration of the report the following points were raised:

- There were too many companies offering expert conflicting advice that confused those who wished to take advantage of Government incentives with regards to renewable energy.
- Members were pleased to see that the Government, under the Localism Bill, was encouraging the establishment of Community Land Trusts. Members agreed that the initiatives highlighted under section 2.17 of the report should be incorporated into the committees recommendations.
- It was recommended that schools should take advantage of 'leaseback' schemes as highlighted in section 2.20 of the report.
- The Council should encourage people to undertake renewable energy schemes and consider introducing loan schemes.

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- It was agreed that although we could not force schools to take advantage of renewable energy projects, school buildings should be included in the Council's definition of its estates when introducing its policies.
- The Council had identified a potential site for a wind farm upon Council owned property, however concern had been raised by its validity by the Council's Property and Planning services.
- Members asked if the education centre proposed for Padworth could also include information regarding renewable energy. It was noted that the Thatcham Discovery Centre already provided such education facilities.
- Members accepted the recommendations proposed in the report and asked for an update on progress at the March 2011 meeting.

Resolved that:

- The Local Strategic Partnership were best placed for taking on responsibility for, and producing, a West Berkshire Renewable Energy Strategy.
- That the Council's Energy Team finalise an Energy Strategy, to include policy on renewable energy, for West Berkshire Council's estate that included school buildings.
- That the Council examine ways in helping / facilitating others to take up projects under the Localism Bill.
- That the Council should investigate introducing a loan scheme to assist schools undertaking renewable energy projects.

21. Work Programme

Members suggested that the following items should be considered for inclusion on the Greener Select Committee's work Programme:

- An update on the renewable energy be provided at the March 2011 meeting.
- That the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Select Committee scope a potential review into planning policy and waste management.
- That an update on the Local Strategic Partnership's work on fuel poverty be presented at the March 2011 meeting.

(The meeting commenced at 6.35pm and closed at 8.25pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature