

REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Regeneration and Economic Development Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 23 September 2011.

PRESENT: Mr M C Dance (Chairman), Mr M B Robertson (Vice-Chairman), Mr A R Chell, Mr N J Collor, Mr P J Homewood, Mrs J P Law, Mr A Sandhu, MBE, Mr K Smith, Mr M V Snelling, Mrs E M Tweed and Mrs C J Waters

ALSO PRESENT: Mr K G Lynes and Mr M A Wickham

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Cockburn (Corporate Director of Business and Support), Ms B Cooper (Director of Economic Development), Mr D Shipton (Acting Head of Financial Strategy), Mr M Bodkin (Head of Growth Areas and Development) and Mrs C A Singh (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

88. Members are asked to note Future Meeting Dates for 2012

(Item A4)

Members noted that the future meetings for this POSC in 2012 would be held on:

Thursday, 19 January

Friday, 23 March

Friday, 22 June

Friday, 21 September

Thursday, 8 November

(All meetings will commence at 10.00 am)

89. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2011

(Item A5)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2011 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

90. Presentations

(Item B1)

1. The Chairman welcomed Mrs Kerly and Mr Horton to the meeting and invited them to give their presentation. Mrs Kerly introduced the protocol for delivering affordable local needs housing in rural Kent, published in the meeting papers.

2. Mrs Kerly explained that speaking with the local communities and understanding the needs of the community was critical in making a scheme work as the developments can 3-7 years to deliver. Mrs Kerly commended the work of "Action for Communities in Rural Kent" which was an independent organisation. She

thanked Miss Joanne Purvis, Housing Strategy Implementation Manager, for all her work in drafting the protocol.

3. Mrs Kerly continued her presentation using overheads of previous development sites in Ashford from 1993 to a recently completed site in 2011, to show the mix of properties and how they had evolved to using renewable energy sources such as solar panels and ground source heat pumps.

4. Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments which included the following:-

- a) It was considered that KCC's role would be to provide local leadership on housing acting as an ambassador and an advocate in rural local needs housing.
- b) It was explained that the housing schemes were small with 6 homes and the highways departments views were sought on the schemes.
- c) It was considered that the benefits of the rural schemes needed to be promoted to Parish Councils that often opposed housing developments in their villages.
- d) It was suggested that for elderly people in a village moving from their family home to a bungalow built through a scheme in their village, they could remain near family and would not have to rely on Social Services.
- e) Concern was raised about the resale of the homes. It was advised that when a home came up for sale or rent the home would be sold/rented to someone in the village registered as being in housing need.

5. Mr Tassell then gave his presentation on "Why Farming Matters in Kent" using overheads, circulated to the Committee before the meeting. He highlighted that the areas of most concern were the effects climate change, water availability (particularly, since the drought this year) and food security. Views expressed were as follows:

- a) Good to hear that careers in farming were being nurtured with young people seeing what working in farming was like now with the introduction of technology.
- b) Concerns were expressed that Kent fruits were not on Kent supermarket shelves.
- c) A view was expressed that people coming to the county needed to find the necessary technology to run their business such as broadband.
- d) Members needed to find ways to open up a dialogue with local farmers in their area.
- e) Kent Rural PLC would draw the relevant agencies together who had an interest in Kent's rural legacy.

6. RESOLVED that:

- a) The Committee thanked Mrs Kerly and Mr Horton and Mr Tassell for their informative presentations; and
- b) the responses to comments and questions by Members be noted.

91. Feedback from the Rural Visits

(Item B2)

(Report by Mr K Lynes, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Mr D Cockburn, Executive Director for Strategy, Economic Development and ICT)

(Mr C Tassell Kent Chair, NFU, was also present for this item)

1. Visit to Rumwood Green Farm

- a) In response to questions, Mr Tassell explained that the owner, Mr Sean Charles, was responsive to the demands of the supermarkets and the quantities that he produced were out of reach for the small producers. He farmed his own land and rented other pieces of land. He grows, picks and packs his own fruits. He packed all year round.
- b) The farm has 550 workers, 540 of which were foreign workers. Mr Charles was asked at the visit why he did not recruit local young people and he responded that it was difficult to attract local people and he wanted people who were punctual and could do the work etc. In response the Chairman suggested that a Certificate of Employability could be the way forward. This would highlight local young people's basic skills/competencies eg punctuality and communication to aid in their recruitment.
- c) Concern was expressed in what the new arrangements for the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme would mean for farmers.
- d) It was asked as to what KCC could do to boost the agricultural workforce. It was considered that young people did not feel that there was progression in farming jobs. Questions were asked about how the jobs are advertised and whether there was enough work being carried out in schools to promote farming as a career
- e) It was suggested that schools could work with farms to raise animals for food to produce and then sell them or create a cooking school.
- f) The Chairman suggested that an Informal Member Group be set up initially to look at the implications of the Seasonal Agricultural Working Scheme for Kent (SAWS) and if necessary further work be undertaken by a Select Committee . It was suggested that this could be widened to understand the need for the employment of foreign nationals across the board.

2. Visit to East Malling Research

- a) The Chairman suggested that the POSC invite the Chief Executive of East Malling Research to give a presentation on the commercial value of EMR at the next meeting of the POSC as he was not available at the visit.
- b) Members expressed annoyance at Yorkshire Council's branding as the "Garden of England".
- c) There was general agreement that we need to better brand the Kent offer.

3. RESOLVED that:

- a) the Chief Executive of East Malling Research be invited to the next meeting of the POSC to give a presentation on the commercial value of EMR;
- b) the Committee agreed to seek approval from the Scrutiny Board to set up a Member IMG on the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAW) and if necessary, after this piece of work, propose further work be carried out by a Select Committee; and
- c) the comments and responses to Members questions and the report be noted with thanks.

92. Financial Monitoring 2011/12

(Item B3)

*(Report by Mr K Lynes, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise
Mr D Cockburn, Corporate Director of Business Strategy & Support)*

- 1. The Finance Strategy Manager, Mr Shipton, introduced the report and responded to comments and questions by Members.
 - a) A request was made for confirmation of the date for the next meeting of the Budget IMG in October.
- 2. RESOLVED that the projected outturn for Regeneration and Enterprise for 2011/12 based on the first quarter's monitoring report to Cabinet be noted with thanks.

93. Update on Strategic Projects

(Item B4)

*(Report by Mr K Lynes, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise
Mr D Cockburn, Corporate Director of Business & Solutions, Business Strategy and Support)*

- 1. The Director of Economic Development, Ms Cooper introduced the report and responded to comments and questions by Members which included the following:

a) It was suggested that the POSC revisit Thanet in January or March 2012.

b) There was a need for better Broadband in the urban areas as well as the rural areas as businesses were struggling in those areas, which were further away from the exchange. It was advised that there will be some improvement in the fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC) Kent towns including Maidstone, Dover and Whitstable.

2. RESOLVED that the information in the report and given in response to Members comments and questions be noted with thanks.

94. Connecting with Communities - 2010/11 Annual Report on Consultation, Engagement and Involvement Activity
(Item B5)

*(Report by Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities
Mrs A Honey, Corporate Director of Customer and Communities)*

(Mr M Bodkin, Head of Urban Regeneration, was present for this item)

1. Head of Urban Regeneration, Mr Bodkin introduced the report and responded to questions and comments by Members.

a) It was considered that the lay out of the consultation details in the report was very well done.

2. RESOLVED that the information in the report and the comments by Members be noted with thanks.

95. Select Committee Update
(Item C1)

*(Report by Mr P Sass, Head of Democratic Services)
(Mrs C Singh, Democratic Services Officer was present for this item)*

1. Mrs Singh introduced the report and Mr Smith, Chairman of the Select Committee on the Student Journey, gave an update explaining that the draft areas of recommendation, attached to the report, would be checked and tested during further evidence gathering before they were finalised.

2. RESOLVED that the information in the report and update by Mr Smith be noted with thanks.