

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporate Overview Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 31 August 2006

Present:

Councillors:

G K Liverton (Chairman)
R C Peachey (Vice Chairman)

Mrs K J Bamsey
G P Chamberlain
C F A Gibbings
J P Halse

J A Knight
Ms S M Merritt
A W J Reed
T G Reeves

Also Present:

Councillors:

Miss V Ash
P A Diviani
Miss J M Elson
R G Franklin
A T Moulding

R Mudge
Mrs F Newth
B Nicholson
Mrs P A Stott
Dr H W Waterworth

Apologies

Councillors:

J E D Falby
K W George
Mrs L A Roden
C H Wale
S C Wragg

The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 8.25 pm

*16 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Overview Committee held on 3 August 2006, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

*17 Blackdown Hills AONB – Annual Report

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Countryside Services on the annual report for the Blackdown Hills AONB.

Members noted that the District Council had a long relationship with the Blackdown Hills Partnership dating back to 1991. There were 6 local authorities who made a financial contribution to the partnership and East Devon's contribution was £13,133 per annum.

Councillor P Diviani, Chairman of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership, reported on various aspects of the partnership and answered members questions.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- that the Leader+ scheme was important and brought in a lot of funding;
- there were opportunities for closer collaboration with the East Devon AONB partnership;
- the ability of the partnership to deliver would be dependent on funding provided at a national level. This was uncertain at the moment;

17 **Blackdown Hills AONB – Annual Report (Cont)**

- the difficulty of the partnership influencing all parts of such a large area as the Blackdown Hills;
- the rural renaissance programme involved Devon County Council;
- the project had shown that community and economic issues could be tied in with the Blackdown Hills environmental designation;
- the project was helping keep skills such as hedging alive;
- a ‘Welcome to the Blackdown Hills’ sign was being thought of. It was yet to be decided what design for the sign would be most appropriate;
- the potential reduction in project funding, due to the reduction in funding from the Countryside Agency, would have an effect on the projects ability to provide match funding;
- that DEFRA had indicated that the Blackdown Hills core funding would not be reduced but funding for projects may be cut;
- the project was helping to preserve and provide for the countryside, which included the provision of walking and horse riding facilities;
- some concern was expressed over the amount of funding spent by the project on staffing, but the Head of Countryside Services assured members that this was more than made up for by match funding generated by the staff;
- members acknowledged the important role the AONB team provided in giving protection for the environment and bringing in funding to the area;
- the financial figures provided needed to be clearer to give Members more information.

RESOLVED

- 1) that the Financial information section of the Blackdown Hills AONB Annual Report be expanded to include a section showing what income had been brought in compared with expenditure;
- 2) that Councillor P Diviani and the Blackdown Hills AONB team be congratulated on the success of the project.

*18 **Draft Statement of Community Involvement**

Consideration was given to the report of the Policy and Conservation Manager setting out the background to the requirement for the Council to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). This was part of the East Devon Local Development Framework and a first draft of the proposed SCI was to be published for consultation.

Members noted that the existing local planning system had been replaced by a two tier system consisting of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Local Development Framework. The Statement of Community Involvement was part of the Local Development Framework and set out a local planning authority’s policy for involving communities in the preparation and revision of local development documents and considering planning applications. The statement was not an end in itself but a means of improving the quality of the planning process. Preparing the statement would ensure authorities considered how to involve communities and benefit from their knowledge and expertise.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- that feedback is required on the way consultation is undertaken and how to access hard to reach groups;
- sustainability was an important issue and would be discussed at the next meeting;

***18 Draft Statement of Community Involvement (Cont)**

- that the draft SCI presented was still a work in progress;
- concern was expressed over how the SCI process would be approached in schools;
- the process seemed to be top down and heavily subscribed by the government;
- acknowledgement that the SCI would cause officers a great deal of extra work.

RESOLVED

that the Executive Board be requested to ask the Local Government Association and the two local MP's, to make representations to the Government that the Local Development Framework process was too complicated and inflexible and a simpler, more flexible and less centralised system was required. There should also be greater recognition of the role of elected members to represent the views of the community..

Chairman

Date