

Minutes of a Meeting of the Environment Overview Committee
held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Thursday, 22 January 2004.

Present:

Councillors:

S C Luxton (Vice-Chairman in
the Chair)

D G Button
G P Chamberlain
T A Cope
A E J Dinnis
A R Giles
B O Ingham

Mrs H E Parr
A S Pascoe
A W J Reed
N Rogers
N J Spence
C H Wale
Dr H W Waterworth

Also Present:

Councillors:

Miss V Ash
Mrs M Boote
J E D Falby
M J L Green
Ms S M Merritt
Mrs L A Roden
A J Wilkinson

Apologies:

Councillors:

Mrs R E Burrows
H J Jeffery
G K Liverton
R Mudge
R C Peachey
P J Skinner
S C Wragg

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and terminated at 9:15pm.

*43 Election of Vice Chairman

Councillor A S Pascoe was elected Vice Chairman for the meeting.

*44 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview Committee held on 4 December 2003, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

*45 Reports of the Countryside Service Task and Finish Forum

The reports of the meetings of the Countryside Service Task and Finish Forum held on 8 December 2003 and 12 January 2004 were noted.

*46 PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

It was noted that the Environment Portfolio Holder was unwell and therefore unable to attend the meeting to answer questions relating to PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas. On behalf of the committee the Chairman wished the Environment Portfolio Holder well and hoped he had a speedy recovery.

47 Review of Public Speaking at Planning Inspections Committee

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Planning and Countryside concerning an analysis of the 12 month experimental period for allowing the public and others to speak at the Planning Inspections Committee. It was noted that on the whole the experiment had worked well, however Members appreciated that some members of the public could find the experience very daunting and may prefer to remain seated.

RECOMMENDED that public speaking (in accordance with the approved Code of Conduct) at the Planning Inspections Committee be permitted on a permanent basis, with members of the public being given the option to sit or stand whilst addressing the Committee.

*48 Service Plans 2004/07

Consideration was given to a booklet of Service Plans for the Planning, Street Scene and Countryside services. The Service Plans looked back at performance during the financial year ending 31 March 2004, and set out plans for the next three years. These had been prepared by the Heads of Service, at the same time as establishing financial estimates for the following year.

RESOLVED that due to the complexity of the Service Plans, consideration of these be deferred until the next meeting of the Environment Overview Committee (as the only item on the agenda), with other Overview Committee members being welcomed to attend if they wished to do so.

49 Draft Revenue and Capital Estimates 2004/05

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director – Economy concerning draft revenue and capital estimates for the Environment Portfolio. It was noted that the draft revenue and capital estimates for 2004/05 had been adopted by the Executive Board on 20 January 2004. From April 2004 the Overview Committees would begin building up budgets for the following year, thus creating greater member involvement and scrutiny in the budget process.

Disappointment was expressed at the number of schemes that had not been included or proposed as possible deletions in the draft revenue and capital estimates for 2004/05. Members were aware that if items were to be included within the estimates other items would need to be identified as those to be deleted. There was a need to keep Council Tax at an acceptable level which meant serious budgetary cuts. Concern was expressed over how East Devon District Council would get the message across to the general public that these cuts were necessary and were being done for the overall good of the all the people in East Devon.

There was concern over the proposed cut in Rural Aid as it was felt that this financial support acted as a lifeline to the rural community. It was recognised that it could not be kept at the current level. It had the potential to provide support to some 59 rural parish councils, and accorded with one of the three primary goals of East Devon District Council. The projects supported by Rural Aid often proved to be more valuable than their costs.

49 Draft Revenue and Capital Estimates 2004/05 (Cont'd)

Consideration was given to cuts that could be made to the draft revenue and capital estimates for 2004/05 and items suggested included the Free Tree Scheme and Landscape One Stop Shop. The Corporate Director – Environment explained that the Countryside Service had been established to proactively manage the unique landscape of East Devon, and explained the reasoning and funding behind the schemes highlighted.

A written statement was requested from the economy directorate explaining the criteria used for determining which items would be included in the budget and which would not, and confirmation that the cuts detailed in pages 31 to 35 were not mandatory schemes or pre-agreed expenditure. Clarification was sought on how the projects identified by the Countryside Service Task and Finish Forum had been determined.

Clarification was requested on the Special Items Bids for 2004/05. It was noted that to date no committee had suggested that any of the items listed ought to be included in the budget. A request was made for the Taleford flood alleviation scheme to be included due to the continuing problem of frequent flooding.

Grant aid to the Offwell Wildlife Centre would be investigated to determine whether one year remained from the original annual grant awarded.

It was requested that the Exmouth Estuary Enhancement and the Exmouth Valley Parks schemes be reviewed and included within the budget for the forthcoming financial year.

The Committee considered the revenue estimates 2004/05 for the Environment Portfolio on a page by page basis. Clarification was required on the variations in support service costs for the Environment Directorate. The additional staff appointments were as a result of the major restructuring of the Council and its directorates to improve service delivery. The Council now had quality people in positions of authority who were able to bring about change to achieve improved service provision.

The budget figures for recycling would be sent to all members of the Environment Overview Committee.

A number of schemes which could provide additional funding for the Council were suggested. These included the receipt of extra Council Tax from second homes (it was noted that a high proportion of these were within the rural areas), a reduction in the Business South West Grant, the abolition of free car parking during December (which would generate an additional £21,000), and increasing the length of the peak season charging period for the better used car parks. Another option was the introduction of car parking charges at the Knowle.

- RECOMMENDED**
- (1) that the draft Revenue and Capital Estimates for 2004/05 relevant to the Environment Overview Committee be approved subject to the following amendments;
 - a) the grants and contributions for the AONB & Countryside Teams for the Free Tree Scheme and the Landscape One Stop Shop be deleted and the resulting £20,000 be allocated towards Rural Aid Grants;
 - b) the Rural Aid Grant fund be set at £60,000;
 - c) if one year's grant aid remained from the Offwell Wildlife Centre agreement, this amount would be reinstated within the draft budget.
 - (2) that the comments concerning increasing the Council's income be noted.

49 Draft Revenue and Capital Estimates 2004/05 (Cont'd)

(Councillor N Rogers declared a personal interest in the Rural Aid Grant issue as a member of the Branscombe Village Hall Committee and took no part in the discussion and voting thereon).

50 Community Planning Initiatives

Consideration was given to the report of the Senior Planning Officer regarding the production of Parish Plans and Village Design Statements. The report detailed the current position with regard to these Community Planning Initiatives, set out a suggested route for their formal adoption by the District Council and suggested ways in which the Council could support their production and implementation.

- RECOMMENDED**
- (1) that the suggested process for endorsing Parish Plans be endorsed;
 - (2) that, following endorsement of individual Parish Plans, the relevant Directorates support their implementation;
 - (3) that a service level agreement be agreed with the Community Council of Devon to facilitate the Parish Plan production process.

51 Yarcombe Parish Plan and Village Design Statement

Members considered a Parish Plan, consisting of an appraisal, action plan and village design statement, that had been produced for Yarcombe and Marsh. On behalf of the Committee the Chairman congratulated the Yarcombe and Marsh Parish Plan Group on their excellent parish plan and village design statement.

- RECOMMENDED**
- (1) that account be taken of the Yarcombe and Marsh Parish Plan when decision making;
 - (2) that delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director – Environment and Ward Member to make any minor amendments following receipt of Highways and Environment Agency comments or arising from the printing process;
 - (3) that the Village Design Statement section of the Yarcombe and Marsh Parish Plan be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance;
 - (4) that a letter on behalf of the Committee be sent to the Yarcombe and Marsh Parish Plan Group congratulating them on their Parish Plan and Village Design Statement.

52 Talaton Parish Plan

Members considered a Parish Plan, consisting of an appraisal and action plan that had been produced for Talaton. On behalf of the Committee the Chairman congratulated the Talaton Parish Plan Group on their excellent parish plan and village design statement.

- RECOMMENDED**
- (1) that the Talaton Parish Plan be endorsed and taken into account when decision making;
 - (2) that a letter on behalf of the Committee be sent to the Talaton Parish Plan Group congratulating them on their Parish Plan.

53 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill

It was noted that this item had been deferred from the meeting of the Environment Overview Committee held on 13 November 2003 due to the item's complexity and the lack of time available for consideration. The report of the Policy and Conservation Officer set out the implications of the Planning and Compulsory Bill for regional planning and development plans and the prospects for Local Development Frameworks to replace local plans. It was noted that the Bill was currently going through Parliament and there would inevitably be changes made. Due to the time scales involved Members were informed that the only Area Action Plans which would be produced would be for Axminster and for Exmouth.

- RECOMMENDED**
- (1) that a Joint Overview Task and Finish Forum be convened to consider the issues facing Axminster and its overall vision to 2016. (The Forum would work in a Panel manner, involving all interested parties within the town and those with local knowledge);
 - (2) that a Joint Overview Task and Finish Forum be convened to consider the issues facing Exmouth and its overall vision to 2016. (The Forum would work in a Panel manner, involving all interested parties within the town and those with local knowledge);
 - (3) that the composition of the Task and Finish Forums be agreed by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman and political group leaders.

54 Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance: Live/Work Units

It was noted that this item had been deferred from the meeting of the Environment Overview Committee held on 13 November 2003 due to the items' complexity and the lack of time available for consideration. The report of the Policy and Conservation Officer set out the advantages and disadvantages of producing Supplementary Planning Guidance on Live/Work Units in which segregated living and working accommodation is provided in a single unit.

- RECOMMENDED** that Supplementary Planning Guidance on Live/Work Units be not produced.

*55 Matters Raised by Members

Councillor N Rogers had requested a presentation on night time light pollution, however due to the heavy agenda for the next few meetings of the Environment Overview Committee it was agreed that this would be considered at a later date.

Chairman Date.....