

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

WEDNESDAY, 11TH NOVEMBER 2009 (6:00PM)

Present:

Councillors: Mrs H E Dyke (Chairman), J Phillips (Vice-Chairman), G H Eeles, D R Godwin, Mrs J Greener, Mrs P V Hayward, M A W Hazlewood, M B Kelly, D J Millis, M Price, K H Prosser, M J Shellie, D R Sheppard, and G C Yarranton.

Observers:

Councillors: Mrs F M Oborski, and Mrs T L Onslow.

C&R.52 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S J Williams.

C&R.53 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor Mrs J Greener was appointed as a substitute for Councillor S J Williams.

C&R.54 Declaration of Interests

Councillors M B Kelly, Mrs J Greener, M J Shellie and G C Yarranton declared a personal interest in agenda item numbers 7, 8 and 9 due to their memberships of the board of Wyre Forest Community Housing Group.

C&R.55 Change to Agenda Order

The Chairman advised Members that Agenda Item No. 16 was no longer considered exempt, and therefore would be moved to Item No. 10.

C&R.56 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 8th October 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C&R.57 Ribbesford Conservation Area – Draft Conservation Area Appraisal

The Committee considered a report from the Conservation Officer which informed Members of the proposed Draft Conservation Area Appraisal for the Ribbesford Conservation Area, and the proposed arrangements for public consultation.

The Conservation Officer advised Members that the report sought Members' approval for the Draft Ribbesford Conservation Area Appraisal Report to go to consultation. Members were informed that the consultation would include writing to

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residents and interested local parties, and a display at the Worcestershire Hub at Kidderminster Town Hall.

Members were advised that the Conservation Area Appraisal focused upon the character of the Ribbesford area in specific detail. The Appraisal was based upon guidance from English Heritage, and pending adoption would be subsequently used in the planning process for the area.

A Member praised the report as being very thorough, and subsequently queried the designation of trees on the Ribbesford Map (circulated as Appendix 2 during the meeting). In response the Conservation Officer advised that symbols on the map were only indicative.

A Member drew attention to the condition of the road leading to Ribbesford Church, and queried whether this would be considered under the Conservation Area Appraisal. In response the Conservation Officer advised that a National Planning Policy Statement suggested that work on highways must take account of the appropriateness of materials when being undertaken in conservation areas. The Officer advised that he had stated that the use of tarmac on the road in question could have a negative impact on the character of the area, and also could impact upon serious flooding concerns at the site. Members were advised that County Highways Section were looking into the site.

A Member queried whether the road in question was adopted or unadopted. The Conservation Officer agreed to respond to this question at a later date via email.

Agreed: It be recommended to Cabinet to agree to undertake a public consultation to gauge the opinion of all affected persons, with a report back to Members at the end of the consultation period, to indicate the level of public support for the Appraisal and its contents.

C&R.58 Scrutiny Proposal Form: Energy Supply and Power Generation – Development and Security

A Member outlined to the Committee the reasons behind submitting a Scrutiny Proposal Form relating to Energy Supply and Power Generation – Development and Security.

The Member perceived there to be a lack of support and guidance for members of the public who wished to pursue small scale energy generation and efficiency measures.

The Member advised that both Councillors and the Council as a planning authority would need to provide leadership and guidance on energy efficiency and environmental matters, and that furthermore, the Council had some influence over Council properties and the Wyre Forest Community Housing Group housing stock.

The Committee was informed that the intention of the scoping form was to look into these issues and map out the relevant organisations, available support and advice, and funding.

In response to this a number of comments were made:

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- The Chairman perceived there to be a lack of information, guidance and signposting for people wishing to pursue such measures.
- A Member commented that the issue was pertinent to matters being considered by the Local Development Framework Review Panel.
- A Member perceived there to be very little information or guidance available from the Council relating to hydro power.

Councillor Millis entered the meeting at 18:19

- A Member commented that Wyre Forest Community Housing Group were working in conjunction with an energy company to pursue renewable energy technology, and supported the idea of mapping out available funding, support, relevant initiatives, and organisations.
- A Member queried whether renewable energy was specifically referred to in the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, or the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. In Response the Principal Forward Planning Officer advised that policy CP01 of the Core Strategy addressed this, with the requirement that 10% of the energy requirements of new build properties should be generated from renewable energy.

The Assistant Scrutiny / Committee Officer outlined a list of questions and topics which it was envisaged the Review Panel would consider:

- What was available in terms of guidance grants, funding and planning advice?
- Which organisations were already involved in this area, and what could they contribute?
- What steps did people need to take in order to get small scale energy generation or efficiency measures approved and fitted?
- How could the Council tie together the various sources of information and fill in any resulting gaps?

In response a Member queried whether the Review Panel should explore the proposed Worcestershire Building Schools for the Future Project and examine its proposals for renewable energy measures.

The Chairman advised Members that if they were in agreement with the proposals, then they should communicate their interest in joining the Review Panel to the Assistant Scrutiny / Committee Officer, who would also identify a series of dates for the Review Panel.

A Member perceived that the entire Committee was interested in the Review Panel, and suggested that the entire Committee be involved in the process.

In response, the Principal Solicitor advised that a Review Panel should ideally have a small membership to enable regular meetings to take place, where Members carry out research individually and report back to the Panel but that subgroups could be set up to reflect particular areas of interest.

Agreed: A Review Panel be established to scrutinise issues relating to renewable energy and efficiency.

C&R.59 West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision – Examination in Public Report of Panel

The Committee considered a report from the Regeneration and Economic Prosperity Manager which provided an update on the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision, and specifically, the Examination in Public Panel Report.

The Regeneration and Economic Prosperity Manager informed Members that following a consultation ending in 2008, the Phase Two Revision had been subject to an Examination in Public (EiP). Members were advised that the Panel presiding over the EiP had published a report into their findings.

Members were advised that a summary of the Council's responses to the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision - Preferred Options was listed at Appendix 2 to the report, in addition to the feedback from the EiP Panel.

Members were advised that the next step in the Regional Spatial Strategy process was to be submission to the Secretary of State, followed by a 12 week consultation on any proposed changes, with the Secretary of State publishing the final West Midlands Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision in mid 2010.

A Member commented that this item had been considered in great detail by the Local Development Framework Core Strategy Review Panel. Furthermore the Member drew attention to section 3.3. of the report, and commented that Worcestershire County Council were planning to rebuild Kidderminster Train Station. In light of this, the Member suggested that the County Council and Network Rail be made aware of suggestions for a Park and Ride Scheme, incorporating a 2/3 storey car park. The Member perceived that it was crucial to feed this suggestion into the planning process before the plans were considered by the County Cabinet.

In response the Principal Forward Planning Officer agreed to inform the relevant County Council Officers of the suggested Strategic Park and Ride Scheme.

A Member enquired as to the definition of "European Sites" as referred to in Appendix 1 to the report. In response the Principal Forward Planning Officer advised that this referred to Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation, which the Officer believed to not directly affect the District.

A Member perceived that the process would entail an approximate three year wait until additional Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation would be provided. In response the Regeneration and Economic Prosperity Manager advised that this would be addressed by the Site Allocations Development Plan Document, and that the process was already set out in terms of regulation and legislation.

In response the Principal Solicitor advised that this perceived problem was not unique to the District, and was a nationwide issue. In addition the Chairman advised Members that the Spatial Strategy planning process had to be adhered to, and that short cuts could not be taken.

A Member queried whether development had stalled at the Sandy Lane Traveller Site in Stourport-on-Severn. In response the Principal Solicitor advised that the

issue was due to be addressed by the Planning Committee.

A Member asked whether there was enough brownfield land to accommodate the level of proposed residential development. In response a Member advised that this was due to be addressed by the next meeting of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy Review Panel, and invited Members to attend.

A Member enquired about whether there was in existence an agreement to sell land at a preferential price to Wyre Forest Community Housing Group dating from Stock Transfer. In response the Principal Solicitor agreed to look into this.

Agreed: The findings of the report be noted, and to await the publication of Proposed Changes by the end of 2009.

C&R.60 Wyre Forest District Local Development Framework Annual Monitoring Report 2008/09

The Committee considered a report from the Policy and Monitoring Officer which outlined to Members the details of production of the Wyre Forest District Local Development Framework Annual Monitoring Report for 2008/09.

The Principal Forward Planning Officer advised Members that the Annual Monitoring Report was an important part of the forward planning process, as it concerned the implementation of the Local Development Scheme, and highlighted whether or not the targets set by Local Development Documents were being achieved.

Members were advised that the Forward Planning Section regularly produced monitoring reports concerning residential, employment, and retail land availability.

Members were informed that the report was due to be submitted to the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) in December 2009.

Agreed: The Annual Monitoring Report 2008/09 be recommended to Cabinet for adoption as drafted.

C&R.61 Wyre Forest District Local Development Framework – Submission Core Strategy

The Committee considered a report from the Principal Forward Planning Officer which sought Members' views on the pre-submission publication version of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

The Principal Forward Planning Officer advised Members that the pre-submission publication version of the Core Strategy had been considered in great detail by the Local Development Framework Core Strategy Review Panel, and provided a summary of the key issues.

Members were advised that the Core Strategy was the overarching document within the Local Development Framework, which provided strategic guidance for future development.

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The Principal Forward Planning Officer advised Members that the Core Strategy had to undergo a front loading process, whereby it was based upon a series of robust evidence base studies.

All of the Core Strategy's policies were required to undergo a Sustainability Appraisal, and furthermore, the policies had to be consistent with national planning policy unless there was sufficient evidence to justify a departure.

Members were advised that the Core Strategy would be published for a six week period, prior to its Submission for Independent Examination in April 2010, intended to be from the 7th January 2010, to the 18th February 2010.

The Principal Forward Planning Officer subsequently outlined some of the key changes and recommendations that had been made regarding the Core Strategy:

- A meeting between the Policy & Regeneration Section, the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) and Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) – the feedback from which had been circulated during the meeting as an additional appendix.
- Development was to be focused on brownfield sites in the urban areas of Kidderminster and Stourport, with a very small amount of development targeted towards Bewdley and rural areas to meet local needs only.
- PINS had recommended that the sequential nature of the site allocations process needed to be made clearer.
- PINS had recommended that an additional column be added to the Monitoring and Implementation Framework, to set out the contingency plans, should targets not be met.

The Principal Forward Planning Officer outlined the proposed changes to the Core Strategy, as listed in detail at Appendix 4 to the report.

A number of points were subsequently raised by Members, as listed below:

- A Member praised the work of the Forward Planning Team.
- A Member queried whether the protection of rural pubs and post offices had been included in the Core Strategy, which the Chairman then confirmed.
- A Member queried the omission of the Lea Castle site – to which a Member confirmed that it was due to be addressed by the forthcoming Local Development Framework Core Strategy Review Panel, and through the Site Allocations process.
- A Member queried the basis of climate change predictions, and questioned whether any climate predictions could be relied upon as evidence. In response the Principal Forward Planning Officer advised that the predicted figures were taken from Worcestershire Climate Change Strategy.
- A Member perceived that greater emphasis could be placed upon recycling. The Principal Forward Planning Officer advised that this issue would be addressed by the forthcoming Worcestershire Waste Core Strategy.
- A Member asked whether the Severn Valley Railway line be extended to Stourport-on-Severn. The Chairman responded that a review in recent years concluded that the cost of such a scheme was prohibitive.
- A Member responded that the Severn Valley Railway line could not be extended due to housing at Burlish Crossing. In addition a review into the use

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of a Parry People Mover type light rail vehicle between the British Sugar Site and Bewdley had concluded that it would be prohibitively expensive, but that this judgement could be re-evaluated over time.

- A Member commented that the Severn Valley Railway line was passable for non-steam traffic, but queried the suitability of the British Sugar Site for a halt due to a perceived contamination issue with a nearby chemicals factory. The Regeneration and Economic Prosperity Manager advised that a previous Health and Safety Executive Buffer zone around the site in question had been dramatically reduced, so that it was no longer seen as a significant constraint.
- A Member asked whether a reference to canals being used for freight could be included. The Principal Forward Planning Officer advised that this had been raised during consultations, and that to include a reference to this would require a concrete evidence base and infrastructure plan to ensure it would be deliverable during the plan period, however the omission of a policy did not rule it out.
- A Member commented that the forthcoming Norton EnviroSort Facility could make a big difference to recycling within the County.

Agreed: The Draft Pre-Submission Publication Core Strategy, its accompanying Sustainability Appraisal Report and the arrangements for Pre-Submission Publication, as set out at Appendices 1 to 3 of the report, be endorsed and recommended to Cabinet for approval.

C&R.62 Temporary Accommodation Reduction Action Plan

The Committee considered a report from the Strategic Housing Services Manager which provided Members with an Action Plan for reducing the use of temporary accommodation and included an Action Plan for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme to support homeless prevention.

The Strategic Housing Manager outlined to Members several of the positive implications of the Action Plan:

- To help enable the Council to meet a national target to halve the number of cases of temporary accommodation used by 2010.
- To help meet a national target to keep stays in temporary accommodation shorter than 6 weeks.
- To help reduce Council expenditure on temporary accommodation.

The Strategic Housing Manager advised Members that the Council had moved towards a prevention mechanism to deal with homelessness cases. The Council had adopted various measures to address this including:

- Awarding Home Choice Plus Gold Plus banding
- Undertaking home visits where parental eviction was a factor
- The Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- Helping people access supported housing
- General provision of funds and advice through the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Members were informed that the above had helped to achieve a 50% reduction in the number of temporary accommodation cases in the District, which was now

below the National and Midlands averages.

The Strategic Housing Manager advised Members that starter tenancies with Wyre Forest Community Housing had been suggested, whereby houses would be allocated with a 12 month probationary period, as this allowed for easier evictions if tenants did not conduct their tenancies appropriately.

Members were advised that two blank figures for the “Empty Homes Target” on page 92 of the report should both read “20”.

A Member asked how many bids, on average, it took for people in the Gold Plus banding to be housed. The Community Housing Group Housing Needs Officer advised that the length of wait as opposed to number of bids was the more important indicator, and that for single people Gold Plus usually took between 2-6 months before an offer of accommodation, and for families, anywhere between 3-9 months.

A Member enquired as to how many young care leavers were coming forward for housing and how long it was taking for them to be housed, and whether a site had been agreed for The Foyer.

In response, the Strategic Housing Services Manager advised that she would respond to the Committee at a later date with this information, and that The Foyer could not be discussed as it concerned exempt information.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services praised and thanked the Housing Team for their success and efforts.

Agreed: The Temporary Accommodation Reduction Action Plan (as attached at Appendix 1 to the report) and the supporting Mortgage Rescue Action Plan (as attached at Appendix 2 to the report) be endorsed and recommended to Cabinet for approval.

C&R.63 Kidderminster Driving Test Centre

The Committee considered a verbal update from the Vice-Chairman on the closure of Kidderminster Driving Test Centre.

The Chairman advised Members that three separate Freedom of Information Requests had been submitted to the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) which sought to establish the number of local customers using the Test Centre.

Members were advised that these three requests had all been returned with conflicting figures, and the Vice-Chairman suggested that it was important to clarify them.

The Vice-Chairman requested the support of the Committee to ask the Chief Executive of the Council to write to the Chief Executive of the Driving Standards Agency to clarify this issue, as per the questions laid out in the additional paper (copies were circulated at the meeting).

The Vice-Chairman advised Members of an amendment to question 5; it would also request figures for the postcodes listed in the question for the 5 months prior to the

closure of Kidderminster Driving Test Centre.

Agreed: The Chief Executive be asked to write to the Chief Executive of the Driving Standards Agency, asking the questions set out in the paper circulated at the meeting, including an amendment to question 5.

C&R.64 Feedback from Cabinet

The Chairman advised Members that the item “Wyre Forest District Council Health Action Plan” had been agreed by Cabinet, and contrary to the recommendation of the previous Community & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, it did not require the approval of the Council.

Agreed: The information be noted.

C&R.65 Work Programme

The Chairman advised Members of several changes to the work programme:

- Tracking Recommendations – To be moved provisionally to January.
- KTC3 Update – No new information at present. To be reassessed in January.

Furthermore the Chairman advised Members of a potential item regarding the Mobile Phone Mast Roll Out. The Chairman advised Members that the 2008/09 Roll Out contained no new applications, and that they had all been examined previously.

The Principal Solicitor advised that Members might wish to receive this information electronically.

The Chairman advised that this information would not be included in an agenda, to avoid repetition.

A Member commented that there was lots to be fed back from the County Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Agreed: The changes to the Work Programme be noted.

The meeting ended at 20:08 pm