

OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

18th March 2002

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Bell (Chair) and Councillors Harrington and Routledge.

Conservative Group

Councillors Bladen and Mrs. Robbins.

In Attendance

J. Oake (Swadlincote Woodlands Regeneration Board) and Clive Mitchell (District Audit).

APOLOGY

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Richards (Vice-Chair) (Labour Group).

OV/25. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 21st January and of the Special Meeting held on 30th/31st January 2002 were taken as read, approved as true records and signed by the Chair.

OV/26. **EXIT STRATEGY – SWADLINCOTE WOODLAND FOREST PARK**

The Chair welcomed John Oake, Chair of the Swadlincote Woodlands Regeneration Board. He explained that the Overview Committee had been asked to look at the Exit Strategy for the Swadlincote Woodlands Forest Park and gave an outline of its discussions to date.

Mr. Oake spoke about the Board's formation, its original objectives and the funding secured through the Single Regeneration Budget. Over the Scheme's lifetime some forty wide-ranging projects had been delivered and the Swadlincote Woodlands Forest Park was one of the principal schemes. The site comprised some 33 hectares of land and Mr. Oake explained the previous land uses, the opportunities provided for new house building and the creation of a low maintenance Forest Park. The final scheme had seen the provision of toilets, play equipment and some community art. Originally, it had been intended to provide a Heritage Centre on the Site, but advice from consultants, particularly with regard to a proposed Visitor Centre had led to a review of thinking. Subsequently, the Sharpe's Pottery Resource Centre Project had been developed as a Heritage Scheme.

Information was submitted on the Board's composition and the recent review of establishment of some key partners. Several Members commented on the benefits of partnership working. The Chair asked about the future role of the Board and Mr. Oake explained it would continue for up to one year to undertake an appraisal process for the Scheme and to manage the Exit Strategy, so as to ensure the sustainability of projects.

Mr. Oake felt that the operational side of the Forest Park Scheme had been achieved to convert a derelict site into a useful area comprising new properties, a fully usable park, a network of paths to provide exercise, environmental education uses, a playground, toilet facilities and biodiversity. The aspirational side of the Scheme had not been delivered completely and particular reference was made to community art provision, which was less than was hoped for.

Mr. Oake spoke about the development of the vision for the Park and the hope to link it to other adjacent facilities. The provision of a bridge to span Derby Road was a project that had not come to fruition and Members discussed the opportunities to provide this at a future date. The benefits of a strong Local Strategic Partnership were recognised together with the funding opportunities it would provide. Mr. Oake referred to the Sub-regional Strategic Partnership, on which two seats had been secured by himself and the Council's Leader. He outlined the opportunities for a Heritage Trail involving local ceramics companies and the preservation of the former winding house adjacent to the Swadlincote Ski Centre.

The Facilities and Development Manager indicated that the future management and development of the Site could be delivered through a partnership arrangement. Some delays had been experienced, but it was intended to pursue such a partnership over the coming months. A commuted sum had been provided through a planning agreement for the residential development and this was being used for site maintenance and security. At current expenditure levels, this fund would be spent within approximately six years. It was likely that any partner would require a management fee from the commuted sum initially. However, it was hoped that over time, the partner would be able to secure other funding or income streams, reducing the revenue funding requirement from the Council. Consideration was given to possible commercial opportunities such as 'environmental holidays', school visits and adjacent leisure developments on the Nadins site, which could result in several small visitor attractions locally.

Reference was made to the success of "Friends Groups" established for other parks in the Urban Core. There was already the nucleus of the "Friends of the Swadlincote Woodlands Forest Park" and the development of this group might help to reduce maintenance costs and provide fundraising opportunities. This could provide a key part of the brief for any prospective partner. It would, however, be necessary to balance the role undertaken by the group, as this was a facility for the wider community as well as those residents living in the Park's vicinity. Details were provided of the current budget commitment for management and maintenance of the Park.

The Chair then summarised the main issues and ideas raised and thanked Mr. Oake for his contribution. It was agreed that a draft report be prepared and circulated to Members with a view to a final report being submitted to the Community Services Committee at its Meeting on 11th April 2002.

OV/27. **REVIEW OF THE NEW POLITICAL STRUCTURE**

The Chair suggested that this item be the subject of a Special Overview Committee Meeting and that feedback be sought on the new structure from Members and Officers. It was agreed that the Meeting be held on Wednesday, 3rd April 2002 at 3.00 p.m. Clive Mitchell confirmed that the

District Auditor's report into the review of the new political structure should be available by that date.

OV/28. **REPORTS OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

Councillor Routledge gave a brief outline of issues raised at the last Community Scrutiny Committee. With regard to the Best Value Review of Housing Services, it was noted that there had been no input from Social Services to date. The Social Services Department at Derbyshire County Council was currently being reviewed and details were given of ongoing staff changes. The Housing Investment Programme Bid had been submitted to the Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) at the end of July 2001. It had been assessed as "below average" and Councillor Routledge referred to the key points identified by GOEM. The Committee had discussed abandoned vehicles and requested the Environmental Services Committee to write to Government supporting proposals to deal with such vehicles more efficiently and effectively.

The Chair outlined those issues considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee. The review of the budget process had been completed and a report submitted to the Finance and Management Committee. Best Value Review updates had been provided for Human Resource Management and Asset Management. The Customer and Support Services Review had been suspended. The Chair was to undertake research into the planning application process and this matter would be considered at the next Corporate Scrutiny Committee Meeting. The Chair also referred to the special project "How Green is the Council". He explained the research undertaken to date and the proposal to visit an authority that was pursuing EMAS and then to develop general recommendations for consideration by a policy committee.

OV/29. **WORK PROGRAMMES**

The Policy and Best Value Manager circulated an action list for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. This provided details of those issues being pursued by each Committee, the action required and the proposed time scale. It was agreed to add Central Establishment Charges to the agenda for the next Corporate Scrutiny Committee Meeting. A Member enquired when feedback from the first consultation on the Local Plan would be considered. It was anticipated that the Environmental Services Committee would consider this in the Autumn.

In terms of the role of Scrutiny, the Deputy Chief Executive spoke about the development of the function. He felt it was working well and 'added value' to the decision-making process. The Chair sought Members' views on the revised committee arrangements and explained the general satisfaction expressed by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee. There was a feeling that some Members were not aware of the role performed by Scrutiny and this could be included in the annual report back. The Sheltered Housing Review had provided a valuable exercise to develop the scrutiny role. The value of site visits to give background knowledge on major issues and topics was also recognised.

R. BELL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.45 p.m.