

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL
Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporate Overview Committee
held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 23 April 2009

Present:

Councillors:

David Key (Chairman)
Bob Peachey (Vice Chairman)

Roger Boote
Graham Brown
Chris Gibbings
Graham Godbeer

Ben Ingham
Stephanie Jones
Tim Wood

Also Present:

Councillors:

Vivienne Ash
Paul Diviani
Peter Halse
Ann Liverton

Graham Liverton
Tony Reed
Pauline Stott

Officers:

Karime Hassan - Corporate Director
Sam Rose – Jurassic Coast World Heritage site team
Adrian Rushworth – Environment Agency
Adrian Hales – Devon County Council
Chris Lane – Democratic Services Officer
Bob Darbourne – Communications & Improvement Manager

Apologies:

Councillors:

Ray Bloxham
Jill Elson
Malcolm Florey
Pat Graham
Andrew Moulding
Philip Skinner
Brenda Taylor

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.45pm

***46 Public question time**

Sian Merritt from Newton Poppleford asked a question about East Devon District Council's commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Pitt Report, especially Recommendations 14 and 24. She also made a request that a Flood Fayre be organised in East Devon to help residents mitigate the effects of flooding on their homes.

***47 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Overview Committee held on 26 March 2009, were confirmed and signed as a true record, subject to the replacement of the word 'toxoplasmosis' with 'toxocarasis' in minute *40..

*48 **World Heritage Coast Management plan was last published Management Plan for the Jurassic Coast**

Dr Rose, Team Leader of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage site team gave a presentation on the World Heritage Coast Draft Management Plan for the Jurassic Coast. Members were informed that the existing Management Plan was last published in 2003 and the Government required it to be revised every five or six years. The process had been undertaken over the last year, led by the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team, and involving detailed consultation and discussions with Steering Groups and other partners such as East Devon District Council. Comments on the Draft Management Plan were required by 9 June 2009

Members noted that the District Council undertook a wide range of statutory and discretionary services that had an impact on the management of the World Heritage Site. The key responsibilities for the District Council in respect of the World Heritage Site Management Plan included:

- Development control and Planning Policy;
- Coastal defences;
- Countryside service and AONB partner;
- Tourism function;
- Regeneration and economic development;
- Visitor and public infrastructure such as toilets, car parks and signage;
- Litter collection on beaches and public spaces;
- Visitor Centre development such as Beer, Seaton and Exmouth;
- Culture, Arts and Museums.

The Steering Group's vision for the site was that the World Heritage status would inspire people to celebrate, enjoy, value and learn about the Dorset and East Devon Coast, and to safeguard it for future generations in the best possible condition. They wished to ensure World Heritage status became a vibrant strand of the life of Dorset and East Devon, and the wider south west, benefiting local people, visitors and the environment throughout the area.

Dr Sam Rose confirmed that East Devon District Council was requested to provide:

- 1) A coordinated response to the consultation draft by 9 June 2009.
- 2) A mechanism for effective integration and communication with and within the Council.
- 3) An initiative to return for endorsement of the plan and a discussion around elected member involvement in site governance.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- Economic impacts on the World Heritage Site were very important;
- Concern expressed over safety to members of the public regarding rock falls at Pennington Point;
- The need to be pragmatic when protecting the World Heritage site;
- Encouraging families to come to Seaton to improve tourism to the town by combining the joint attractions of the Jurassic coast and Axe Wetlands;
- Some confusion expressed over the status of the advisory role of the World Heritage Site;
- The possibility of adding responsibilities for the Jurassic Coast to the job of Member Champion for Culture;
- More partnership work in order to benefit more from the World Heritage Site designation, compared with West Dorset.

*48 **World Heritage Coast Management plan was last published Management Plan for the Jurassic Coast (Cont)**

RESOLVED

that the Countryside Manager, Charlie Plowden, provide a written report to a future meeting of the Council on the World Heritage Coast Management Plan as there were a number of issues in the Draft Management Plan that related to the Local Development Framework and needed consideration before comments could be sent to the World Heritage Site.

Dr Sam Rose was thanked for his presentation.

*49 **Pitt report on flooding issues**

Adrian Rushworth, Improvements Manager at the Environment Agency and Adrian Hales, Deputy Head of Highways Management at Devon County Council gave a presentation on understanding the implications of the Pitt Review for all organisations and the steps that were being taken to address these recommendations. Members noted that there would be an enhanced role and greater responsibility for local authorities in the management of flood risk. It was confirmed that each organisation involved needed to work together to overcome flooding problems and each fulfil their different roles.

Members noted the implications to East Devon District Council arising from recommendations given in "Sir Michel Pitt's Review of the summer 2007 floods". There were two key aspects for East Devon District Council, these were:

- 1) Emergency planning – being prepared for flooding, the flooding event itself and how to recover from it;
- 2) Surface water management issues.

Adrian Hales reported that Devon County Council would be given a strategic risk responsibility and would develop a flood risk strategy. He emphasises the importance of mitigating the effects on local people and confirmed that the County Council would be appointing a Flood Risk Manager to mitigate the effects of flooding on residents.

During discussions the following points were highlighted:

- surface water run off was an important issue and needed to be mitigated;
- land drainage was an issue that needed to be addressed;
- encouragement should be given to set up Emergency Volunteer Committees in communities;
- riparian ownership was often difficult to establish;
- it was important to establish responsibility for maintenance of gullies and waterways;
- that all residents should play their part in avoiding flooding;
- farmers were no longer allowed to excavate rivers and streams to remove gravel and that this could mean watercourses were more likely to flood;
- the possibility of a national organisation arranging a Flood Fayre in consultation with parish/town councils;
- it was incumbent on all people involved with flooding to play their part and fulfil their responsibilities;
- flooding problems experienced in Chardstock following the completion of a new Primary School in the village and the complex reasons behind this flooding;
- the need to learn from past problems, overcome them and not to repeat them.

Adrian Rushworth and Adrian Hales were thanked for their presentation on the Pitt Report.

50 **Draft Community Engagement policy**

Consideration was given to the report of Jamie Buckley, Engagement & Funding Officer on the Draft Community Engagement policy. Members noted that they were being asked to recommend approval of this policy, which updated the current Consultation Policy by taking account of a wide range of legislation and guidance, most notably the new statutory duty to involve the public in the Council’s activities which came into force recently. The connection with the Place Survey discussed at the meeting on 26 March 2009 (Min no *44 refers) was noted.

It was acknowledged that there was a need to involve Members in what was going on in their ward and to keep them better informed.

RECOMMENDED that the draft Community Engagement Policy be approved.

*51 **Loss of public houses in rural areas**

Councillor Paul Diviani was welcomed to the meeting. He introduced the problem currently being experienced of the loss of public houses in rural areas, with up to 39 pubs closing nationally every week, an average of 2,000 per annum. Overall pub numbers had been falling slowly for 20 years, but the rate of decline had increased dramatically in the last 3 years.

Councillor Diviani illustrated the community benefits of pubs, particularly for rural areas, this included being the centre of the community, along with the church and primary school. They played an important role in strengthening local social networks, facilitating local services, events, charities, sports and civic activities. There was also an economic case for pubs in that they raised money for the local community, provided employment and encouraged tourism. The possibility of some eligible pubs applying for mandatory and discretionary rate relief was considered. Some could also be eligible for third sector finance where some pubs could apply to become Community Interest Companies and apply for third sector grants and loans to diversify.

The possibility of having Supplementary Planning Guidance on pubs, which would include very extensive and specific guidelines on the evidence base required to permit a change of use of pubs, was proposed to be produced. In the meantime it was suggested that a “presumption against” be issued pending the new guidelines.

Councillor Diviani was thanked for raising this important issue to the Corporate Overview Committee.

RESOLVED

1. that the Corporate Overview Committee express its concern about the closure of pubs in communities and that this issue be highlighted in the emerging core strategy, to reflect the wish to resist the change of use of pubs;
2. that a press release be issued highlighting Members’ concern over the closure of community pubs and its intention to highlight this problem through the core Strategy.

Chairman Date.....