

ENVIRONMENT AND ACCESS PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE

16 March 2005

Attendance:

Councillors:

Verney (Chairman) (P)

Bidgood (P)
Busher (P)
de Peyer (P)
Higgins (P)
Jackson

Jeffs (P)
Love (P)
Mather (P)
Nunn (P)
Wright (P)

Deputy Members

Councillor Maynard (Standing Deputy for Councillor Jackson)

Others in Attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Beveridge (Portfolio Holder for Planning) and Councillor Davies

1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 20 January 2005, be approved and adopted.

2. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

In response to the comments that were raised by Councillor Bidgood during the public participation period of the previous meeting, the Acting Director of Development Services agreed to ensure a prompt response to the issues raised.

3. **PLANNING GRANTS INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP: PLANNING GRANTS 2005/06**

(Reports EA50 and EA51 refer)

The conclusions of the Planning Grants Informal Scrutiny Group had been reported to the previous meeting and recommended to Cabinet on 8 February 2005. However, at Cabinet further information became available regarding the finances of one of the groups who had applied for assistance. Cabinet therefore resolved that the issue should be re-considered by this Committee, to establish a priority order for applicants of planning grants.

Immediately prior to Committee, the Planning Grants Informal Scrutiny Group had met to re-consider its conclusions and following discussion, the Committee agreed to these recommendations to Cabinet. The Committee agreed to divide the grants into three categories. The most important of which were those groups and organisations


that the Committee considered provided the Council with services which it would otherwise have to provide itself or which were statutory in nature. Payments made to these organisations should, therefore, be seen as payment for the provision of specific services that the Council would otherwise have a duty to provide, rather than discretionary grants.

The Committee categorised a second group of grants whose services were highly desirable and whose objectives accorded with the Council's priorities. Within this category, the Committee prioritised the grants as set out below. The third category represented grants that Members considered provided worthwhile services, but it was agreed that these groups should only receive funding if there remained sufficient finances after supporting those groups in categories one and two.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be recommended to approve the following funding options for Planning Grants during 2005/06:

1. Essential Services:

- Historic Building Grants £70,000p.a.
- Hampshire Wildlife Trust (wardening of Winnall Moors, St Faiths and, possibly, St Catherines Hill) £10,000 p.a.
- East Hampshire AONB Project £10,500 p.a.
- Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre approx £7,500 p.a.
- Restoration costs of St.Faiths (for 3 years)
(To come from WCC sources, such as the Town Forum and Planning Grants Reserve) £12,000 p.a.
- Environmental Improvement Grants  £0 (nil)

2. Highly Desirable Provision (in priority order):

1. Historic Building Grants an extra £5,000 p.a.
2. The Forest of Bere Project, to be funded at 50% of Hampshire County Council's contribution to the project, up to a maximum of £9,700 p.a.
3. Hampshire Wildlife Trust (for local Environment Projects) £6,200 p.a. (equal third priority with):
3. British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (for local Environment Projects) £7,950 p.a.
4. Environmental Improvement Grants £25,000 p.a.

3. Other Funding:

- Enhanced Historic Buildings Grants an additional £25,000 p.a.

- Enhanced Environmental Improvement Grants, an additional £15,000 p.a.
- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group £00 (nil)

4. **ecoSE ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP**
(Report EA53 refers)

The Director of Health and Housing advised that ecoSE was a partnership of public and private sector agencies that aimed to create sustainable housing in the south-east. Whilst Members noted that the sentiments and aims of ecoSE were in line with the Council's sustainability policies, the cost to meet ecoSE standards on the Council's housing stock was likely to be prohibitively expensive. The Committee noted that the current proposed refurbishments of the housing stock to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard would in itself require additional resources of £400,000.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Davies suggested that financial assistance from the European Union may be available to ecoSE Associate Members.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be recommended to commend the aims of ecoSE and to consider requesting that the Housing Performance Improvement Committee should investigate the issue further, but that at this stage associate membership should not be pursued due to financial constraints.

5. **TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME**
(Report EA54 refers)

The Committee considered the report which set out the Traffic Management Programme and workload issues for the City Council's Traffic and Transport Team. During their discussion Members expressed concern at the delayed appointment of the temporary staff member to help reduce the backlog of permanent traffic orders. The Acting Director of Development Services explained that the delay had been caused by the job evaluation process of the temporary post. This had now been resolved and the post would be advertised within the next few days. He added that although improvements had been made on tackling the backlog using the additional money granted by Cabinet on 15 December 2004, there remained sufficient funds to sustain this temporary post for six months.

In response to questions, the Director also explained how the Team's workload was prioritised and how Ward Members were kept informed of new and proposed traffic management programmes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

6. **LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 2006-2011**
(Report EA55 refers)

The Committee noted that the County Council was in the process of drafting the Local Transport Plan to cover the period 2006-2011 which would state the authority's transport strategy for this five-year period. The report formed part of the County

Council's consultation process and Members were invited to comment on the proposals as set out in the report.

During debate, Members commented on the need to establish additional Park and Ride sites along the main routes into the town. With regard to the proposals for a new Park and Ride site in the Bushfield area, Councillor Beveridge as the Portfolio Holder for Planning, confirmed that the County Council were continuing to investigate the possibility of a number of sites in the area. It was probable that a selected site would be identified in the first draft of the Local Transport Plan to be published in July 2005.

Members also discussed whether the Winchester Movement and Access Plan was out-of-date and the City Council's representation on the County Council's transport panels. In response to further comments, the Acting Director agreed to update Members on the MIRACLES Project through the Members' Briefing Note.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members questioned the proposal for £100,000 contribution to the proposed variable message signs for Winchester town centre's car parks. In explanation, the Acting Director stated that there was at this stage no commitment to undertake the replacement of the existing, ageing and unreliable signs, but that half of the cost would be borne by the County Council. He added that a decision on the scheme would be considered by Cabinet at the next review of the car parks capital works programme.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be recommended to agree that the City Council responds to the County Council as follows:

i. That the City Council expects to take a full part in the development of the new Local Transport Plan and to be fully consulted on those proposals effecting Winchester district,

ii. That the City Council is concerned that the loss of the WMAP could lose focus on the unique problems that exist in Winchester and seeks an assurance that this will not be the case,

iii. and that the City Council requests that particular emphasis be placed on addressing the air quality issues in the centre of Winchester, particularly through provision of Park and Ride facilities in the Bushfield area.

7. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

(Report PS164 refers)

The Committee considered a number of issues that could be further examined by the Parking Review Informal Scrutiny Group. During debate the City Secretary and Solicitor agreed to disseminate to Members the Group's terms of reference, to inform Members' decision at the next meeting as to whether the Group had concluded its work.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

8. **DEVELOPMENT SERVICES – BUSINESS PLAN 2005/06**
(Report EA52 refers)

This item had not been notified for inclusion on the agenda within the statutory deadline. The Chairman agreed to accept the item onto the agenda as a matter requiring urgent consideration, so that Members' recommendations could be reported to the next meeting of Cabinet.

The Acting Director of Development Services introduced the report and summarised that the main focus of improvement would be to ensure that the work of the Development Services Department met Government standards. It was noted that the principle cause of this problem related to the high turnover of planning officers within the Department.

During debate, Members commented on the need to improve the quality of letters and publications (such as the weekly list of decisions) from the Department, that planning advice to the public should include a disclaimer, the role of the Local Plan in the light of the proposed Local Development Frameworks and the need to maintain and improve public confidence in the planning system.

Members made a number of suggestions to improve the wording and clarity of the business plan which the Acting Director agreed to incorporate into the final document subject to comments by Cabinet. None of these required any fundamental change to the document to be received by Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be recommended to endorse the Development Services Business Plan 2005/06, subject to the incorporation of the various amendments suggested.

9. **VOTE OF THANKS**

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Committee expressed its unanimous thanks to the Chairman for his guidance and work throughout the municipal year.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.30pm.

Chairman