

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

THURSDAY, 6TH JANUARY 2011 (6.00PM)

Present:

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), J Phillips (Vice-Chairman), R Bishop, J Greener, I Hardiman, P V Hayward, M A W Hazlewood, J Holden, M Price, K H Prosser, J A Shaw, D R Sheppard and S J Williams.

Observers:

Councillors: J-P Campion, N J Desmond, M J Hart, M B Kelly and F M Oborski.

C&R.68 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: J Baker and D J Millis.

C&R.69 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor P V Hayward was appointed as a substitute for Councillor J Baker.

C&R.70 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

C&R.71 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C&R.72 Car Parking Review Phase II Review Panel

A report was considered from the Chairman of the Parking Review Phase II Review Panel that outlined the recommendations made by the Panel.

The Chairman of the Panel reminded Members that the Review Panel had been set up following a joint scrutiny meeting on 30th November 2010 from which the membership of the Panel was made. The Panel consisted of Members from all areas of Wyre Forest and Members who had not been on the Panel had been approached for their input.

The Panel had met on 9th December and 16th December 2010 and 5th January 2011 and a wealth of evidence had been scrutinised. Representations had also been received from Town and Parish Councils and members of the public.

Four recommendations had been made and the Chairman suggested that a fifth be

included regarding a review of the parking charges.

The Vice-Chairman of the Committee congratulated the Chairman on the excellent review she had chaired and particularly commended her for keeping the focus on Phase II.

The Director of Planning and Regulatory Services commented that there had been a couple of issues regarding clarity that the Panel had raised during the review. An opportunity had presented itself when parking charges changed on 4th January 2011 to address these issues of clarity in the signage as follows:

- (i) The signage now made clear that if a ticket was bought late in the afternoon it would cover parking through until the morning. Instead of saying over 3 hours the sign alluded to a 3 to 24 hour band to make the charging period clear.
- (ii) Concerns had been raised about over sized vehicles that took up more than one space. The signage now made clear that it was necessary to pay for each space that a vehicle occupied.

The Zoning Proposals

Central Car Parks

The central car parks were : Market Street, Kidderminster, Raven Street, Stourport and Load Street Bewdley. All three towns would have the same charging applied and this would see an 'up to 30 minutes' charge introduced in Kidderminster and Stourport and an 'up to 1 hour' charge in Stourport. The 'Up to 2 hours' in Raven Street would be removed.

Inner Car Parks

Inner car parks would cover all the car parks within the Kidderminster immediate Town centre vicinity, the Riverside car parks in Stourport, (Bridge Street if it was brought into operation) and Dog Lane in Bewdley. There would be a range of pricing in these car parks that facilitated short, medium and long stay. Whilst it was intended that all towns would have identical charges for periods of stay 'up to 3 hours' the 'over 3 hours' it was originally intended that the 24-48 hour periods in Stourport and Bewdley would be set higher than Kidderminster to reflect the visitor trade that those two towns attract which places greater demand on long stay spaces. It was recognised that demand for spaces from visitors in the two market towns placed greater pressure on their use and therefore a higher charge had perceived to be more appropriate than in Kidderminster to encourage long stay parking in these towns to migrate to the outer car parks.

Outer Car Parks

The 'Outer Rate' would apply to those car parks outside the immediate vicinity of the town centre in Kidderminster – Castle Road, Comberton Place, Stadium Close, Horsefair and St. Mary's (and Broadwaters if charges were introduced), Vale Road and the Sports Centre in Stourport and Gardner's Meadow in Bewdley. Here, three key elements of charge applied: firstly, the first hour of any stay would be at no charge, there then applied the same prices as 'Inner Car Parks' for periods of up to 2 and 3 hours but significantly lower charges for all day and longer charges.

Rural Car Park

The Avenue in the village of Blakedown would be recognised as a Rural car Park although other than an inflationary increase, no amendments were proposed to the charging periods introduced in October 2010.

Recommended to Cabinet:

- 1. 60 minutes free parking Monday to Saturday and 90 minutes free parking on Sundays for outer car parks.**
- 2. The disparity in the inner charging rate be adjusted so that Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley have a universal charge of £4.30 for over 3 hours and £8.60 for 24-48 hours.**
- 3. Further investigation be made regarding the possibility of other groups running the Horsefair car park.**
- 4. To allow the use of restricted passes in Dog Lane, Bewdley, permanently, not just for a transition period.**
- 5. The Panel acknowledges this is a change in the way the Council's parking system is due to operate and feels it would be appropriate to have a review of the charges and the assumptions made after 12 months from implementation.**

C&R.73 Housing Services Inspection Improvement Plan

A report was considered from the Housing Services Manager that outlined the recent Audit Commission Strategic Housing Services Assessment and the associated Improvement Plan.

The Strategic Housing Services Manager advised Members that the Council did not opt to have a full inspection due to the uncertain future of the Audit Commission. The Audit Commission had acted in the role of critical friend to the Council and thus the inspection had not been scored and would not be published on the Audit Commission website. The inspection covered all aspects of strategic housing and it looked at the Council's own self-assessment and strategies and action plan, including the Corporate Plan and Service Plan. The inspection report recognised many of the strengths within the Housing Team and identified areas where the Council was meeting requirements. Some areas for improvement had been identified and these had been fed into the Improvement Plan.

The inspection recognised that capacity for improvement was seen as strong with the team being effectively led and with the skills and ability to further develop the service. The active engagement of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services was also recognised.

A debate ensued where the following queries and clarifications were noted:

- The waiting list for disabled facilities grant currently stood at 266 and with an ageing population this figure was likely to increase.

Agenda Item No. 4

- Between 250-260 disabled facilities grants were granted per year.
- People were added to the grant waiting list following an occupational therapy assessment.
- The Strategic Housing Services Manager would be meeting with Occupational Therapists next week in order to review the waiting list for those waiting for disabled facilities grants. The review would check that the assessments were correct and that anyone who did not need to be on the waiting list was removed.
- Applicants on the waiting list were ranked from category 1-3 (1 being a priority score). It was possible in the future that those people who scored 3 would not be considered for a grant.
- It was noted that now work undertaken on disabled facilities grants would no longer be solely done by the Community Housing Group within social housing and this was to ensure that the allocation of grant work was fair and equitable. The Home Improvement Agency and the District Council would be setting up partnership arrangements with selected contractors for a set schedule of rates and contractors would be rotated in order to provide the work.
- The Council's performance in the provision of new affordable housing units had been good.

Recommended to Cabinet: That the Strategic Housing Services Assessment be signed off and the Improvement Plan agreed.

C&R.74 Areley Kings Conservation Area – Draft Conservation Area Appraisal

A report was considered from the Conservation Officer that informed members of the proposed draft Conservation Area Appraisal for the Areley Kings Conservation Area and the proposed arrangements for public consultation.

Members were advised that the Council had established approximately 15 conservation areas in the district. At a meeting held with English Heritage the Council was informed that it had more conservation areas within its boundary than any other authority in the West Midlands.

A standard procedure was followed for the establishment of conservation areas, whereby the character and evolution of the area was considered and how it had changed from the middle ages to the present day. As well as residential properties, ecclesiastical properties were considered. Consideration was given to the landscape and the buildings and what made the area desirable to be preserved and enhanced.

The Conservation Officer outlined the effects of designation of a conservation area which included stricter planning controls over demolition, minor development, and protection of trees and stricter regulation of new development in order to ensure that it preserved or enhanced the special character of the area. Further Members were advised that trees formed an important element of a conservation area and that they helped to form the character of the area and assisted in creating boundaries.

It was noted that some of the more important trees within the proposed conservation area were yews in the local churchyard, an avenue of trees to Areley Hall from Areley Lane, a boundary of trees to the Lower House and trees situated to the rear of Areley House.

Recommended to Cabinet: to agree to undertake a public consultation on the document appended to the report to the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, with some minor additions to the paragraphs on trees, 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.75 Work Programme

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the current municipal year. It was considered that the work programme needed to be updated to take in additions from the Forward Plan.

Agreed: The Chairman, Director of Planning and Regulatory Services and Principal Committee Officer to meet, review and update the work programme.

C&R.76 Press Involvement

Agreed : there were no items that required publicity.

The meeting ended at 6.45 pm.