

# **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Corporate Overview Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Thursday, 9 June 2005**

**Present:**

Councillors:

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

A E J Dinnis  
J E D Falby  
J P Halse

B O Ingham  
A W J Reed  
T G Reeves

Speakers:

Mr B Thornton, Chairman, Exeter  
Chamber of Commerce  
Mr J Fry, Westward Developments Ltd  
Mr A Carter, FWS Carter & Sons  
Mr R Carter, FWS Carter & Sons  
Mr A Lovering, Blackdown Hills Business  
Association  
Mr G Hansford, Pitt Farm  
Mr G Brown, NFU

**Also Present:**

Councillors:

Miss V Ash  
Mrs M J Boote  
P A Diviani  
M J L Green  
S C Luxton  
Ms S M Merritt  
A T Moulding  
R Mudge  
Mrs F Newth  
B Nicholson  
Mrs H E Parr

**Apologies:**

Councillors:

D G Button  
G P Chamberlain  
Miss J M Elson  
P J Skinner  
C H Wale  
S C Wragg

Mr M Randall

The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 8.45pm.

\*1 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economy Overview Committee held on 11 May 2005 were noted.

\*2 **Employment land supply issues**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the representatives for attending. He explained that the main aim of the meeting had been identified at the meeting of the Economic Development Strategy Task and Finish Forum on 19 January 2005, which was to inform consideration of employment land issue throughout East Devon to facilitate delivery of the Local Development Framework. It was also to provide Members with an opportunity to hear from local business people, landowners and other stakeholders, views on the demand for and supply of employment land in the towns and rural communities of East Devon.

Employment land issues in Rural areas

Each speaker addressed the meeting putting forward their own ideas. Time was given for Members and other representatives to ask questions and to discuss the various ideas put forward.

The main land-based issues raised on rural areas were:

- There is demand from existing firms on Exeter Airport Business Park for land on which to expand. There is a case for a further 7 acres on and around the Business Park to be released for employment land.
- The sale and development of Exeter Airport will have a big impact on business in the South West Region This is welcomed because recent information from SW RDA indicates that the "Gross Value Added" of the South West is way behind the rest of the country, and is set to continue to under-perform without positive action. Only Bristol and Exeter show growth potential. As Exeter is constrained by land East Devon holds the key to an important part of the SW growth.

Land south of the old A30 and north of the airport perimeter should be designated for commercial use as the airport expands. This land is held as an option by the new community developer. The business community do not want residential on this land because

- 1) it has potential for commercial development
- 2) commercial units can act as a sound buffer between the airport and houses in the new community
- 3) it will safeguard the airport's future growth

Skyparks will be insufficient land. In the light of recent SW RDA information the business community believe that the Devon Structure Plan has underestimated the need for growth.

There is a demand for inward investment in the area east of Exeter. There will also be a growth in smaller businesses serving the airport and Flybe. These are high tech, clean, high wage jobs that will lift the economy of the region.

- There is demand for more land to be allocated for industry and/or leisure use adjacent to the Flightway Business Park at Dunkeswell. Flightway Business Park provides an important opportunity for industrial development and employment in the Blackdown Hills as long as development is handled sensitively. The road network to Dunkeswell is poor and if there is to be further development in the area than it is likely that the developer would have to contribute to road improvements. This is a

historical problem resulting from failure to require the developers of the housing on the edge of the village to contribute to road improvements.

- It is recommended that Devon County Council be lobbied to spend some of the windfall money it was receiving from the sale of Exeter Airport for the necessary road improvements at Dunkeswell.
- The need for more industrial development land to be allocated adjacent to Greendale Business Park both to satisfy demand from present businesses on the site who want to expand and also requests received on a weekly basis from new businesses who wish to relocate their businesses to the area.
- An additional acre of land was available for development at Moorview Industrial Park, Whimble. The developer had received 19 enquiries from businesses looking for premises in the last 12 months, mostly in the past year.

A number of policy issues for rural areas were raised:

- The need for more flexibility to convert and change classifications of buildings eg holiday home to other uses.
- The need for flexibility when agricultural tied cottages come out of farming use and cannot be occupied if the occupant is no longer employed in farming. Diversification uses should be allowed here.
- Innovative thinking regarding accommodation for incoming workers is a problem (eg casual/harvest workers).
- Flexibility from AONB policies regarding income generators such as turbines (renewables) and masts.
- The role that could be played if the Council allowed for more diversification in the rural economy through flexible interpretation of PPGS7.
- The importance was emphasised for the district of getting the right balance between industrial development, provision of more housing and protection of the countryside.
- The restrictions of the planning process and time taken obtaining the required permissions restricted development and were a disincentive to businesses to relocate to the area and also meant businesses wanting to expand had to move to find bigger premises.
- A written submission was received from John Bain, Land agent, Clinton Devon Estates Farming restructuring will continue to provide more redundant farm buildings however, their high cost of conversion for office use probably means that they will only supply the most basic business space.
  1. Remote rural buildings very often provide an opportunity of providing storage and business space which are perceived by some as being unsightly and anti-social ie car breakers, plant hire etc
  2. The business community need much more certainty and speed in the planning process. Non productive planning activity has cost the Estate approximately £80,000 a year, over the past three years.
  3. There has to be an understanding that if buildings are to be preserved there must be a pragmatic policy that they have to be utilised in some way.
  4. The conversion of traditional farm buildings very often produces poor business space and it is questionable whether demand for this space will be maintained in the future.

5. Tourism is an important part of the rural economy and self catering holiday units/cottages form an essential part of it. The reliance however on a policy of only giving consent for conversion to holiday use where it is linked to the farm is economically unsustainable for the future. Our own practically based evidence supports this line.
  6. The difficulty in securing consent for employment land in rural areas is significant and every effort should be made to utilise existing space be it redundant farmsteads or brown land where alternative uses are likely to be more acceptable.
- A written submission was received from P W Muzzlewhite, Whitton and Laing arguing that a major move to home working was taking place and required a more flexible approach to planning in relation to larger houses, barn conversions and new build to accommodate the change and bring employment and vibrancy back into villages.

Finally, the meeting concluded that there was a need to involve the planning department in the economic development process. Attendance at the meeting by a senior planning officer to answer some members' queries would have been of assistance. It was explained that a report summarising the four meetings with businesses would be presented to this committee in the autumn and also would be circulated to all participating businesses to check that their views had been accurately reported. In January 2006 work would begin with the Local Plans team on preparation of an Employment Land Issues report.

Cllr Liverton suggested that the Council should hold a meeting annually with businesses to discuss general policies and other relevant matters.

Chairman ..... Date.....