

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 24 April 2014

Present: Brian Edwards (Chairman)

Ann Beech
Len Bloomer
Maureen Compton

Geoff Martin
Martyn Tittley (Vice-Chairman)

Also in attendance: Gill Heath, Mark Winnington and Susan Woodward

Apologies: George Adamson, Mark Deaville, Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf, Geoff Morrison, Diane Todd and Ellen Wright

PART ONE

50. Declarations of Interest

There were none on this occasion.

51. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 7 March 2014

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee meeting held on 7 March 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

52. The new Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire (2015-2030) Draft for consultation

The Select Committee were updated on the preparation of a new Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire. Staffordshire quarries produced about two thirds of the sand and gravel sold in the West Midlands, the greatest amount of clay and shale compared with any other county in England and had one of only 12 cement kilns in the UK. 80% of the anhydrite used in the cement industry was also produced from Staffordshire's only mine. The Minerals industry employed 700 people in Staffordshire and a further 4000 related jobs. Given the importance of the minerals industry to the economy, it was important that Staffordshire had a Local Plan that was effective in guiding decisions on mineral planning applications.

In preparing the new Minerals Local Plan, it had been necessary to take into account the circumstances that had changed since the adoption of the 2006 Plan, including:

- new legal requirements such as the "duty to cooperate" on issues that had cross boundary impacts;
- the National Planning Policy Framework which set out the basis for assessing whether a Local Plan was "sound";
- the quality of remaining permitted reserves to meet anticipated demand; and
- lessons learnt through decision making on planning applications and monitoring mineral development.

On 3 April 2014 the Staffordshire County Council's Planning Committee had approved a draft of the new Plan for public consultation. This consultation would provide an opportunity for feedback on draft policies and proposals prior to preparing a final draft of the Plan which would be submitted to the Secretary of State for examination. The consultation would begin in May and run for at least six weeks, with consultation documents available on the County Council's web site with a full range of consultees invited to provide feedback on the draft policies and proposals. Following the initial consultation it was anticipated that the final draft plan would be available for comment in November/ December prior to it being submitted to the Secretary of State in Spring 2015.

The new Plan was based on a vision for mineral development in the county to be achieved by 2030. As part of that vision six policies were proposed for determining planning applications and Members received details of these.

The Cabinet Member, Economy and Infrastructure, reassured Members that the intention was to extend existing quarries rather than open new quarry sites. He also informed the Select Committee of the need to work closely with the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure that careful consideration was given to the choice of site for housing, with mineral resources extracted prior to housing developments.

Members raised concerns over the number of HCVs accessing quarry sites and the difficulties this presented for the infrastructure, specifically on rural roads. Members wished to ensure that access and infrastructure was addressed in the Plan.

Members referred to gas extraction and asked whether this had been explored in the County, in particular whether there was any intention to extract shale gas. At present there was no indication that Staffordshire was of interest to any private industry with regard to shale extraction.

It was suggested that a small working group be set up to consider the Plan in more detail and produce a response to the consultation on behalf of the Select Committee. The following members agreed to take part in this working group:

Ann Beech
Geoff Martin
Len Bloomer
Martyn Tittley

Those members not present at today's meeting would also be invited to take part in this working group.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the working group be established to prepare the Select Committee response to the Minerals Local Plan consultation.

53. Briefing Report: Staffordshire Rural Forum

The Cabinet Support Member, Environment and Rural Affairs, informed Members of progress with regard to the Staffordshire Rural Forum. This Rural Forum was an

informal network of organisations with an economic, environmental or social remit which took a strategic view of the needs of rural communities, businesses and the rural environment. The aim of the Forum was to represent, act and collaborate on behalf of Staffordshire's rural businesses and communities, to address challenges and exploit opportunities that resulted in tangible and sustainable economic, social, community and environmental benefits for the county's rural areas.

By early 2013 multi-organisational agreement had been reached on collective beliefs and key values and behaviours which were contained within the Staffordshire Rural declaration, signed by over 40 organisations. The Rural Forum's priorities and desired outcomes were published in the Staffordshire Rural Strategy. This strategy encouraged a partnership approach to opportunities and addressing the issues of greatest need within rural Staffordshire.

80% of Staffordshire was rural, with 25% of its population living within these communities. Congratulations went to the officers and Cabinet Support Member for the progress made on this issue.

Members noted that all District and Borough Councils within Staffordshire had signed the Rural Declaration except Newcastle Borough Council. Although Newcastle had been invited to participate they had not responded to the invitations. Mrs Ann Beech agreed to discuss the appropriate contact with officers so that this could be addressed.

The Cabinet Support Member had referred to using rural post offices more effectively and Members asked what this would entail. The suggestion was to consider the possibility of using them as community hubs. Officers had been in contact with representatives from the Post Office and had received assurances that no post office presence would be lost.

Members were pleased to see the developments made through the Rural Forum. They referred to a recent publicity campaign which promoted Staffordshire as the "hidden county" and asked that the Select Committee receive details of tourism within rural Staffordshire and the wider county. The Cabinet Member, Economy and Infrastructure, informed the Select Committee that he had recently agreed a delegated decision on the strategic plan for Staffordshire which used a range of social media and technology to promote the County. £100,000 of European funding had been used to support tourism in Staffordshire, advertising the County as "Staffordsheer enjoyment/excitement/relaxation". Tourism was worth £1.2b to Staffordshire and had increased by 30% over the last few years.

RESOLVED – That a) the progress on the Staffordshire Rural Declaration and the work of the Rural Forum be noted; and
b) Mrs Ann Beech help establish the appropriate Newcastle Borough Council contact officer to give consideration to signing the Rural Declaration.

54. Chasewater Country Park

Chasewater Country Park was one of six country parks owned by Staffordshire County Council. The Council had taken over management responsibility of Chasewater on 1 April 2014 from Lichfield District Council.

The Chasewater project was divided into two phases. Phase 1 sought an operational budget for the Park from 1 April 2014, which had been secured. The operational budget supported the delivery of a minimum level operating model and a development resource focused on mitigating the Park's budgetary pressure through reducing running costs and increasing revenue streams. Phase 2 was the production and approval of a development plan for Chasewater which aimed to maximise the economic, health, social and environmental value of the Park.

Nine initial strategic options had been identified and through the appraisal process a mixed delivery model could be chosen. Members considered the nine options and considered the site, understanding that most of the site was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which would impact on any future development.

Members were excited by the possibilities for this site and felt there was a lot of potential. A Centre Parks style approach was suggested as a way forward, augmenting with the other Staffordshire attractions. The possibility of some commercial development was suggested as a key facet to the future of Chasewater, as it was in a prime location for such development, encouraging more people to visit and stay in Staffordshire. However the site was on green belt land, with 75% of the site being a triple SSSI, and therefore any development would need to be appropriate.

Work had already been undertaken to establish a route between Chasewater and the Cannock Chase Visitors Centre at Marquis Drive, Hednesford, which would be approximately 7 miles in length. The possibility of promoting a cycle route between the two Centres was also being explored.

Members felt that the use of the site for school parties should be expanded as this presented some fantastic opportunities.

Mrs Sue Woodward, local member, told the Select Committee that she was excited to see the options suggested and the possibilities for the future of Chasewater. Mrs Woodward had grown up in the area and had fond memories of Chasewater. She informed Members that the site was already looking better after some initial maintenance from the County Council. There was great potential to improve the health and wellbeing of the local community and the surrounding area and for the local community to take ownership of the opportunities it presented. Chasewater was half a mile away from where the Staffordshire Hoard had been found and Mrs Woodward suggested that a Mercian Trail could link these facilities with other local tourism attractions such as Tamworth Castle and Lichfield Cathedral.

Mrs Woodward reported that Burntwood Town Council had suggested a myriad of ideas for the future of Chasewater. There were many possibilities and Mrs Woodward suggested that this facility would be beneficial for youth services, those with disabilities or learning disabilities. The facility also gave opportunities for jobs and for developing the economy. She was pleased to see the shared enthusiasm for this project.

A recent report had been requested by the Cabinet Member, Economy and Infrastructure, to establish the value to Staffordshire. The value had been established as £7b based on what was calculable, however the actual value was expected to be in

excess of this. Chasewater had the opportunity to contribute to the health economy of the County as well as to its leisure and tourism.

RESOLVED – That the Select Committee note the transfer of Chasewater Country Park from Lichfield District Council to Staffordshire County Council and the possibilities for its development.

55. Roll out of Broadband

At their meeting of 21 March 2012 Cabinet approved £7.44m capital expenditure as match funding to Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) funding to extend the superfast broadband network across Staffordshire. Having undertaken a framework procurement exercise BT was awarded the contract. By 2016 97% of the premises in Staffordshire would be connected to the fibre broadband network. The project would be delivered in 8 phases over the two year fibre deployment period, starting in 2014 and due for completion in 2016. Over 500 individual structures would be upgraded during this period, deploying 1 million metres of fibre in the process.

Approximately 90,000 premises in the intervention area would be connected to the fibre network. Communities would start to benefit from May 2014 and would be able to order superfast broadband services. The first communities to benefit would be Rugeley, Colton, Ash Bank, Clifton Campville, Marchington, Yarnfield, Yoxall, Kings Bromley, Burntwood, Heath Hayes and Penkridge. It was anticipated that additional communities would be announced on a quarterly basis as the project progressed.

This project had developed quickly and the Cabinet Member. Economy and Infrastructure, congratulated Officers on the progress achieved. In particular he shared the excellent comments made as a result of the BDUK project assurance review on this project.

The County Council had ownership of the project, having funded the £7.44m. A claw back mechanism was in place, however if take up was greater than 20% the additional revenues would be shared between the funding partners (ie the County Council/BDUK and BT) pro-rata their investment. The County Council would reinvest this funding to address the final 5% of premises not able to access Superfast Broadband.

Members asked what the maximum distance from the green box was for receiving superfast broadband speeds. Although there was no firm data from BT on this it was suggested that between 1 and 1.2 kilometres away from the green box was the distance within which residents should receive the 24 megabits per second, with 1.8 kilometres line length being the distance where no appreciable difference would be seen.

In sixth months time an update report could be brought to the Select Committee to share the progress made and to highlight any solutions found to addressing the 5% unable to access superfast broadband.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be noted and that a further progress report be received in six months time.

56. Work Programme

The Scrutiny and Support Manager informed the Select Committee of the following suggested amendments to the work programme:

- the Rationalisation of Household Waste Recycling Centres, which was due to be considered at the 12 May Select Committee, had been withdrawn from that agenda following a decision at the 16 April 2014 Cabinet;
- a new item on the Learning and Skills Strategy would now be added to the 12 May Select Committee;
- a progress report updating members on the Ofsted Inspection of School Improvement Arrangements to be added to the work programme for consideration on 5 September 2014; and
- two extra items be added to the work programme on Tourism and an update on Superfast Broadband.

Members were aware that the issue of Sportshire and the legacy of the Olympic games had been referred to, and considered by Corporate Review Committee. Members asked that the appropriate extract from the minutes of Sportshire and the legacy of the Olympic Games item be circulated to members so that they can reassure themselves that the Olympic legacy had been debated.

Members were informed that Mr Neil Taylor's (Parent Governor Representative) term of office had now finished and the Select Committee agreed that a letter thanking him for his contribution should be sent.

RESOLVED – That, a) the amendments to the work programme be approved; and b) the extract of the Corporate Review Committee minutes on Sportshire and the Olympic Games legacy be circulated to Members.

Chairman

Documents referred to in these minutes as Schedules are not appended, but will be attached to the signed copy of the Minutes of the meeting. Copies, or specific information contained in them, may be available on request.