

ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE

27th May 2003

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Southerd (Chair), Councillor Taylor (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Carroll, Isham, Jones and Stone.

Conservative Group

Councillors Atkin, Bladen, Ford, Mrs. Hall and Martin.

In Attendance

Councillor Bell (Labour Group).

APOLOGY

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Whyman, M.B.E. (Labour Group).

EDS/1. MINUTES

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 6th March 2003 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

EDS/2. REPORTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES – MONITORING OF COUNCIL PLANS AND STRATEGIES

The Chair of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Bell presented this item. The Scrutiny Committee had undertaken a review of arrangements for monitoring Council plans and strategies and it was submitting reports to each of the three policy committees. A background was given to the Review and a small working group had been appointed to undertake this matter. It had produced a comprehensive list of all the current plans and strategies and the list contained over one hundred items. Appended to the report were details of the plans and strategies relating to this Committee. The schedule included details of each Plan's status, its date of approval and review, the responsible Officer within the Corporate Management Team and the Committee responsible for the development and implementation of the plan or strategy. The Working Group had considered that it would be impractical to review the monitoring arrangements in detail and the Scrutiny Committee had agreed to refer this matter to policy committees for further discussion.

The report then set out a number of issues for policy committees to consider. In the White Paper "Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services", the Government had announced proposals to streamline and rationalise the number of plans that it required Councils to produce. Essentially, Councils judged "excellent" under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment would only be required to prepare a Best Value Performance Plan and Community Strategy. A key decision for policy committees would be whether to retain certain plans and strategies in order to support the effective management of the organisation. A further consideration in terms of rationalisation was the proposed South Derbyshire Community Strategy.

The Chair welcomed the report and he felt it was particularly useful for new Members, to give an outline of the plans and strategies in existence. Once the report had been presented to the three policy committees, each political group could consider the rationalisation of plans and strategies. Members commented on the need to ensure that the review was implemented, noted that statutory plans could not be removed and discussed the variation in review dates for some of the plans and strategies.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee receives the report of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

EDS/3. SERVICE PLANS – FINAL MONITORING REPORTS

The Committee received the final Service Plan Monitoring Reports for the Planning Services, Economic Development, Technical Services and Environmental Health Divisions. It was noted that the Technical Services and Environmental Health Service Plans included matters that were the responsibility of the Housing and Community Services Committee. Similarly, the Economic Development Service Plan included matters which were the responsibility of the Finance and Management Committee.

Service Plans provided an important part of the Council's performance management framework. The current service plans had been approved in November 2001 as the basis for Service Delivery throughout the current financial year. The monitoring reports reviewed progress at the end of the Service Plan period. Details were provided of the sections contained within each Service Plan and Officers took the opportunity to highlight particular issues.

With regard to the Planning Service Plan, further information was sought on ensuring fair access to the service for those with disabilities and the translation of information into other languages. Brownfield development statistics were also discussed.

Under the Economic Development Service Plan, Members discussed the closure of public toilets previously for financial reasons. It was questioned whether in the longer term public toilet provision could be increased in appropriate locations to further the Council's tourism aims.

In response to a question on the Environmental Health Service Plan, information was provided on the process to remove abandoned vehicles and details were given of the responsive service provided by the "Clean Team".

The Committee considered the Technical Services Division Service Plan and comment was made on the decrease in the weight of waste collected per head of population. A Hilton Ward Member referred to the composting scheme. Difficulties were being experienced by some larger families on the new residential development, in managing with a fortnightly collection of refuse. For larger families, an increased capacity wheeled bin was available and side refuse could be collected from properties involved in the composting scheme. There appeared a need to inform residents of this service, possibly through an article in the composting newsletter. There was also a need to remind residents not to overfill the wheeled bins. Members asked about the mechanisms in place to inform new residents about initiatives such as the

composting scheme and the opportunities for increasing the range of kerbside collections.

RESOLVED:-

That the final Service Plan Monitoring Reports for 2002/03 be received.

EDS/4. PROPOSED DIVERSION PUBLIC FOOTPATH NO. 5 (PART) PARISH OF ETWALL

It was reported that an application had been received to divert a section of Public Footpath No. 5 in the Parish of Etwall. Details were provided of the current definitive line, the proposed diversion and the assessment of the Public Rights of Way Officer.

Informal consultations had been undertaken and no objections had been received. It was therefore concluded that the proposed diversion was acceptable.

RESOLVED:-

That an Order be made under the provisions of Section 119 of the Highways Act 1980 to divert part of the definitive line of Public Footpath No. 5 in the Parish of Etwall.

EDS/5. NEW-GENERATION ENTERPRISE ZONES

It was reported that the Alliance for Regional Aid (ARA) acted as the collective voice of local authorities in Britain's traditional industrial areas. It brought together four local authority associations, including the Coalfields Communities Campaign of which this Council was a member. The ARA was campaigning, including lobbying the Government, for a successor to Enterprise Zones. These were local areas where specific additional incentives were available towards investment and job creation. Enterprise Zones were established throughout the 1980's and mid 1990's. However, current Government policy only supported the creation of new Enterprise Zones in exceptional circumstances.

These initiatives encouraged private sector activity, creating jobs and bringing derelict land back into use, by removing certain tax burdens and relaxing other statutory or administrative controls. Enterprise Zones had caused some problems and examples were provided. A successor scheme needed to build upon the positive features of the old regime and discard identified weaknesses. Examples of the types of incentive that might be considered were set out within the report.

As a member of the Coalfields Communities Campaign, the ARA originally contacted the Council in July 2002, asking it to identify specific sites that might be appropriate for new generation Enterprise Zones. The area encompassing Tetron Point, Cadley Hill Industrial Estate and the Local Plan allocation to the south of Cadley Hill was suggested initially as a possible site. Since that time, the new Local Plan had removed the allocation to the south of Cadley Hill and a large section of the Tetron Point site had been allocated. It was therefore unlikely that the remaining area would be large enough to qualify as an Enterprise Zone. However, East Staffordshire Borough Council had also identified land to the south of Branston/Centrum

West as a proposal and there might be an opportunity to look at a combined scheme.

The ARA had requested that Members be informed of the campaign and be asked to convey support to the local Member of Parliament. It sought to secure the support of the Council's local partners through the Local Strategic Partnership and asked that the Council wrote directly to the Chancellor to express its support.

Members' views were sought in principle on this matter and they were asked whether they wished to support the inclusion of the identified sites, possibly in conjunction with those in East Staffordshire, as a potential Enterprise Zone. In general, Members were supportive of the initiative and the identified site. However, a further potential site was an area of land to the east of Woodhouse Street, Woodville. Members questioned the minimum area of land required to qualify for designation as an Enterprise Zone and examples of current site sizes were quoted. Other issues considered were the relaxation of planning controls against the potential economic development benefits.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Council supports the Alliance for Regional Aid's campaign for New Generation Enterprise Zones and lobbies the Government and other organisations as requested.***
- (2) That, in principle the Council supports the inclusion of Tetron Point, Cadley Hill Industrial Estate and a site at Woodhouse Street, Woodville extending eastwards, as a potential New Generation Enterprise Zone, or possibly as part of a wider zone linked to sites in Burton-on-Trent.***

EDS/6. DEVELOPMENT CONTROL BEST VALUE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

It was reported that the Development Control Service was inspected in October 2001. The Service was judged to be fair with no prospects of improvement. A number of recommendations were made by the Best Value Inspectors. These fell into two broad categories, addressing shortcomings at a corporate level and within the service delivery itself. A revised Implementation Plan was prepared to reflect these recommendations. Inspectors had since returned to check on progress and delivery of the Implementation Plan. A copy of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations on this follow-up visit were appended to the report. In summary, the Inspectors commended the Council for the progress it had made but they remained concerned about certain areas both at the corporate and service delivery levels. This had resulted in further recommendations which were set out within the report.

There had been some disagreement with the findings of the first inspection, but the Inspectorate had confirmed that its overall intention was to be complimentary. Officers continued to take the view that the Inspectors concerns about ignorance of what customers wanted was misplaced. However, there was an opportunity for further gauging of customers' views through a questionnaire that was required as a Best Value Performance Indicator. A report had been made to the Inspectors about the public speaking at the Development Control Committee. This was being addressed as part of the modernising agenda and would ensure that equity and

resource implications were addressed fully at the corporate level. There were a considerable number of issues to be tackled in the Division at present. The Inspector's suggestion that a trial of public speaking be established at the Development Control Committee was considered not to be the best way forward at this time. Delivery of the procurement strategy was being progressed as part of reviewing the Policy and Best Value Service Plan. All the recommendations made by the Inspectors could be subsumed into a revision of the Planning Service Plan, rather than revising the Implementation Plan. Members pursued the concerns raised by the Inspector and were assured of customer satisfaction with the service provided, whilst noting the current pressures on Development Control Officers.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee notes the findings of the Best Value Inspector.***
- (2) That the Inspector's recommendations and any unfinished business from the Best Value Implementation Plan be included within the forthcoming revision of the Planning Service Plan.***
- (3) That the proposed actions contained within the report be accepted and pursued.***

EDS/7. HOUSING DESIGN AND LAYOUT (SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE)

It was reported that Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) was employed by local planning authorities to add detail and aid the application of policies contained in the Local Plan. The Council was required to consult widely on the format and content of such guidance, prior to its adoption. This would ensure that the guidance would carry weight when applied either in the determination of planning applications or as a material consideration, set before Inspectors on appeal. This SPG required revision due to the relatively recent publication of revised Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note No. 3 on housing. The basic thrust of the PPG was that new development should be located within urban areas wherever possible and in sustainable locations, having a particular regard to local distinctiveness. The Government had issued further informal guidance to aid interpretation of PPG 3, which had meant a re-drafting. The PPG also placed greater insistence at a local level that new housing layouts should be more intensive, in terms of the number of houses per hectare and that there should be a higher quality of design and layout promoted. The draft SPG sought to interpret this and to direct developers towards a form of layout that was likely to be acceptable to this Council. However, it moved away from the traditional stance of this Council, which sought to ensure that space about and between dwellings were at a set level, to a position where only existing dwellings were protected from intrusive and overbearing forms of new development. This would have the effect of allowing developers within new housing areas to accommodate a larger number of houses, whilst allowing innovative and interesting designs.

Additionally, the SPG reflected the stance of the PPG and the latest revision to the Local Plan, in promoting lower levels of car parking provision. This reflected the Government's intention to reduce the reliance on the private motor vehicle.

Members discussed the consultation arrangements for the SPG. It was felt that customers should be consulted and use made of either the Citizens Panel or the Council's Area Meetings. The consultation period should be extended to allow for this. When the matter was reconsidered by the Committee, a copy of the existing and proposed SPG's would be required to enable comparison. A Woodville Ward Member voiced concerns about the revised guidelines and the increased density of development. There were concerns about inadequate garden space for families and a need to design and locate public open space to enable use by children of all ages, whilst preventing disruption for adjacent residents.

To provide a context, Officers explained the relatively small proportion of new build property that would be affected by the SPG and the ongoing discussions with Leisure Officers about open space design. Comment was made about market forces and the need for developers to meet customer's needs, to ensure the sale of their properties.

A Member referred to the recent visit to Tewkesbury where Members viewed an innovative estate design. He noted the Government's aim to reduce reliance on the private motor vehicle, but referred to the reduction in public transport services, which would need to be taken into account for developments in rural areas. Other Members reinforced concerns about density of development and the need for appropriate public open space to prevent nuisance problems in the future. The design of roof lights and recycling issues were also discussed.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the draft supplementary planning guidance note relating to housing design and layout be amended to reflect Members' comments.***
- (2) That the guidance note be circulated for public consultation, to such parties as is deemed appropriate and that the consultation exercise includes use of the Council's Area Meetings.***
- (3) That the results of this consultation exercise be reported to a future Meeting of the Committee.***

EDS/8. DISBURSEMENT OF PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT 2003/04

It was reported that the Council had received a Planning Delivery Grant for 2003/04 in the sum of £75,000. Continuing grant should be available for two further years, on the basis of improvements in performance against various reported measures of the Planning Service.

The grant was not ring-fenced, but would no doubt be dependent in future years on performance improvements. There was anticipation within the Planning Service that additional resources would be devoted to match the high achievements. The deployment of additional staff already secured as a result of successful service developments, was critical to maintain the service at current output. There was a need to provide additional accommodation to overcome current overcrowded conditions and a need to replace dilapidated equipment and furniture. There was a requirement to conduct a customer satisfaction survey to meet the Government's Best Value Performance Indicator. This would entail considerable administrative and

computing/analysing input. Officers had explored the feasibility of contracting this work out.

To meet these concerns a number of proposals were submitted. The priorities were office accommodation, staff overtime, furniture and re-fitting, replacement of reprographic equipment and archiving. It was noted that this matter would need to be referred to the Finance and Management Committee.

Members considered the proposals and sought clarification on the replacement of corporate equipment for plotting digital images.

RESOLVED:-

That the Finance and Management Committee be recommended to authorise expenditure of up to £75,000 from the Planning Delivery Grant 2003/04 for those purposes identified within the report.

EDS/9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [ACCESS TO INFORMATION] ACT 1985)

RESOLVED:-

That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the Meeting as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that there would be disclosed exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Act indicated in brackets after each item.

MINUTES

The Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 6th March 2003 were received.

T. SOUTHERD

CHAIR