

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT PROSPERITY AND SERVICE POLICY PANELS

**THE EARL BALDWIN SUITE, DUKE HOUSE, CLENSMORE STREET,
KIDDERMINSTER**

12TH FEBRUARY 2007 (6PM)

PRESENT:

Councillors: Mrs F M Oborski (Chairman of the Prosperity Policy Panel in the Chair), J Holden (Chairman of the Service Policy Panel), Mrs J L Salter (Vice-Chairman of the Prosperity Policy Panel), M J Shellie (Vice-Chairman of the Service Policy Panel), J Aston, Mrs M H Baillie, J Baker, G W Ballinger, Mrs H E Dyke, Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis, P B Harrison, Mrs P V Hayward, Mrs S M Hayward, M B Kelly, Miss M A Mason, M A Salter, J A Shaw, D R Sheppard, K J Stokes, N J Thomas, G C Yarranton.

OBSERVERS:

Councillors: P Dyke and Mrs A T Hingley.

JPS.1 TRIBUTE – THE LATE COUNCILLOR M M G OBORSKI

Members stood for one minute's silence in tribute to the late Councillor Mike Oborski, who had died the previous day.

JPS.2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs R L Akathiotis, Miss S C Meekings and C D Nicholls.

JPS.3 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES

Councillor P B Harrison was appointed as a substitute for Councillor Mrs R L Akathiotis. Councillor M B Kelly was appointed as a substitute for Councillor C D Nicholls.

JPS.4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made.

JPS.5 CODE FOR SUSTAINABLE HOMES – A STEP CHANGE IN SUSTAINABLE HOME BUILDING PRACTICE

Members considered a briefing paper from the Senior Health and Sustainability Officer, which informed Members about the new Code for Sustainable Homes, published on 13th December 2006.

The Senior Health and Sustainability Officer advised the Panel that the Code for

Sustainable Homes was potentially very exciting with regard to changes to house building in the country. The adopted policy had been developed in response to positive action that authorities had taken across the country.

One of the Government's aims was that by 2016, all new houses should be zero carbon rated. The Senior Health and Sustainability Officer explained that the code was currently voluntary. Registered Social Landlords would have to work towards the code if they received Housing Corporation funding.

The Council was working with local house builders to ensure that they remained up to date with the fast moving agenda.

Members asked whether, as well as for new housing developments where there were substantial refurbishment or extensions, would this new code apply to them. The Senior Health and Sustainability Officer clarified that wherever Building Regulation consent was required, the code would apply.

Members supported both options in the report and asked whether there was any unilateral action that the Council could take to promote more sustainable homes in the meantime until the Code became mandatory. They were aware that Worcester City Council had already done this. The Forward Planning Manager told the Panel that the Worcester City initiative was through its Local Development Framework documents. Wyre Forest would have this option, but it would take time to achieve that process as, currently, the Council's priorities were to have the core strategy in place first. However, as part of the core strategy, the Council could introduce policies regarding sustainable homes.

Members asked how much weight the Code would have when applications were considered at Planning (Development Control) Committee meetings. The Panel was advised that, at this stage, it was too early to say. It was necessary to wait for the annex to Planning Policy Statement One (PPS1) when authorities could look at securing 10% renewable energy on new applications. It could be influenced by the Council's response to the consultation on 'Building A Greener Future: Towards Zero Carbon Development.

Members were informed that, currently the Council could make builders aware of the Code, but could not make it mandatory for builders to adhere to it. Members felt that the Code should be mandatory rather than voluntary. They mentioned that the Community Housing Group was in the process of refurbishing some of its housing stock and was already looking into energy efficiency.

Members referred to paragraph 3.3 of the briefing paper, regarding recycling containers in houses. They noted that nowadays, many new houses were very compact and there might be no space for them. The Chairman highlighted that in 2009, there would be a new recycling scheme which would make this irrelevant as everything would be collected from one bin.

Members felt that the Government should be urged by Councils to make the code mandatory and that councils should be putting forward a resolution to demand that the Government makes the Code statutory. There was also concern that the Code did not apply to existing buildings.

Members felt that the only way to have an impact would be through the Local Government Association (LGA) and it was therefore recommended that the Cabinet recommend to the LGA that the Code for Sustainable Homes should be mandatory for all new homes built.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet:

- 1. The Council work with local house builders to promote the voluntary code for sustainable homes.**
- 2. When considering the Local Development Framework, higher requirements of sustainability be included.**
- 3. The Council respond to the “Building a Greener Future: Towards Zero Carbon Development” consultation document and ask the Department of Communities and Local Government to make the Code for Sustainable Homes mandatory for all new homes.**
- 4. The Cabinet recommend to the LGA that in response to the “Building a Greener Future: Towards Zero Carbon Development” consultation document, the Department of Communities and Local Government be recommended to make the Code for Sustainable Homes mandatory for all new homes.**

JPS.6

BUILDING A GREENER FUTURE: TOWARDS ZERO CARBON DEVELOPMENT

The Panel considered a briefing paper from the Assistant Planner, which informed Members of the content of the consultation paper on ‘Building a Greener Future: Towards Zero Carbon Development’.

The Panel considered the Officer’s suggested responses to the questions from the Department of Communities and Local Government, as set out in the appendix to the briefing paper.

With regard to question two, the Panel felt that there was a need for the Government to be more realistic about the level of subsidy available for sustainable equipment as there was not enough funding available. This contrasted with Germany where such equipment was more available and cheaper.

Regarding paragraph three of question two, Members were concerned and felt that there needed to be a balance in policy regarding lower income households, which could potentially be priced out of the market for low carbon homes and leave them with higher bills and less certainty over supply.

Members were also concerned that Registered Social Landlords, who were already operating on an uneven playing field, would be affected and therefore needed some encouragement from the Government in terms of grants etc. Members agreed that in addition to the response contained in the appendix, it should also say “Consideration must be given to poorer households and Registered Social Landlords towards funding.”

It was also suggested that poorer owner-occupiers should be supported because the poorest people in communities were elderly home owners with private pensions that were just above the benefit level who would be unable to qualify for subsidies.

The Senior Health and Sustainability Officer explained that the Merton Rule was so called because it began in the London Borough of Merton where that council introduced a requirement for a certain percentage of energy to be generated on-site from renewables incorporated into new developments.

When asked about what type of financial incentives were suggested in the proposed response to question three, Members were advised that incentives could include tax exemption, VAT exemption, lower or no stamp duty on zero carbon homes, better grant schemes for renewables etc.

Members requested an additional comment to say that there was concern that there were no incentives being suggested to encourage owners of existing housing stock to take steps to make their homes more sustainable. A Member stated that, even by 2050, most of the houses would be ones already built now and, unless they were having extensions, these proposals would not affect them. Both new and old houses would need to be looked at as a whole.

The Senior Health and Sustainability Officer explained that there was already an existing requirement under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 for there to be a two percent year on year reduction in emissions in housing stock. Therefore, the Council was already doing this and was promoting the use of renewables and energy efficiency through cavity wall insulation etc. As a result, Wyre Forest District Council was on course to achieve its targets but many councils were not.

A Member informed the Panel that she had taken advantage of all energy efficiency grants and systems available and that they could really help to improve energy consumption. She was concerned that not enough people knew about what schemes were available. It was suggested that members could be the leaders in this field in the communities by promoting energy efficiency. This should be a fundamental aspect of every policy document and practice statement.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet:

The Officer's comments set out at Appendix One of the briefing paper to the Panel for submission to the Department for Communities and Local Government be endorsed subject to the additional points mentioned above.

JPS.7

CONSULTATION ON PLANNING POLICY STATEMENT: PLANNING AND CLIMATE CHANGE – SUPPLEMENT TO PLANNING POLICY STATEMENT 1

Members considered a briefing paper from the Assistant Planner, which informed them of the content of the consultation paper on 'Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change – Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1'.

The extent of the impact on the District would not be clear until the final document was published, but once adopted, it would be considered to be a material factor when determining applications.

Members stated that the new proposed policies would make a fundamental difference to considerations by Development Control but they were unclear in terms of scope and timescale. Members were informed that it would be at least six months until the annex would be introduced. After its introduction, there would be scope for the Government to put in a transitional period to allow the construction industry to prepare for the changes. There was likely to be a limitation on the scale of developments that the policy would affect.

Members asked why Wyre Forest was not a leader in this area like the London Borough of Merton. The Panel was told that the timing of the preparation of the Wyre Forest District Local Plan review was unfortunate, in that national guidance at that time did not facilitate policies for on-site renewables. However, with the publication of more recent guidance and the proposed annex to PPS1, policies could be included within the Core Strategy to be prepared later this year.

Members considered the Officer's responses to the consultation in appendix one to the report.

A discussion ensued regarding alternative sources of power including wind and tidal. Members felt that the Council should be encouraging the use of solar panels and photovoltaics on roofs. Members noted that alternative sources of energy were cheaper and more widely available in other countries and that only when a significant number were sold in this country would the price come down.

With regard to question 6b, Members felt that it was contradictory to say that local planning authorities should be able to set the proportion of the energy supply of substantial new development to be gained on-site and renewably and/or from a decentralised, renewable or low-carbon energy supply locally. Members felt that the response should include a statement to say that a national minimum for renewable or low-carbon energy should be agreed, but that authorities could exceed this minimum.

Members noted that in Woking, all street lights had solar panels on them. Members suggested that Worcestershire County Council should do the same.

The Panel agreed to the response to question eleven concerning the use of other renewable energy sources, such as biofuel, but noted that there was a need to be more realistic. Currently there were taxation issues with biofuel and its growth. People would be discouraged from using alternative sources of fuel. Members also highlighted that the production of biofuels could create more carbon emissions than it would be saving as in the case of palm oil which was causing rain forests to be cut down.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet:

The Officer's comments as set out in Appendix One to the report be endorsed for approval by Cabinet for submission to the Department for Communities and Local Government by 8th March 2007, subject to the additional point mentioned above in response to question 6b .

(Councillors Mrs H E Dyke and P Dyke left the meeting at this point. 7.15pm)

WATER EFFICIENCY IN NEW BUILDINGS – A CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Members considered a briefing paper from the Senior Health and Sustainability Officer, which informed them of the content of the consultation paper 'Water Efficiency in New Buildings'.

The Senior Health and Sustainability Officer told the Panel that water resources were scarce and in the United Kingdom, people were using more especially with the number of houses increasing. Per head, the United Kingdom had less water available than in Spain and Portugal.

The Panel was informed that currently, there were no regulations with regard to water consumption. All new houses were fitted with a water meter but it was not necessary to put water saving measures into new developments. The Government, regardless of the Code for Sustainable Homes, wanted to introduce building regulations that included water efficiency in new builds to reduce the daily consumption of water.

Members felt that the idea was laudable but that, until water companies improved supplies and fixed the leaks, it would be a waste of time. Water companies appeared to be wasting more water than people could use.

Members noted that in Japan, it was possible to buy a toilet system whereby water from the hand basin was used to flush the toilet. Members asked why in this country, people were not using this kind of technology.

Members felt that water conservation was a real problem and that waste water should be recycled. Technology was available but was not being used as there were no incentives available.

Members considered Appendix One to the report and made the following comments:

With regard to the response to question one, Members agreed that an additional comment should be included to say that grey water recycling systems should be included in new homes and commercial buildings.

With regard to question two, it should say "To make these new Building Regulations raise the bar above standards already being achieved, it would be sensible to set the new **maximum** at 120 litres per head per day.

Members suggested that the response to question six should also say that financial incentives such as tax incentives would encourage more use of water saving products.

Regarding the response to question seven, the answer should say that yes there are already sufficient supplies of compliant fittings available.

Members suggested that the response to question eleven should say that the other

factors to take into account were leakage and grey water. Members felt that there was a need for a cultural change to peoples thinking and that more marketing, education and information was necessary to achieve this.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet:

The Officer's comments set out at Appendix One to the report to the Panel be endorsed for approval for submission to the Department for Communities and Local Government by 9th March 2007, subject to the additional points mentioned above.

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm.