

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 14 December 2010

### PRESENT

Cllr J N Young (Chairman)  
Cllr A R Bastable (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs Mrs R B Gammons  
D Jones  
J Kane

Cllrs Ms C Maudlin  
Mrs M Mustoe  
P Williams

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs D J Gale

Substitutes: Cllrs A Shadbolt (In place of D J Gale)

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis  
R A Baker  
D Bowater  
Mrs R J Drinkwater  
Ms A M W Graham  
Mrs C Hegley  
R W Johnstone  
M R Jones  
K C Matthews  
D McVicar  
T Nicols  
P Snelling  
R C Stay  
Mrs P E Turner MBE

Officers in Attendance: Mr G Alderson Director of Sustainable Communities  
Mr J Cliff Head of Growth Programme  
Mr B Fong Interim Senior Finance Manager  
(Sustainable Communities)  
Mr R Fox Head of Development Plan  
Mr A Lewis Major Projects Officer  
Mr J Partridge Overview & Scrutiny Officer  
Ms S Wileman Service Development Officer

SCOSC/10/49 **Minutes**

**RESOLVED**

**that the Minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 November 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

SCOSC/10/50 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

Member	Item	Nature of Interest	Present or Absent during discussion
Cllr J Kane	9	Ward Member for Dunstable	Present
Cllr N Young	9	Ward Member for Dunstable	Present
Cllr D Jones	11	Attended the Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Planning Committee meeting in respect of the Joint Core Strategy	Present
Cllr A Shadbolt	11	Member of the Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Planning Committee	Absent
Cllr N Young	11	Member of the Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Planning Committee	Absent
Cllr Mrs R Drinkwater	12	Son is a member of Biggleswade Athletics Club	Present

(b) **Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-**

There were no declarations made.

(c) **Any political whip in relation to any agenda item:-**

There were no declarations made.

### **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman did not have any announcements or communications.

### **SCOSC/10/52 Petitions**

In accordance with the Public Participation Procedure, as set out in Annex 2 of Part A4 of the Constitution, an ePetition was received by the Committee asking the Council to ensure that Sandy Leisure Centre remained open and accessible. The Committee were informed that the petition had 400 signatories to date and additional signatures could be added until 19 January 2011.

In accordance with the Public Participation Procedure, as set out in paragraph 2 of Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution, the Chairman of the Committee also invited a speaker who had registered to speak on this item to address the Committee. This speaker was permitted three minutes and they outlined the impact of the closure of the leisure centre on its current users and residents. In response to the speaker the Director of Sustainable Communities commented that the proposal to close Sandy Leisure Centre was one of several proposals pertaining to the Sustainable Communities Directorate. The Committee was aware of the need to have regard to the content of the ePetition and the comments of the speaker during its deliberations on the proposals contained within the base budget build and supplementary savings proposals (minute SCOSC/10/60 refers).

### **RESOLVED**

**that the ePetition requesting that the Council ensure that Sandy Leisure Centre remained open and accessible be received and taken into consideration during discussion of item 12, the Base Budget Build and Supplementary Savings Proposals.**

### **RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the Executive receive the ePetition relating to Sandy Leisure Centre at its meeting at which the Council's budget proposals for 2011/12 are considered.**

### **SCOSC/10/53 Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The meeting noted that a further six speakers had registered to speak at the meeting in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 to Section A4 of the Constitution. The Chairman confirmed that one speaker would be invited to speak under this item and the other five registered speakers, who wished to ask questions in relation to item 9 would be invited to speak prior to consideration of that item.

A question was asked concerning the Gypsy and Traveller site consultation process for the northern part of Central Bedfordshire. The speaker raised concerns regarding a letter that has been sent to residents regarding the Gypsy

and Traveller Development Plan Document (DPD). The speaker commented that the letter from the Head of Development Plans was misleading as it suggested that all 27 gypsy and traveller pitches for the northern part of Central Bedfordshire had been allocated. This was not the case as there remained 4 pitches that were currently unallocated.

In response to questions the Head of Development Plans stated there had been no intention to be misleading in the letter regarding the Gypsy and Traveller DPD consultation for the north. There were 4 pitches that remained unallocated in the document and once appropriate sites had been identified for these pitches a full consultation would be undertaken and letters sent to those who had previously responded to the Council's consultation on the matter. A statement was to be provided to the local media to this effect.

A further written statement was received by the Committee regarding the Gypsy and Traveller DPD for the northern part of Central Bedfordshire. In response to questions raised in this letter the Chairman of the Committee commented that there would be no massive expenditure on gypsy and traveller sites as many of the allocations were being met on existing sites. It was also commented that the abolition of the regional spatial strategy had dramatically reduced the numbers of gypsy and traveller pitches that were proposed to be allocated in the northern part of Central Bedfordshire. The Committee requested that this correspondence be provided to the Head of Development Plans and that a written response be provided appropriately.

#### **SCOSC/10/54 Call-In**

No decisions of the Executive had been called-in to be reviewed in accordance with the Call-in Procedure as set out in Part D2 of the Constitution.

#### **SCOSC/10/55 Requested Items**

No items were referred to the Committee for consideration at the request of a Member under Procedure Rule 3.1 of Part D2 of the Constitution.

#### **SCOSC/10/56 Local Development Framework (South): Dunstable Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan**

In accordance with the Public Participation Procedure, as set out in paragraph 2 of Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution, the Chairman of the Committee invited those members of the public who had registered to speak on this item to address the Committee. Each speaker was allowed a maximum of three minutes.

Representations were received on behalf of members of the Dorchester Close Residents Action Group and residents of Dorchester Close. These speakers raised issues in relation to the uncertainty and stress of their current position and the process for serving a compulsory purchase order. It was commented that whilst residents did not want to leave their properties they were amenable

to talking to the Council about a possible compromise although they would seek compensatory costs. Residents also commented on the level of communication they received from the Council. It was queried whether alternative locations had been considered for the proposed site of the multi-story car park.

Concerns were raised by a speaker on behalf of Dunstable Baptist Church in relation to the quantity and accessibility of car parking for visitors that was proposed in the masterplan in the vicinity of the church.

Two residents of Kingscroft Avenue also raised issues in relation to the proposed multi-storey car park and suggested this would result in blight to properties and increase anti-social behaviour and traffic in the area. Several questions were also raised in relation to the current location of the Asda store and information that had been requested from the Council.

In response to questions the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development stated that the Asda store in Dunstable meets the standards set out in the Local Plan 1995. The relocation of the Asda store was not considered as part of the masterplan exercise nor was there any case to substantiate a move of the store. Funding for the masterplan exercise was through the growth area fund and as such there was no cost to the ratepayer. Commercial partners would be sought by the Council in order to provide the funding to deliver aspects of the Masterplan, there would be minimum funding provided by the Council. The Portfolio Holder further stated that compulsory purchase orders were a last resort and they were only considered if it was in the public's interest. The Council would seek negotiation before considering serving a compulsory purchase order.

The Chairman commented that once the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the Masterplan its recommendations would be considered by the Executive which would consider whether the Masterplan should be adopted. The Committee then received a presentation from Mr T Bridgman from the consultants AECOM regarding the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan. He outlined the proposals, consultation responses and implications for the Masterplan. It was also commented during the presentation that if proposals for a multi-story car park come forward as part of a planning application for redevelopment, any impact on adjoining properties would need to be carefully assessed, and this would be the subject of a further public consultation.

Following the presentation Members discussed the proposals in detail and raised issues in relation to a number of aspects including integrating the four quadrants of the town centre together and the concerns of residents in relation to the siting of the multi-storey car park and the properties at Dorchester Close. Members also queried issues in relation to traffic and freight movement in Dunstable and the importance of integrating the proposals for the Masterplan with the Local Transport Plan 3 and the Local Area Transport Plan for Dunstable.

In response to questions the Major Project Officer stated that the Council was appointing a specialist consultant to advise on matters relating to the

acquisition of properties. Compulsory purchase of the properties at Dorchester Close would only be considered as a last resort. The officer also stated there was presently no intention to gain access to the proposed multi-storey car park from Kingscroft Avenue or Kingsway.

Officers stated that they would clarify if there were any inconsistencies between the Masterplan and the Local Transport Plan in relation to car park access. It was also commented that further communication would be undertaken with residents in the area regarding the proposals.

In summarising the discussion the Chairman commented that the turnaround in retail in Dunstable town centre needed to be reflected in the masterplan and there needed to be some elaboration on the principles of shared space.

#### **NOTED**

**the consultation responses received to the draft Dunstable Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan.**

#### **RESOLVED**

**that the Executive be informed that it is the view of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Dunstable Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan should be endorsed.**

#### **SCOSC/10/57 Luton and South Bedfordshire Local Development Framework: Core Strategy - Pre Submission**

(Note: the Chairman was absent during the consideration of this item only and the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Alan Bastable, took the Chair).

The Committee considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities, which sought the views of Members on the publication of the Pre Submission Joint Core Strategy for Luton and Southern Bedfordshire. It was highlighted that since the preferred options report was endorsed by the Council the revocation of regional spatial strategies (RSS) had resulted in the return of decision making on housing and planning to local councils. The Joint Core Strategy was presently under consultation and was considered to be robust. Central Bedfordshire Council was a statutory consultee on the Joint Core Strategy.

The Head of the Joint Technical Unit then outlined the key policies contained in the Joint Core Strategy that included policies relating to timeliness of infrastructure and the A5-M1 link. It was also highlighted that the Joint Core Strategy would set out the principles through which town centre masterplans would be developed and the nature of major urban expansion in the area. The Committee discussed the implications of not approving the Joint Core Strategy and the recent judicial review by CALA Homes in which the previous RSS figures prevailed. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government had stated that the previous RSS regime was gone and further guidance would be issued to local Councils within the next year to address any

remaining concerns. The Joint Core Strategy was determined on evidence of local need.

In response to questions from Members it was stated that further analysis of the Leighton Linlade extension route would be carried out to assess whether or not there was an evidence of need. It was also stated that if the Joint Core Strategy was approved it would provide Central Bedfordshire Council with a long term plan for development that could protect the Council against challenges such as that by CALA homes.

## **RESOLVED**

**that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee strongly supports the Luton and Southern Bedfordshire Joint Core Strategy Pre-Submission document, which is based on assessment of local need.**

## **RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the document be endorsed.**

### **SCOSC/10/58 Local Development Framework (South): Gypsy and Traveller Provision**

The Committee considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development relating to the scale of pitch provision for gypsies and travellers in the southern part of Central Bedfordshire. The Committee discussed the report in light of the Government's decision to abolish regional spatial strategies (RSS). The Committee considered the implications of the abolition of the RSS and the need to consider an appropriate allocation of gypsy and traveller pitches in the southern part of Central Bedfordshire. The Committee discussed the following issues:-

- There was currently no protection for the council to resolve matters relating to unauthorised gypsy and traveller encampments. Endorsement of the scale of pitch provision for gypsy and traveller pitches in the southern part of Central Bedfordshire would provide this protection for the area.
- The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), 2007, was considered an appropriate means of defining the scale of pitch provision necessary in the southern part of Central Bedfordshire as it was based on evidence of need.
- Whilst the GTAA proposed a range of between 34 and 40 pitches up to the end of 2010 for the south of Central Bedfordshire a figure of 34 was considered to be too low and likely to fail at examination. Members agreed that 37 pitches was a robust figure that could be justified at examination.

- The majority of allocations of additional gypsy and traveller pitches up to the end of 2010 could be met through the allocation of currently tolerated sites or those with temporary permissions.
- The East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) had identified a compound growth rate for Central Bedfordshire of 3%. This figure was considered to be an appropriate means of determining the number of pitches needed up to the end of 2015.
- There would be no need to approve a development plan document for the south of Central Bedfordshire as many of the proposed allocations could be met through allocating currently tolerated pitches or those with temporary permissions. Any gypsy and traveller sites proposed to be allocated would be presented through the planning process in the normal way.

### **RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

- 1. that 37 gypsy and traveller pitches be allocated in the southern part of Central Bedfordshire to the end of 2010 and a further 18 pitches be allocated from the beginning of 2011 to the end of 2015 making a total of 55 pitches; 32 pitches having existing permissions leaving 23 pitches still to be provided;**
- 2. that 5 pitches for travelling Showpeople be allocated in the southern part of Central Bedfordshire between 2006 and 2011 and a further 3 pitches between 2011 and 2021;**
- 3. that the Council work with the established gypsy and traveller community to discuss the incorporation of transit pitches within existing or proposed sites.**

### **SCOSC/10/59 Budget Management Report for the Quarter ended 30 September 2010**

The Committee considered a report by the Portfolio Holders for Safer Communities and Healthier Lifestyles, Economic Growth, Skills and Regeneration and Sustainable Development which outlined the actual financial performance and full year forecast as at 30 September 2010. In addition to this report the Director commented that the Sustainable Communities Directorate was currently underspent by £78k. The report provided an accurate end year forecast for the directorate.

### **NOTED**

- 1. the full year forecast under spend of £78k;**
- 2. the actions undertaken by management to work within budget tolerance.**



## SCOSC/10/60 Base Budget Build and Supplementary Savings Proposals

The Committee considered a report by the Portfolio Holders for Safer Communities and Healthier Lifestyles, Economic Growth, Skills and Regeneration and Sustainable Development which set out the outcomes of the work to review the Sustainable Communities' base budget, an outline of the Directorates activities and supplementary savings proposals for 2011/12. The Committee made the following specific comments and recommendations regarding the Sustainable Communities Directorate in the order set out below:-

a) Merge the Community Involvement and Community Engagement Teams

The Committee queried the number of staff currently employed in the Community Involvement and Community Engagement teams and discussed the roles that these teams fulfilled. It was noted that where the support provided by these teams was proposed to be removed the Town and Parish Councils could seek to continue that support as encouraged under the Community Engagement Strategy.

Following questions from the Committee it was clarified that this proposal was a cessation in service provision by the Sustainable Communities Directorate rather than a merger of two teams.

### **RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the Executive adopt the proposal relating to the Community Involvement and Community Engagement Teams in order to achieve a full year saving of £300k.**

b) EGRS4 Remodelling of the Library Service

The Committee noted that a full review of the operation of the library service was planned and would commence after 1 January 2011. The Committee emphasised the importance of this review as a means of identifying further potential savings.

### **RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the Executive adopt the proposal to remodel the Library Service in order to achieve a full year saving of £350k.**

c) CSPPWL4 Closure of household waste recycling centres (2 days per week)

Members raised concerns regarding fly-tipping outside of household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) if hours were reduced. Concerns were also raised that the publicity required to notify residents of the change in hours would outweigh the savings that could be achieved by implementing this proposal. Members also requested that further advertising be made available at the HWRCs of furniture banks that promote the reuse and reallocation of household furniture.

**RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the Executive adopt the proposal to close the household waste recycling centres on 2 days per week in order to achieve a full year saving of £60k.**

- d) CSPPWL1 Remodelling of the Community Safety Team

**RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the Executive adopt the proposal to reconfigure the community safety team in order to achieve a full year saving of £30k.**

- e) CSPPWL5 Remodelling of Waste Services teams

**RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the Executive adopt the proposal to remodel waste services teams in order to achieve a full year saving of £30k.**

- f) CSPPWL6 Sports Development and Play Service

The Committee were informed that this proposal was complex as some of the funding for this team was received from external sources such as the NHS.

**RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the Executive adopt the proposal to delete the Sport Development and Play Service in order to achieve a minimum of a full year saving of £200k.**

- g) CSPPWL7 Review provision of Outdoor Education Service with a view to increased efficiency

**RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the Executive adopt the proposal to review the provision of the outdoor education service in order to achieve a further full year saving of £123k.**

- h) CSPPWL8 Sandy Leisure Centre

The Committee discussed the importance of seeking an alternative provider to deliver the facilities at Sandy Leisure Centre. In reaching its recommendation Members were mindful of the ePetition received on this matter, which asked the Council to ensure that Sandy Leisure Centre remained open and accessible.

**RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the Executive adopt the proposal regarding Sandy Leisure Centre in order to achieve a saving of £143k in a full year. The Executive were requested to proactively seek alternative providers such as the school or the voluntary community sector to run the facility so that the proposals did not result in the closure of the leisure centre.**

*Cross Cutting Proposals*

- i) CC6a Passenger transport review increased target

The Committee noted that this proposal had been approved by the Executive at its meeting on 7 December 2010 during consideration of a report on the local bus services and community transport interim support strategy.

- j) CC35 Delay Harmonisation of Council Tax

The Committee was aware that this proposal was not within the remit of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee but felt it was appropriate to express a view on the proposal. Members commented they felt that residents would be amenable to the Council retaining the £1.6million that would be lost as a result of harmonising council tax if it was invested to retain services that would otherwise be lost.

**RECOMMENDED to the Executive**

**that the Executive take account of the view of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the proposal to delay harmonisation of council tax should be adopted in order to achieve additional income of £1.595 million in 2011/12.**

**NOTED**

**the Base Budget Build for 2011/12.**

**SCOSC/10/61 Work Programme 2010-2011**

The Committee considered a report from the Director, which asked the meeting to consider the Committee's current work programme for the 2010-2011 municipal year and beyond and sought any comments and amendments. In addition Members were asked to consider the Executive Forward Plan and an indicative work programme for the Development Strategy Task Force for the same period.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and People commented that an item on the review of fees and charges for 2011/12 was scheduled to be received by the Executive at its meeting on 11 January 2011. It was proposed

that as most of the fees and charges related to the Sustainable Communities Directorate it should be received by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 18 January 2011.

**RESOLVED**

- 1. that the work programmes for both the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Development Strategy Task Force be approved subject to the addition of the report on fees and charges for 2011/12 being considered by the Committee on 18 January 2011;**
- 2. that the Chairman discuss with the Overview and Scrutiny Coordination Panel an approach to the consideration of the Councils' fees and charges report for 2011/12.**

**NOTED**

**the Executive Forward Plan.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 2.21 p.m.)

Chairman .....

Dated .....