

ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE

1st June 2006

**PRESENT:-**

**Labour Group**

Councillor Taylor (Chair), Councillor Dunn (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Carroll, Isham, Shepherd and Southerd (substitute for Councillor Tilley).

**Conservative Group**

Councillors Bale, Ford, Mrs. Hood and Mrs. Renwick (substitute for Councillor Mrs. Hall).

**In attendance**

Councillor Bell (Labour Group).

**APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillor Tilley (Labour Group) and Councillor Mrs. Hall (Conservative Group).

EDS/1. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th April 2006 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

**MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE**

EDS/2. **SWADLINCOTE TOWN CENTRE STUDY AND MASTERPLAN**

It was reported that the Swadlincote Town Centre Masterplan (STCM) developed recommended action plan proposals that were set out in the Swadlincote Vision and Strategy from February 2001. It comprised a multi million pound package of environmental improvements, primarily on public land, designed to capitalise on Swadlincote's heritage assets and promote its regeneration.

The preparation of the Vision and Strategy involved extensive public consultation. The development of the STCM had been guided by liaison with Members and Officers of the District Council, Officers of the County Council and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. It took into account the views of the community, following a public exhibition in March 2006.

The Masterplan had been designed as a tool for guiding comprehensive, phased improvements to the public realm over a period of about fifteen years. The works included re-paving, decluttering the streets, better lighting and signing and improvements to approaches, car parks and gateways. The Masterplan had been safety and access audited, to ensure that highway safety and access for people of all abilities was maintained. It was proposed that the pedestrian regime established in the early

1980's should continue. Access for vehicles would remain as existing, apart from no longer allowing vehicles to pass across the north side of The Delph between West Street and High Street.

A key element of the repaving was to create a safer, alternative means of segregating vehicles and pedestrians to the current ad-hoc arrangements of bollards, planters and other street furniture. It was proposed that this should be achieved by reintroducing kerbs and channels to visually and physically segregate the road and footway surfaces. Flush kerbs would be maintained in the High Street, whilst elsewhere traditional raised kerbs would be re-established. The Delph had been re-planned, to provide a high quality, attractive focus to the Town Centre, giving it a better sense of place and to create a space that would generate a sense of civic pride where people would want to be.

Budget costings had been prepared and the total improvement costs were £5.7 million. The scheme had been split into a number of phases of implementation, to keep each phase within manageable costs. External funding of £361,000 had been secured for the first phase, which had to be spent and reclaimed by 31st March 2007. In order to meet this deadline, the procurement of works needed to begin in June. The Council would need to secure additional capital funding in the future to continue to implement the STCM. Because inward investors in the Town would benefit from the Masterplan enhancements, it was considered that developers should make a contribution towards its implementation.

The Chair commented that this was a significant document for Swadlincote Town Centre. There was recognition of the previous hard work undertaken and the STCM identified how development of the Town Centre could be taken forward. This would lead to a sustainable Town Centre that was fit for the 21st century. The Planning Policy Manager referred to the presentation at Annual Council Meeting, the previous week. Unfortunately, the design consultants were not able to be present at this Meeting, but details of the first phase implementation could be presented to a future Meeting.

The Deputy Leader of the Council asked whether the Committee could influence the choice for the first phase of implementation. She also questioned if further funding was not forthcoming, whether the first phase would become obsolete. Officers replied that the intention was to bring forward phases as funding permitted. The Chair stated the need to ensure that implementation of each phase was sympathetic to the surrounding area. The Head of Planning Services confirmed that this would be done, using the example of paving works to demonstrate this. Phase one of implementation had effectively been selected, because of the funding available.

Councillor Southerd recognised the need for elements of the STCM to tie together and he wondered how far implementation could deviate from the Masterplan, without losing its integrity. The Head of Planning Services explained that Members were asked to consider the scheme's concept at this Meeting. Further reports would be submitted to subsequent Meetings, to finalise the details of implementation. There might be opportunities to vary some aspects of implementation, but potentially these were limited in scope.

Councillor Ford welcomed the proposals, but he was concerned over the potential funding required. He questioned the timescales for implementation and the likely impact on costs if implementation took longer than envisaged. He referred to closed circuit television (CCTV) and felt that this should be implemented within the Town Centre. The Planning Policy Manager confirmed that CCTV was considered as part of the proposals, but it had not been included at this stage. The Head of Planning Services was confident that the Council could deliver future phases of the implementation with matched funding from development. At this time, the proposals did not impact on the Council financially. Reference was also made to the potential for future Council land disposals.

Councillor Mrs. Hood stated the public transport need from the rural areas into Swadlincote Town Centre. The Chair confirmed that the District Council did promote public transport needs in conjunction with Derbyshire County Council. It was agreed that this was a key part of ensuring the sustainable regeneration of the Town Centre.

With the Chair's approval, Councillor Bell spoke to this item. He was concerned at the level of commitment presented by the report. He questioned whether these proposals could be revisited at a future date and Officers confirmed that acceptance was sought to the principles of the STCM. The document had been through significant consultation and it would be both costly and difficult to redesign the concept at this stage. As a health and safety specialist, Councillor Bell was concerned about certain elements of the STCM. In particular, he was concerned about the removal of street furniture, which slowed vehicles down, prevented inappropriate parking and the potential for vehicles to be used to "ram raid" shop frontages. He felt the public consultation was not conclusive and had further concerns about the health and safety impacts of the amphitheatre proposals.

The Chair explained that significant cognisance had been taken of the health and safety issues. The Head of Planning Services referred to the auditing of proposals and initial health and safety concerns had been addressed. Councillor Mrs. Renwick felt that the amphitheatre gave a feature to the Town Centre, which should attract people to it.

Councillor Carroll pursued the public transport issues and felt these were important for the whole District. There was a need to create an interesting and pleasant Town Centre, that would in turn attract the retail stores the Town needed. Councillor Southerd commented that public transport was based on commercial need. The Town Centre plans would attract more people to Swadlincote and in turn passengers on the bus services.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the Swadlincote Town Centre Masterplan (STCM) for public realm improvements be approved by the Council as a comprehensive plan for future improvements to the Town Centre.***

- (2) That the STCM be used to support funding bids for public realm improvements.**
- (3) That the STCM be used to promote development and inward investment to Swadlincote.**
- (4) That, where appropriate, contributions towards implementing the STCM be negotiated from developers seeking planning permission for commercial development within and adjacent to the Town Centre.**

Note: at 6.30pm Councillor Bell left the Meeting.

EDS/3. **PROJECT BRIEF: ECONOMIC REGENERATION STRATEGY**

The Committee's approval was sought to a brief setting out arrangements for the preparation of a new Economic Regeneration Strategy for South Derbyshire. The current South Derbyshire Economic Development Strategy had expired and the preparation of a new Strategy was a priority within the Council's emerging Corporate Plan. The new strategy would need to reflect changes in economic regeneration structures and priorities, together with changes in the economic circumstances of the District and its residents. The Strategy would examine key issues around business promotion, economic deprivation, workforce development and business infrastructure. It would encompass a range of inter-related issues and examples were provided within the report. The Strategy would cover the period 2006 to 2011 and would link with other key strategy documents, including the Community Strategy and the emerging Local Development Framework.

An outline was given of the stages and timetable for preparing the Strategy. It was anticipated that all costs associated with preparation of the Strategy could be met from the existing Economic Development Promotions budget.

The Chair felt this Strategy would compliment the work in Swadlincote and benefit the whole District. The Deputy Leader of the Council voiced her thanks to the Policy Team for the enjoyable and informative workshops arranged on this subject. The Deputy Chief Executive reminded that a tour of the District would be held for all Members on Friday 9th June 2006.

**RESOLVED:-**

***That the project brief for a new Economic Regeneration Strategy for South Derbyshire be agreed.***

EDS/4. **DELIVERY OF TOURISM – PEAK DISTRICT & DERBYSHIRE DMP**

It was reported that the Government announced in 2003, that Regional Development Agencies would be given the strategic lead for tourism. East Midlands Tourism was established by the East Midlands Development Agency to lead the development of tourism in the Region.

A major element was the establishment of five County-based Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs) to deliver services previously provided by the Heart of England Tourist Board. This included promoting the Region's destinations and being the first point of contact for both visitors and the tourism industry. East Midlands Tourism was providing core funding for DMPs over the next two financial years with an announcement of funding beyond that date awaited. Substantial additional funding for tourism was being made available through East Midlands Tourism and it was important for the Council to engage with the DMP for Derbyshire. The Council had been asked, together with other authorities in the County and the National Park Authority, to become a partner and enter into a service level agreement.

The draft business plan for the Peak District & Derbyshire DMP acknowledged that its success rested absolutely on the willingness of partners in the public sector to entrust key responsibilities to it and to transfer the appropriate resources. The DMP was based in Buxton and was likely to be known as "Visit Peak District & Derbyshire". An outline was given of its primary responsibilities. The DMP would take over many responsibilities from local authorities, but would not have adequate staffing resources deliver them directly. The DMP also proposed a liaison role, to be undertaken by Tourism Officers, to provide a link between the DMP and local tourism businesses. An outline was given of specific activities and the Council and National Forest Company had been asked to consider providing staff time for this role.

The Peak District & Derbyshire brand was developed to replace existing identities. However, there was acknowledged importance of the National Forest as a sub-regional tourism destination in its own right. It was recognised that this part of Derbyshire would require a different working relationship with the DMP. The National Forest & Beyond campaign would continue, rather than be subsumed into the new brand.

A financial contribution of £5,000 was sought in each of the next two years, together with a commitment to provide staff time. It was proposed to submit the service level agreement to a future Committee Meeting.

Councillor Southerd felt that there was little choice but to participate in the DMP. However, some authorities closer to the Peak District had reservations. South Derbyshire favoured the National Forest as a brand and it was hoped that the Council would get some benefit from the new DMP. Councillor Carroll welcomed the fact that the National Forest destination would not be subsumed. She felt it important that the beauty of this area was not overlooked. Councillor Dunn noted from the national press that Derbyshire was the third most attractive county within the Country. Councillor Ford felt that this initiative could only help to develop South Derbyshire even further. The Deputy Chief Executive referred to the constraints from wide-ranging partnerships, but also the opportunities that were presented, the funding available for marketing and the links between tourism and regeneration.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the Committee agrees in principle to participate in the Peak District and Derbyshire Destination Management Partnership.**

- (2) *That the Committee authorises a financial contribution of £5,000 per annum to this DMP.*
- (3) *That Officers be authorised to negotiate a Service Level Agreement with the DMP, including consideration of how the liaison role will be delivered.*

EDS/5. **PUBLIC SPEAKING AT DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE**

A report was submitted to advise Members of the study findings regarding public speaking at the Development Control Committee and to seek the introduction of a scheme for a trial period. This issue was raised during a workshop, as part of the consultation on the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and it had also been raised at Parish Liaison Meetings. It was important to ensure that in implementing such a scheme, it was based on best practice and was equitable. ENTEC UK Ltd, the consultants who undertook the SCI work, were engaged to provide research on this matter. The methodology used and the findings were set out in a full study report that had been circulated to Members.

In order that the scheme was beneficial to those who participated and to add value to the process at the Development Control Committee, it was proposed to display plans and photographs by means of a powerpoint presentation, as part of the Officer report.

The Head of Planning Services took Members through the recommendations of the consultant's report. There was a section on registering the intention to speak and the different approaches available. There had been initial concerns that the proposed intermediate approach might be too onerous, but the Planning Division now had systems in place to accommodate this. There was a "first-come, first-served" approach proposed for registration, where one person would be nominated to speak on each application and other contributors would liaise with that person. This would mean that one applicant and one objector could speak to each application. It was recommended that each speaker be allowed three minutes. The recommendations highlighted options for the Chair to control the time of each speech. Other topics were the areas that the public could speak on, interaction between speakers and the Committee, allowing people to speak again if an item was deferred and providing written guidance to speakers. Recommendations were made on the use of audio equipment and equipment to aid Officer presentations. This section concluded with guidance on development control issues and the proposed six month trial period for public speaking.

The Chair appreciated that the recommendations were quite detailed, but this represented a significant change to the Development Control Committee's method of operation. A further report would be submitted to Members to review progress and he would like to ensure that the review was seamless.

Councillor Isham welcomed the report. She referred to the scale of development in Woodville and the difficulties for the public sometimes in understanding the limitations of the development control process. She

questioned whether practical issues had been taken into account regarding access for people with disabilities and the presentation of information in other languages, including sign language. The Head of Planning Services referred to the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy and she gave examples to show how Officers would attempt to comply with this policy in assisting those with special needs.

Councillor Bale praised the initiative but questioned whether there were sufficient safeguards to prevent the discussion of irrelevant items. He was mindful that some people were better at public speaking than others and rather than being on a "first-come", "first-served" basis, he would have preferred the nearest neighbour to application sites to be given priority. The Head of Planning Services confirmed the neighbour notification arrangements, but everyone had equal rights in terms of public speaking. The appointment of planning specialists to speak at Committee was discussed. The public was less likely to be aware of detailed planning issues, but in determining applications, Members would reach their conclusions being aware of all the information presented. It was felt unlikely that planning specialists would be appointed, unless there was a major application being determined. In response to a further question from Councillor Bale, it was confirmed that the current delegation arrangements would remain. The public speaking proposals related to applications coming before the Development Control Committee, but it was acknowledged that Members could be lobbied to request items being submitted to the Committee.

As Chair of the Development Control Committee, Councillor Southerd had been concerned about the adoption of public speaking. He referred to the visits undertaken to other local authorities, the merits and problems with their differing approaches. He felt this Council had the benefit of well educated Committee Members and good Officer support. These proposals invited participation in the planning process. Over time, he considered that the public and parish councillors would gain greater knowledge on the planning process. He felt the proposals to display site plans during Officer presentations would be of benefit and that the Council had approached this matter in a proper, considered way.

Councillor Shepherd supported this view, praised the clarity of the consultant's report and referred to human rights issues. Officers explained that this had been researched and legal advice taken. It was being balanced in a practical way. Councillor Ford welcomed the introduction of public speaking at the Development Control Committee.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That Council be recommended to adopt a scheme for allowing public speaking at the Development Control Committee, as contained within Section three of the Consultant's report, for a trial period of six months, as soon as the necessary literature, procedures and equipment are in place.***
- (2) That five months into the trial period, a report be submitted to Members, in order to determine whether or not the scheme should continue on a permanent basis, either as existing or in an amended form.***

EDS/6. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [ACCESS TO INFORMATION] ACT 1985)**

*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 20th April 2006 were received.*

S. TAYLOR

CHAIR