

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 14 May 2009

PRESENT: Councillor RMA Manning (Leader of the Council)
Councillor SM Edwards (Deputy Leader of the Council and Housing Portfolio Holder)

Councillors: Dr DR Bard New Communities Portfolio Holder
Mrs SM Ellington Environmental Services Portfolio Holder
MP Howell Staffing Portfolio Holder
AG Orgee Finance Portfolio Holder
TJ Wotherspoon Policy, Improvement and Communications Portfolio Holder
NIC Wright Planning Portfolio Holder

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Holly Adams Democratic Services Officer
Steve Hampson Executive Director
Greg Harlock Chief Executive
Keith Miles Planning Policy Manager
Jonathan Dixon Principal Planning Policy Officer (Transport)

Councillors JD Batchelor, SGM Kindersley, Mrs CAED Murfitt and Mrs BZD Smith were in attendance, by invitation.

Procedural Items

128. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Leader was authorised to sign as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2009.

Councillor MP Howell informed Cabinet that the Council was expected to attain the next level of the Equalities Standard for Local Government by the end of June 2009. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee would be evaluating the Council's progress at its June meeting, and there would be an external peer review.

129. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors JD Batchelor, SGM Kindersley and AG Orgee declared personal non-prejudicial interests in items 5, 6 and 7 on the agenda as elected Cambridgeshire County Councillors.

130. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None received.

Decisions made by Cabinet

131. CAMBRIDGESHIRE STRATEGIC POLICY ADVICE TO THE EAST OF ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY - REVIEW OF REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY (RSS)

As a partner of Cambridgeshire County Council, the strategic planning authority, Cabinet was asked to confirm the District Council's response to the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) review of the Regional Spatial Strategy. Members aimed to maintain the previously agreed levels of development in South Cambridgeshire villages without causing detrimental effects to neighbouring districts, some of which sought increased development for their towns.

Cabinet **AGREED** the following conclusions on the key points of advice which Cambridgeshire should provide to EERA:

- (a) Support for a Cambridgeshire vision for the future of the County supported by specific objectives against which alternative strategies can be tested. The spatial planning vision and the objectives, as currently drafted, are set out fully elsewhere in Appendix 1. High aspirations are set for Cambridgeshire at 2031 in relation to:
 - its people;
 - the economy;
 - transport and accessibility;
 - sustainability;
 - the environment; and
 - climate change.
- (b) The scenarios provided for testing by EERA are not realistic for Cambridgeshire. They imply housing growth between 2006 and 2031 of at least 98,000 homes, based on a continuation of the RSS rate (3,900 per annum [pa]). At the higher level they suggest 129,000 homes (5,200 pa).
- (c) The most appropriate and realistic rate of growth, related to performance over the last 10 years and to foreseeable prospects for the economy as well as for delivery is considered to be at least 75,000 new homes. This provision is already committed in the current strategy and would provide for a rate of 3,000 pa up to 2031.
- (d) Provided that a convincing case can be made for sustainable development of selected market towns in Huntingdonshire, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland, some flexibility for higher rates of growth and some additional allocations but overall provision should be no higher than 90,000 homes at the maximum (3,600 pa).
- (e) The successful delivery of the current strategy (as set out in the 2003 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan and in the 2008 East of England Plan) must remain the top priority. It includes urban extensions around Cambridge, the new settlement at Northstowe and expansion of market towns. The recovery from the recession must not be allowed to undermine the quality of development which needs to be undertaken to a high standard and with adequate provision of jobs, affordable housing, key infrastructure and opportunities for sustainable travel / access to high quality public transport.
- (f) Given limitations on likely future investment, any refinement of the existing strategy must have its foundations in making the best use of existing infrastructure in planning future growth.

- (g) The improvement of conditions in Cambridgeshire's market towns can be supported, recognising that this will bring with it a need for investment in appropriate infrastructure, regeneration of the urban fabric and increasing the prospects for new jobs. With such improvements the larger towns will have capacity for further sustainable housing growth, which in itself will help to underpin local retailing, services and related employment as well as support nearby rural communities in South Cambridgeshire.
- (h) Related to this, South Cambridgeshire can support the need to address the economic prospects of Cambridgeshire in areas away from Cambridge (i.e., Fenland and the northern parts of Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire).
- (i) It is accepted that Cambridge and its environs will remain the main focus for economic growth and employment, including research and knowledge based industry. This sub-region is an important engine of growth for Cambridgeshire, the region and for the United Kingdom. Appropriate provision must therefore be made for new homes and supporting infrastructure to enable a sustainable link between employment and the workforce, whilst at the same time recognising the very important role of the Cambridge Green Belt in retaining the essential character of the City.
- (j) Support the delivery of the current strategy as the basis for the spatial strategy for Cambridgeshire for the period up to 2031, augmented where justifiable and deliverable with further balanced expansion, linked to the overall vision and strategic objectives for Cambridgeshire, as follows:
- market towns – regeneration in selected locations;
 - transport links – alongside this, there may be some limited potential for sustainable expansion at other towns with excellent transport links;
 - Cambridge – strategic review of the Green Belt; and
 - rural areas – Significant development in villages is not generally sustainable and does not form a part of the strategy. Only small-scale development to meet local housing needs will normally be permitted.
- (k) South Cambridgeshire's experience is that the sequential strategy set out in current East of England Plan policy CSR1 will at the very least require amendment. As presently drafted its cascading provisions provide for more development in unsustainable locations in villages than intended. South Cambridgeshire's experience in preparing its Core Strategy based on this policy is that PPS3's emphasis on delivery can drive housing numbers lower down the sequence than anticipated if there are any delays in delivering development further up the sequence.
- (l) Agree that there are considerable doubts about the viability of any further new settlements because:
- it will be very costly to provide suitable infrastructure;
 - they are unlikely to be sustainable for jobs, services or transport;
 - they will divert from the delivery of the current strategy up to 2031; and
 - the scale of housing growth likely to be deliverable does not justify further new settlements at this stage.
- (m) Agree that the Arup study of Regional Scale Settlement options is not an adequate basis for drawing up spatial strategy for Cambridgeshire or for the Region as a whole.
- (n) Agree that other key issues of vital importance in the development of future

strategy include:

- recognising external links between areas, such as Peterborough, King's Lynn and towns to the south of Cambridge and further links to London; and
- ensuring that the latest findings on climate change and flood risk are fully taken into account.

Over the summer, the County and District Councils will refine their approach on the spatial strategy outlined above including:

- assessing delivery issues and infrastructure costs;
- testing and augmenting the evidence base on developer proposals; and
- testing the impact on carbon emissions.

South Cambridgeshire is however concerned that changes to the economic prospects of Cambridgeshire over the last 12 months have not been yet been incorporated into the strategy. The changing economic landscape means that rather than being about planning high levels of housing provision to match previously forecast high levels of economic growth and job creation, the new East of England Plan needs to have a greater emphasis on the economy. This should begin with an investigation of the prospects for the local economy, the suitability of current policies and allocations for long-term recovery, and whether any revision of policy direction is needed to secure long-term prosperity.

132. RESPONSE TO THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY FOR THE EAST OF ENGLAND SINGLE ISSUE REVIEW TO ADDRESS PROVISION OF GYPSY & TRAVELLER CARAVAN SITES

A number of changes to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy policy for provision of Gypsy and Traveller caravan sites had been recommended following an Examination in Public (EiP). The Secretary of State considered the recommendations and published proposed changes for consultation. In response to questions from members, the Principal Planning Policy Officer (Transport) confirmed that the proposed 3% population uplift had been tested at the EiP and found to be the best way forward until completion of new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments, and advised that the policy's approach beyond 2011 was in keeping with the Council's preferred approach, which advocated a wide distribution of permanent residential pitches across the region, with all local authorities required to make some provision.

Cabinet confirmed that its responses met the Council's strategic aim of being a listening council, as the responses took into account needs identified through discussion with local Gypsies and Travellers and the Ormiston Trust, and constructive criticism provided by settled residents.

Cabinet **AGREED** the following responses to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England single issue review to address provision of Gypsy and Traveller caravan sites:

Provision for Residential Pitches

The Council accept the proposed change regarding pitch provision in South Cambridgeshire. On balance, whilst the proposed change increases the requirement for the district, it does so within the context of a wider regional approach to pitch provision. The Council has consistently supported the principle of a regional approach to distribution, and the principle that all authorities should make provision. This provides a more equitable and deliverable approach. It also has the benefit of providing greater choice to the Gypsy and Traveller community.

With regard to the proposed change, *'Insert the word 'Minimum' before Additional pitches required 2006-2011 in the District table in Policy H4'*: the policy needs to strike the right balance between allowing planning applications for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation to be permitted if the application meets the requirements set out in local development plans, and enabling Local Authorities to carry out enforcement activities on unauthorised developments and encampments where no planning permission has been sought or does not meet the requirement of the local development plans. Provision of pitches in line with the Policy will be a key test as part of any enforcement action. The inclusion of the word "minimum" into the policy makes this test unclear and is not helpful. Should a local authority area have made full provision for the number of pitches identified in the Policy then local criteria policies will determine whether any further applications are suitable, especially given the ongoing need to 2021 identified in the Policy. There is no need to introduce the word 'minimum', and it should be removed to avoid creating unnecessary challenges to enforcement activities. In addition, the recently approved South East Plan (May 2009) removed the proposed word "minimum" from the overall housing policy.

Provision of Transit Pitches

The principle of a network of transit pitches across the region has merit; however, it is questionable whether there is a robust evidence to create a specific pitch requirement. In particular, the implications of the wider policy achieving higher levels of residential pitch provision on the need for transit provision is not fully understood.

Given the general need for permanent residential accommodation that currently exists, it would be likely that transit sites would be occupied as long-term residential sites, at least in the short term until permanent sites are established across the region. This could create significant management difficulties. A further problem is that if additional work is needed to inform Development Plan Documents (DPD) on transit provision this could delay the production and consequently delay the provision of permanent residential pitches which prompted this single issue regional plan review.

The proposed change would require the network of transit sites to be delivered in less than two years. This is not realistic or appropriate in every area given the problems identified above, and the time needed to establish the appropriate distribution of provision. A degree of flexibility should be added to the policy, to allow for the transit provision to be delivered in the subsequent five-year period if local circumstances meant this was a more appropriate approach.

Provision for Travelling Showpeople

The Council object to this proposed change. The needs of Travelling Showpeople across the region should be the subject of further research, as there is currently insufficient evidence to make specific district- or county-based requirements. Evidence from the Showmen's Guild which led to the requirements was introduced at a very late stage in the plan making process, during the Examination in Public. It did not form part of the evidence base for the consultation process, and the appropriateness of the evidence and potential options for distribution of provision have not been subject to options testing or wider consultation. The figure included is considerably higher than the need identified through the Cambridgeshire Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), which indicated a need of only five plots. The evidence to guide distribution through a county is limited. The evidence base suggests a significant focus of need for some districts, which is not reflected in the proposed change. The introduction of a county-based requirement at this late stage could delay planning for Gypsy and Traveller pitches, if a DPD were held up to add on this process.

Future Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessments

The approach to future reviews of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments is supported. Levels of provision should continue to be tested and addressed on a regional level.

133. CONSIDERATION OF WATER & SERVICE CHARGES ON COUNCIL-MANAGED TRAVELLERS' SITES

The Staffing Portfolio Holder asked that this report be withdrawn, as he did not believe that it provided enough information for a considered decision by Cabinet. A revised version of the report would be presented to his next Portfolio Holder meeting, which would be scheduled as soon as possible. The Executive Director apologised for the report format.

Cabinet agreed that this item be **WITHDRAWN** from the agenda.

Standing Items

134. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee Chairman reminded Cabinet that the Committee had asked that Portfolio Holder meetings be scheduled for the civic year and that full public notice be given for all items for decision.

The Chairman reported that the member-led review of Arbury Park had been shortlisted as one of the top three scrutiny projects nationally and would be displayed at the national scrutiny conference on 9 June 2009. Cabinet congratulated the members and officers involved in its production and wished them luck in the contest finals.

Councillor SGM Kindersley commended the chairmanship, public engagement and quality of debates at the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

135. UPDATES FROM CABINET MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Nothing reported.

**The Meeting ended at 2.47
p.m.**
