

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporate Overview Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 24 April 2008

Present:

Councillors:

D R A Key (Chairman)
R C Peachey (Vice Chairman)

R Bloxham
R Boote
P Bowden
G P Brown
G P Chamberlain
M Florey

C Gibbings
G S Godbeer
Mrs P A Graham
B Ingham
S C Wragg

Also Present:

Councillors:

Miss V Ash
T A Cope
P A Diviani
Miss J M Elson
Mrs S Jones
Mrs A E Liverton
G K Liverton

A T Moulding
Mrs F Newth
Mrs H E Parr
A W J Reed
P Skinner
C Tratt
Mrs E E Wragg

Officers:

Karime Hassan - Corporate Director
Chris Lane -Democratic Services Officers
Neil Blackmore – Landscape Architect
Chris Woodruff – AONB Manager
Matt Dickins – Principal Planning Officer
Tracy Guiry – Project Development
Manager

Apologies:

Councillors:

D J Cox
R G Franklin
J P Halse
Mrs P A Stott
Mrs B O Taylor
T J R Wood

The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 8.50 pm

***37 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Overview Committee held on 20 March 2008, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***38 Exmouth: Rolle College Campus - update**

Members received an update on progress with regard to the Rolle College site from Councillor Mrs E E Wragg. She advised the Committee that Rolle College had been gifted to the town by Rolle Estates over 60 years ago for educational provision. The University of Plymouth had taken over the facility without charge and should give the site back to the people of Exmouth. Professor Levinski, Vice Principal of Plymouth University, before his

***38 Exmouth: Rolle College (Cont)**

untimely death, had guaranteed that the site would be kept for educational uses. However, this guarantee had not been met by his successors. Karime Hassan, reported that the University of Plymouth had given a price to the consortium representing those interested in providing an educational facility on part of the site. However, the situation had recently changed significantly, as a head of terms had now been agreed by the University of Plymouth and Moorfield Real Estate Fund, a development company. Exchange of contracts between the two parties was expected to take place shortly. The site was therefore sold to a private company, who were expected to try to achieve residential development on much of it. However, it was understood that the price achieved reflected what the District Council would expect to achieve in terms of Section 106 agreements, such as 40% affordable housing etc.

Members noted that the District Council could have significant impact on the use of the site through its planning powers. Karime Hassan reported that he had spoken to the development company who had confirmed that they were open to a dialogue with regard to use of part of the site for educational purposes. Before any firm talks could be held however, the consortium needed to firm up its business plan for educational use on part of the site, to establish the financial situation. Councillor Mrs Wragg confirmed that Exmouth Town Council had allocated £30,000 towards the purchase of the site. It was noted that a meeting should be held between the consortium, Devon County Council, East Devon District Council and the developers in order to discuss educational provision on the site.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- the importance of opening a dialogue with developers in order to achieve the educational developments on the site that were required;
- that it would be cheaper for Devon County Council to refurbish the existing buildings on the site than build new;
- the importance of providing further educational provision in Exmouth, particularly as an enhanced sixth form college;
- that the whole of the Rolle College site was being purchased by Moorfield Real Estate Fund;

Councillor Mrs E E Wragg was thanked for her presentation and in turn thanked members of the Committee for their support.

(Councillor Miss J M Elson declared a personal interest as a Governor of Exmouth Community College).

***39 Final report of the Exmouth & Seaton Visitors Centre Task & Finish Forum**

Consideration was given to the report of Karime Hassan, Corporate Director and Tracey Guiry giving details of the final report of the Exmouth & Seaton Visitors Centre Task & Finish Forum. The minutes of the meetings held on 7 November 2006, 12 February 2007, 1 March 2007 and 13 March 2008 were noted.

Members noted that the terms of reference for the Task & Finish Forum was to examine the property issues surrounding the disposal or leasing of Council land for the delivery of the Exmouth and Seaton interpretation centres, together with the key risks, and to formulate recommendations on officer capacity and delivery issues. It was considered that both projects brought a wide range of economic and social benefits to both towns, including:

- new employment opportunities;
- new employment sites;
- new educational offer;

Final report of the Exmouth & Seaton Visitors Centre Task & Finish Forum(Cont)

- new tourism development offer, to improve out of season visits;
- new routes to counter challenges of aging populations, attracting families;
- new partnerships with public and private sector bodies which will have an impact much wider than the centre alone.

Members were advised that the Seaton Visitors Centre would cost in the order of £5 million of which it was expected the District Council would have to find £675,000. However, the situation with Exmouth was more complicated. If the Visitors Centre was built on the Imperial Recreation Ground the cost was anticipated to be £6 – 7 million and there was a funding gap of £4 million. However, there was the alternative option of putting the sports centre/ visitors centre in one building, which was significantly cheaper.

Tracy Guiry reported that second phase market testing had been carried out and that this had indicated that the business case for both the Exmouth and Seaton Visitor Centres was good. The Board of Trustees recruitment had just finished. There had been 72 applications, of which 25 had been strong applicants. A shortlist of 8 had been interviewed and applicants were now being appointed. The first meeting of the Board would be held at the end of May, following which there would be a transfer of responsibilities for the Seaton & Exmouth Visitor Centre projects to the Board of Trustees.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- that SWRDA wished to see the projects completed by 2011, if they were not SWRDA funding could disappear;
- that the Seaton Tram Company were now much more supportive and willing to share ideas, which included joint ticketing arrangements;
- that there was the need to provide a word class facility at both Seaton and Exmouth;
- the importance of ensuring that the Visitors Centres would be financially self supporting, without the need for further financial support from the District Council or SWRDA.

- RESOLVED** 1. that the key risks associated with these projects had been identified and the TAFF was satisfied that control measures had been put in place to address these risks, namely,
- the viability of both Centres had been demonstrated by the feasibility and business case;
 - a governance arrangement had been determined and a Board of Trustees would be in place before the summer of 2008;
 - detailed capital funding requirements had been identified and market testing was being carried out;
 - partnership working was embedded and a project manager for the projects had been appointed and was driving the delivery of the projects;
 - South West Regional Development Agency continued to be supportive of the project and a clear strategic programme monitoring arrangement had been put in place at the request of the SWRDA to oversee progress.

*39 **Final report of the Exmouth & Seaton Visitors Centre Task & Finish Forum(Cont)**

- RESOLVED**
2. that in relation to the Seaton centre, the capital funding plans were noted and encouragingly looked deliverable by 2011, however, the relationship to the wider regeneration programme was fundamental to delivery; the relationship of the Seaton Tramway to the proposed centre requires careful consideration and requests for future reviews of the lease arrangements for the Tram Company must not undermine the business case for the Seaton Gateway Centre.
 3. that in relation to Exmouth two options for the preferred site have been investigated, and Option 1 (Bus Station site) for the Exmouth Centre (that is to include the Centre in the master-planning undertaken by ASM) appears to be the most deliverable in terms of funding and should be adopted as the preferred, more viable option, but with the Forum recognizing that this decision would be made by the Board of Trustees once established.
 4. that Option 2 (Imperial Recreation ground), if chosen by the Board of Trustees, should not proceed until the necessary capital is in place for implementation.
 5. that when the Board of Trustees has been established an invitation be extended to the Board of Trustees to attend the Corporate Overview Committee to outline their preferred proposals in relation to progressing the Exmouth project, and to allow members the opportunity of meeting representatives of the Board.

*40 **Progress report from the Member Champion for Business**

Members considered the verbal report of Councillor Graham Brown, Member Champion for Business. Councillor Brown reported that he was the Council's representative on the Heart of Devon Economic Partnership and the Exeter Growth Steering Board. He wished to thank in particular Councillor Peter Halse, Karime Hassan, Nigel Harrison, John Maidment and Matt Dickins for all the help they had given him since he had become Member Champion for Business as well as the Overview Committee for giving him the opportunity to give a progress report.

Members noted that each week Councillor Brown had met with up to 4 businesses who wished to discuss development proposals in East Devon, with the Council. There was an urgent need to find employment land within East Devon, particularly as up to 1,100 jobs a year needed to be created within the District. The lack of available employment land was therefore a particular frustration of his role. He also reported that there were also some delays over the delivery of Cranbrook and the Science Park.

Councillor Brown advised that there was a need to find employment land in rural areas, particularly as the Council's second priority was a thriving economy. There were up to 8 major firms that wished to relocate to East Devon and it was important that suitable employment sites were available for those businesses. He considered that the current planning policies needed to be changed to encourage development and firms to relocate to East Devon.

*40 **Progress report from the Member Champion for Business (Cont)**

The Chairman confirmed that the opportunity would be given to other Member Champions to give updates on their work at future meetings of the Overview Committee.

Members wished to express their thanks to Councillor Graham Brown, Member Champion for Business for his report and the work he had done so far for business in East Devon.

RESOLVED that the Development Control Committee be urged to recognise the impact and shortage of employment land in East Devon and the problems this was giving business in the District.

*41 **Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidelines**

Members considered the report and presentation by Neil Blackmore, Landscape Architect, on the Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidelines for East Devon and the Blackdown Hills (LCA&MG). This had been produced in accordance with national guidance and an accepted methodology to ensure consistency with neighbouring authorities work.

The LCA&MG had been verified by an extensive range of stakeholders, including Natural England, the Forestry Commission and local land managers, and others, to ensure terminology was acceptable and test the accuracy of information. The information was intended to inform strategic thinking and decision making to ensure the preservation, conservation and enhancement of the East Devon and Blackdown Hills landscapes.

Members noted that the Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidelines for East Devon and the Blackdown Hills was a very useful tool to provide information. Following endorsement from the Executive Board and improvements to the graphics, it would be made available to Councillors and the general public on the Council's website.

Neil Blackmore and Chris Woodruff were thanked for their presentation.

RESOLVED that the Executive Board be recommended to endorse the Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidelines for East Devon and the Blackdown Hills (LCA&MG) as an important evidence base to inform the Local Development Framework production and for Development Control purposes, subject to an improvement to the graphics.

*42 **East Devon Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment**

Consideration was given to the report of Matt Dickins, Principal Development Plans Officer. The report advised Members of the need to produce a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and of progress on the production of a methodology to guide this together with timetable for undertaking the work.

Members noted that Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) published in 2007 introduced a requirement to produce a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) to form a key component of the evidence base to support the delivery of land for housing. Practice guidance was published in July 2007 setting out detailed advice on how to produce a SHLAA. This stated that the study area should preferably relate to a sub-regional housing market area, although it may be for a local planning authority area. Given the different timescales for progressing Local Development Frameworks within the Exeter Housing Market Area it was not practical to produce one study to cover the whole area. However, an officer steering group from the relevant planning authorities had produced a draft methodology to guide the preparation of individual SHLAAs to ensure consistency across the housing market area. This methodology would shortly be finalised and would be used for the preparation of a SHLAA for East Devon.

*42 **East Devon Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment** (Cont)

Members noted that it was important that the provision of housing in East Devon should not be looked at in isolation but in conjunction with employment opportunities. The East Devon Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment would therefore be used to inform on other land uses.

RESOLVED that the requirement for the preparation of a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for East Devon in 2008, be noted.

Chairman Date.....