

COUNCIL



24 JANUARY 2013 - 4:00PM

PRESENT: Councillor M I Archer, Councillor G G R Booth, Councillor M G Bucknor, Councillor Mrs V M Bucknor, Councillor T R Butcher, Councillor J F Clark, Councillor D W Connor, Councillor M F J Cotterell, Councillor Mrs C R Cox, Councillor M J Curtis, Councillor J R Farmer, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor S Garratt, Councillor P Hatton, Councillor D Hodgson, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor M J Humphrey, Councillor P Jolley, Councillor B M Keane, Councillor S J E King, Councillor A K Melton, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor Mrs F S Newell, Councillor D C Oliver, Councillor C C Owen, Councillor D R Patrick, Councillor T E W Quince, Councillor C J Seaton, Councillor D Stebbing, Councillor W Sutton, Councillor G Swan .

APOLOGIES: Councillor J R Chambers, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor K G Mayor, Councillor Mrs K F Mayor, Councillor Skoulding, Councillor P A Tunley, Councillor F H Yeulett

48/12 COUNCILLOR SCRIMSHAW

Members joined the Chairman in standing in remembrance of Councillor Scrimshaw, who sadly passed away very suddenly on 5 January 2013.

The Chairman stated that Councillor Scrimshaw was a committed Member of the Council since his first election in December 2008. He was a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a member of Planning Committee and had also served on Licensing Committee. Councillor Scrimshaw was also a Member of Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary Parish Councils. Robert and his dedication to Fenland will be fondly remembered.

49/12 TO SIGN AND CONFIRM THE MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF 20 DECEMBER 2012

Request from Councillor Cornwell

The Chairman informed Members that Councillor Cornwell had contacted him requesting that a note be attached to the minutes regarding Minute 47/12 - Fenland Electoral Review, penultimate bullet point stating, "Councillor French stated that March councillors were delighted with the review". Councillor Cornwell would like it noted that he was not aware that this statement had been made or he would have challenged it. As a March member Councillor Mrs French had no remit to speak on his behalf and he was certainly not "delighted" with the submission, indeed he had made it clear throughout the whole process that he did not agree with the submissions, could not support them and intended to submit counter proposals to the Commission.

The Chairman stated he was not intending to change the minutes as they were accurate and can only be altered if inaccurate.

Councillor Mrs French responded to Councillor Cornwell's request stating that March Town Council was originally not happy, which did include Councillor Cornwall and therefore the review was sent back to Fenland District Council resulting in further changes being made. At a subsequent meeting, which did include Councillor Cornwell it was then agreed that everyone was happy with the submissions.

Request from Councillor Booth

Councillor Booth requested that the following point be added to Minutes 46/12, "Councillor Booth stated that he felt one area in the calculation that was open to challenge was the 2% increase in council tax benefit claimants when DWP had predicted nil growth, it was not forward looking".

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting on 20 December 2013 be confirmed and signed noting the above comments.

50/12 TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.

Councillor Miss S Hoy - The Chairman welcomed Councillor Miss Hoy to Council as this was her first meeting as Councillor for Hill Ward in Wisbech;

Public Speaking - The Chairman stated he had received a request from Mr Trevor Watson to speak under the public speaking rules to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Melton. Members agreed to suspend standing order 22 to enable the question to be posed before the Fenland Core Strategy item to which it relates;

Annual Tea Party Event - The Chairman thanked all those who attended and supported his Annual Tea Party Event, jointly hosted with the Chairman of the Fenland Twinning Association and apologised for his non-attendance from himself and other Members due to the extended planning committee;

Award for Countywide Asset Partnership - The Chief Executive stated he was pleased to announce that the Making Assets Count partnership, widely known as MAC, for which Fenland District Council is a key player, has been successful in achieving the 2012 Association of Chief Estates Surveyors (ACES) 'Excellence in Property Management Award'. The award was presented at a recent ceremony at the Associations Annual Meeting and was received by the Leader of the Council and representatives from other Cambridgeshire public sector partners. MAC is a partnership of such public bodies across Local Government, Fire, Police, PCT and other key public sector bodies. It aims to help reduce the size of the public estate by rationalising and making better use of public buildings, and in turn join up services or local communities to improve delivery yet in turn improve organisational efficiencies in these difficult financial times. Fenland is helping lead the way by developing innovative projects such as:

- The land swap at Coalwharf Road, Wisbech to allow the new Pupil Referral Unit and a demonstration housing project to go forward;
- Working with the Ministry of Justice and partners over the vacant Courthouse in Wisbech.

Further projects in Fenland are being explored and developed as part of this wide ranging initiative. The Chairman of the Council presented the certificate to the Leader and Councillor Clark on behalf of the Council.

51/12 TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM, AND PROVIDE ANSWERS TO, COUNCILLORS IN RELATION TO MATTERS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, ACCORD WITH THE PROVISIONS OF PROCEDURE RULES 8.4 AND 8.6.

Councillor Booth stated that Councillor Scrimshaw would be missed and that Fenland District Council had lost one of its most diligent and conscientious councillors.

Councillor Booth asked the Leader:

- With regard to the recent reports of the increase in burial costs which is not inline with inflation, why was Fenland increasing these at such a rate. Councillor Melton responded stating that the proposed Fees and Charges would be considered by Overview and Scrutiny on 28 January 2013 where it would be properly debated; he understood that it was not in

- line with inflation but that the fees and charges were in line with neighbouring authorities;
- If any progress had been made with regard to the appointment of a Cabinet Member to be responsible for planning matters to which Councillor Melton stated that this responsibility was spread around the remaining Cabinet Members and he was awaiting the conclusion of the planning committee before progressing. Councillor Melton did announce that he had invited Councillor Miss Hoy to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

As Standing Orders had been suspended Members asked questions:

- Councillor Mrs French asked the Leader for an update on what Cambridgeshire County Council proposed with regard to sports facilities in March. The Leader responded stating he had received a statement from Cambridgeshire County Council, that had also been forwarded to the press, stating that Cambridgeshire County Council's plans for sports facilities did include plans for March North. This would give certainty to the local community groups to bid for funding;
- Councillor Archer stated that last night's planning meeting had done an excellent job at bringing Fenland District Council back from the brink of disaster but asked the Leader if anyone would be held accountable as to how Fenland had got into this issue and would the Leader take any responsibility. Councillor Melton responded stating discussions will take place and that he would not take any responsibility as he had not been involved in this issue or made any comments regarding it. He understood that last night's planning meeting was very well chaired, very constructive and everyone had chance to enter into the debate;
- Councillor Mrs Newell congratulated the Chairman of Planning Committee on a successful meeting.

52/12 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chairman called upon Trevor Watson to pose his questions to the Leader of the Council.

Trevor Watson stated:

- He thanked Councillor Melton for allowing him to speak at such short notice;
- He had been a resident of North East March for 25 years;
- The objection to the proposed allocation of housing in North East March is a view by many hundreds of people who feel it is important to retain the special characters that make the area unique;
- The residents of March have signed a petition objecting to the proposal;
- 110 letters of objection have been sent to the Council;
- A separate petition from children received 42 signatures;
- The reasons for objecting to this allocation are based on sound and logical planning reasons:
 - Located on the end of a built up town that consists of small residential estates and to allocate 80 acres of land including 800 houses in this area would destroy the character and also be at odds with Fenland District Council's objectives - this is why the area has not been used in the past;
 - This area has problems getting access to the town centre due to the railway crossing gates that frequently causes hold up in the traffic - imagine what an extra 1600 vehicles from this proposal would result in. The traffic issue which is already bad would be made worse;
 - The proposal would result in a major visual intrusion with up to 60 acres of farm land being wiped out at a time when the district should be growing more crops of its own - it is not only wrong, it is unsustainable;
 - Neale Wade School is two miles from this area which would result in hundreds of school children walking to school;
- Cambridgeshire County Council could offer a possible solution regarding the area for housing and the playing field services which would be in keeping with the general character of this part of March; if this amendment is carried forward they would still oppose the

allocation of 60 acres to housing;

- It was the view of the objectors that these were all strong and logical planning reasons to delete this allocation as they care about the environment and wished to keep the special quality of that part of town.

The Chairman thanked Trevor Watson for sharing the views of local residents and stated that his comments had been noted.

Councillor Melton thanked Trevor Watson for attending stating it was great to see public participation.

53/12 FENLAND CORE STRATEGY – PROPOSED SUBMISSION VERSION

Councillor Melton introduced the Fenland Core Strategy stating it was an ambitious plan and thanked colleagues, in particular Councillor Owen and officers for the hard work put into this document and Members for their forbearance in this process. He stated that today was not the end of the story as there would be ample opportunity to feed into the process.

Councillor Owen presented the Fenland Core Strategy - Proposed Submission Version report stating that the purpose of today was to:

- Seek approval from Members of the Core Strategy (Proposed Submission Version) and the Policies Map;
- Consult the public and stakeholders and authorise the document to be submitted to the Secretary of State for public Examination.

Key Issues

- Sets the planning framework for the district to 2031;
- Sets the growth targets for housing and other matters, as well as other planning policies;
- Will replace the 1993 Fenland District Wide Local Plan;
- Will compliment national planning policies as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012;
- If approved, will be consulted upon for the final time before being 'submitted' to the Secretary of State for scrutiny by an independent Inspector.

Core Strategy Headlines

- Pro growth strategy - focused on promoting the health and wellbeing of Fenland residents, housing growth and jobs growth;
- Target - 11,000 new homes and 7,200 jobs;
- A flexible, criteria based document, to guide development (rather than being prescriptive about where and when growth should occur);
- Major growth focused on the four market towns with large scale urban extensions at each;
- Policies to ensure proposals are sustainable such as design quality, flooding, infrastructure and transport

Recent Amendments

The document is broadly the same as originally envisaged at the start of the process 18 months ago and aligns to Members aspirations for a pro growth approach. The following changes have been made as a result of public, stakeholder and Member feedback from the version consulted on in July 2012:

- New policy on the "Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development", as required by government;
- New policy on Health and Wellbeing - emphasises Council's commitment to support and improve the health and wellbeing of its residents;
- New policy on Heritage Issues to accord with NPPF;

- New policy on Protecting our Natural Environment to accord with NPPF and address objections from Natural England, Wildlife Trust and Cambridgeshire County Council;
- New policy on Crime and Disorder recognising key role planning can have in reducing opportunities for crime and the fear of crime;
- Affordable housing policy clarified:
 - 1-4 dwellings no need to provide, or contribute towards affordable housing;
 - 5-9 dwellings - 20% affordable;
 - 10 or more dwellings - 25% to be affordable (reduced from 30%)
- North-East March ("Estover Road") allocation re-written - main purpose to enable enhanced open space and play facilities, plus clarity on the need for thorough transport assessments and the possibility of requiring the delivery of a northern link road;
- New section on 'infrastructure' - a summary of infrastructure items found in supporting Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP);
- Settlement Hierarchy policy amended to permit single dwelling infill developments in named small settlements and to give more flexibility to the amount and location of growth in small villages;
- Wisbech policy amended - more clearly reflects the need for transport infrastructure for growth in Wisbech and also that West Wisbech is phased and depends on a western link road being built;
- The 'Exception Policy' for Affordable Housing in rural settlements has been removed, as without DABs there is now no restrictive policy against which an 'exception' could be made.

North-East March (Estover Road)

As already specified, this policy has been re-written to take into account of a significant number of comments and objections from local people including:

- Petition with 569 signatures;
- 110 individual letters/emails;
- Children's petition with 41 signatures

The petition is being dealt with as part of this process rather than the council's normal petition process as this process, incorporating the external inspection process enable appropriate public participation.

Policies now sets out that the allocation will be:

- A focus for enhanced open space and recreation both in terms of quantity and quality of facilities (but not necessarily in exactly the same location as now);
- 450 dwellings - to help enable this;
- Key infrastructure provided in line with phasing plans;
- Transport Assessment to ensure development works, possibly with the provision of the northern link road already identified in the March MTTs.

Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP)

Members are also asked to approve an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP):

- This is key to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is provided at the same time as new development;
- It sets out strategic, costed, phased and prioritised infrastructure to enable growth to come forward in a well planned and sustainable way;
- It is a live document and will be updated on a regular basis as new information becomes available;
- Developers will have regard to the IDP when considering Policy CS13 (Infrastructure) in the Core Strategy;
- It will also be essential to establish the Council's own spending on infrastructure and in lobbying government and stakeholders for funding.

Next Steps

1. If approved, the Core Strategy and Policies Map will be subject to a final round of public consultation for 6 weeks starting in mid February (Final date yet to be agreed);
2. Comments will be collated and sent directly to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) in April - the Council will make no further changes to the Plan;
3. PINS will appoint an Independent Inspector and set a date for a Public Examination (likely to be June/July 2013);
4. The Inspector will consider the Plan and representations and invite interested parties (including members of the public) to participate in a number of Hearing Sessions. The sessions are open to anyone to attend as observers;
5. Inspector's Report by late Autumn 2013;
6. Council adopts Plan late 2013/early 2014.

To Summarise

Not just a planning document, it is a plan to change Fenland for the better by creating:

- New jobs and improved skills and wage levels;
- Dynamic town centres;
- Vibrant villages;
- Improved housing and infrastructure;
- Raised aspirations, opportunities and improved health

Councillor Mrs Bucknor made reference to the Wisbech section of the Core Strategy stating that she had previously raised the issue of the A47 at both the December and January Council meetings yet it had still not been included. She explained that development cannot take place without good transport structure and that there was not one line within the Core Strategy to do with the A47 that was meaningful; had it even been costed?

Councillor Mrs Bucknor also raised the point that higher educational attainment and skills levels are essential for Wisbech yet the Core Strategy states there is no demand for higher education across Fenland; this is unacceptable. The development of the engineering block at the College of West Anglia is positive but the need has been identified for another secondary school. It is hoped there would be an agreement forthcoming that the college would not be sold off for housing albeit run down at the moment. Councillor Mrs Bucknor questioned where another secondary school could be located there as there was nothing in the strategy stating where the proposed site could be. Councillor Mrs Bucknor also asked what the Council would be doing with regard to the Court House.

Councillor Melton explained that with regard to education that both himself and officers from Cambridgeshire County Council had met and toured Wisbech to identify sites and where required ongoing work was needed and as Wisbech grows, a second secondary school will be needed and Fenland cannot provide this but can provide the growth to support it. He also explained that the college is a separate body to Fenland which was expanding and that Fenland had invested in significantly. He explained that when a need is identified Fenland would talk to all land owners and would seek to maximise assets to benefit the whole of Fenland.

Councillor Melton pointed out that with regard to the A47 and the lack of reference to it within the Core Strategy that pages 9 and 10 of the IDP were dedicated to it. He explained that Fenland now has the support from Norfolk County Council and West Norfolk District Council and that Fenland was committed to bringing the A47 forward as soon as possible but it has to be realised that the money is not there for all major infrastructure development; Fenland cannot provide this but would be there lobbying ministers at every opportunity to procure money for the A47.

Councillor King explained he thought Councillor Mrs Bucknor was confusing secondary education with further and higher education and that Cambridgeshire County Council was looking for a secondary facility.

Councillor Cotterell stated he wished to draw attention to pages 18,19 and 58 regarding the future of Fenland villages and that if development is restricted too much then the villages would be killed off. Agricultural, although still important, is not as important as it was thirty or forty years ago. He hoped Members would look at villages as some are now fighting for existence having lost their churches, pubs and schools although there is still good community spirit within them; Fenland does not want these to become dormitories and asked for Parish Councils to look at and comment on the Core Strategy with regard to villages.

Councillor Melton echoed the points that Councillor Cotterell had stated and appealed to Parish Councils as some of them will do anything to halt any development whatsoever resulting in no infrastructure or investment into the villages; infrastructure and growth go hand in hand. Councillor Melton stated that the villages should be allowed to grow organically and that Fenland would like to see small scale, high quality developments on the outskirts of villages, not large developments as this does nothing for social interaction and small businesses should be encouraged within the villages. Land allocations need to be looked at although this is not a carte blanche to build executive homes but the future of the young people of Fenland needs to be safeguarded with an added stock of affordable homes for them to move into.

Councillor Curtis stated that:

- He would support the Core Strategy but begged the Council to listen to the comments that he was to make;
- He explained that he had concerns particularly in the huge in-balance on housing and the economic position which could result in those that live in Fenland working outside the district and companies employing and paying business rates outside of Fenland;
- He added that Fenland needs to show ambition and make people want to invest in Fenland;
- He urged Members not to think about the A605 link as just a Whittlesey issue;
- He asked the Leader to accept the thanks of all Whittlesey councillors, including himself, for an outstanding effort at the planning meeting which ran for seven and a half hours;
- He stated that the introductory statement to the Core Strategy talks about flexible criteria rather than being prescriptive and does this need to be looked at as the Core Strategy had been a barrier at the planning meeting as the Members were fighting against the district wide local plan;
- He stated that a number of Members who represent villages do think their villages need more growth to sustain them therefore the Council needs to look at how to make them vibrant places to live.

Councillor Melton thanked Councillor Curtis and welcomed his comment regarding the villages. He also thanked the great efforts of officers and Members of the planning committee for their hard work. With regard to the A605, there will be more traffic going through Whittlesey, especially with the proposed development, as the A605 could be a major artery to economic growth in this part of Cambridgeshire therefore improvements are needed to ease the access to Peterborough. Councillor Melton stated that the comments with regard to business rates had been noted and taken on board by Councillor Clark as the revenue is essential to Fenland.

Councillor Archer welcomed Councillor Melton's comments regarding organic growth of the villages and stated that the IDP made no mention of integrating transport and that Manea has no links to Chatteris. Councillor Archer asked if Fenland needed to adopt a policy to reflect yesterday's planning decision.

Councillor Melton referred to the Fenland Railway Strategy and shared Councillor Archer's views that Manea station is under used. He stated that there is a need to demonstrate to the Rail Board that more stopping and improvements to Manea station are required.

Councillor Booth stated that the Core Strategy contained good policies and he supported it but explained that:

- Some of the later amendments have detracted from the earlier version in July;
- The new definitions are vague and do not give any idea to the type or scale of development;
- Previously there was a benchmark on villages but now numbers are not used;
- He wished to change the definition back to the July version with regard to the growth of the villages as this would give developers a benchmark to work from.

Councillor Booth stated that the Infrastructure Plan needs to be put on hold and looked at again:

- The Council is not being ambitious enough with regard to the A47;
- The people of the North East March are not being listened to and Fenland needs to show it is listening to people's views;
- He is concerned that the playing field allocation will be further out of town and therefore people will have to travel further;
- Policy CS12 needs changing as it does not consider the flood risks to mobile homes.

Councillor Owen replied that:

- The CS12 policy with regard to mobile homes seems logical;
- He commented that Fenland has listened to the public and made changes accordingly which is why the document differs from the original;
- Affordable housing is made clear in the document;
- The change in village numbers is because organic growth will occur naturally;
- Regarding the infrastructure of the A47, a lot has already been achieved but it all takes time which is why it is kept within the plan;
- Regarding the North East allocation he could not see a real problem with people having further to travel.

Councillor Farmer stated that he supported the document but felt the statement on page 9 point 2.1.5 regarding almost 40% of Fenland's working population commute out of the district for work was not detailed enough as it does not state whether this is unusual. Peterborough is on Fenland's border and has many industries to which the population would commute. Wisbech has one or two new factories where Fenland people are clearly employed; he asked if Fenland was creating employment or putting large buildings on land that is damaging the infrastructure and asked how many people come into Fenland to work.

Councillor Melton replied stating that infrastructure needs to be provided for those that wish to work or invest in Fenland and there needs to be opportunities for work therefore the people of Fenland need to be well educated and skilled if we are to keep them within Fenland. If Fenland can attract employers into the district then this will bring people in.

Councillor King reminded Members that this is a high level document and is not suppose to go into great detail. He agreed with the comments of Councillor Curtis that Fenland needs to think about things differently and it is important to allow this document to develop organically. He stated he had made many comments regarding Wisbech and was happy with the document. Councillor King stated that it was essential Fenland communicates with Norfolk to ensure the infrastructure is put in place; a joint venture is essential. Councillor King stated that the spending on flood defences has increased the flood risk to level 3 and would be a major barrier to growth as new developments would need to spend more money therefore the Council must campaign to have this reviewed.

Councillor Melton agreed with Councillor King about the flood risk increase which was frustrating as it would stop development therefore Fenland would be pushing this forward. He stated discussions had taken place with Kings Lynn and West Norfolk to work closer with them. They recognised the importance of working with Fenland as it is not possible to work in isolation; this would be a strain on the infrastructure of Wisbech and impact education due to parental choice

with students crossing into the district.

Councillor Quince welcomed Trevor Watson to the meeting and stated he would do his best to ensure that March North is listened to. He explained that both a bypass and another bridge over the river is needed but this will take time.

Councillor Melton thanked Councillor Quince for his comments. He stated that a bypass is necessary to open up huge amounts of industrial land around the prison with easy access to the new road and improvements around the railway as the facility and land is there and should be utilised.

Councillor Patrick asked when Fenland would start preparing plans for the A47 as Norfolk have already started and perhaps it would be advantageous to work with Norfolk on this as a joint venture.

Councillor Melton stated this was exactly what was now happening; this had not happened previously due to Norfolk not being interested in the A47 at the Wisbech end but they now realise it is in their interest to get easier access to the Midlands.

Councillor Booth proposed that:

- The Core Strategy be amended as per the definitions for limited growth and small villages in the July version;
- The North East March development be deleted from the plan;
- Defer the IDP

This was seconded by Councillor Patrick.

A vote was taken regarding Councillor Booth's proposal to which 3 voted in favour and the remainder against.

A vote was then taken to revert back to the original recommendations to which 24 voted for and 4 against.

It was DECIDED:

1. **To APPROVE the Core Strategy - the Proposed Submission Version for the purpose of:**
 - public consultation;
 - at the end of that consultation, submission to the Secretary of State for Examination;
2. **To APPROVE the Policies Map - Proposed Submission Version for the purpose of:**
 - public consultation;
 - at the end of that consultation, submission to the Secretary of State for Examination;
3. **To APPROVE the Fenland Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) 2013 as a supporting document to the Core Strategy and as a 'live' document with the ability for infrastructure items within it to be updated and added as and when appropriate;**
 - To APPROVE that the IDP be brought back to Cabinet at least once a year for a full refresh and approval by Cabinet;
4. **Delegate to the Corporate Director, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder if necessary, approval of any necessary minor adjustments to the Core Strategy, Policies Map or IDP.**

54/12 FENLAND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2012 - 2031

Councillor Seaton presented the Fenland Economic Development Strategy 2012-2031 report.

Councillor Booth stated this was a better policy as it contained more detail and therefore he would support it.

Councillor King stated he was pleased with what had been achieved with the Strategy and was excellent as the rolling action plan gives a degree of accountability.

It was DECIDED to APPROVE the adoption of the Fenland Economic Development Strategy 2012-2031 and with rolling Action Plan.

55/12 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSON

Councillor Melton presented the Appointment of an Independent Person report in the absence of Councillor Yeulett.

Councillor Booth asked if it had been checked whether the successful applicants had any links at all to Fenland District Council.

Councillor Melton stated there had been several applicants; all had gone through a thorough process with every criteria and check having been made.

Councillor Mrs Newell asked if training would be given to which Councillor Melton stated that it would be.

The appointment of Anne Hay and Claire Hawden-Beal as recommended by the Conduct Committee be APPROVED.

6:10pm

Chairman