

NOTES of a meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, Informal Member Group on “Kent – What Price Growth?” held on Monday, 26 March 2007

PRESENT: Mr D Smyth (Chairman), Mr B R Cope and Mrs T Dean

OFFICERS: Mr R Hardy, Assistant Director of Environment and Regeneration and Mr G Mills, Democratic Services

1. Notes of Previous Meeting

(1) The notes of the meeting of the Informal Member Group held on 22 January 2007 were noted. The Informal Member Group also noted that the Regeneration and Economy Team had advised Kent Police Authority and the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority of KCC’s publication of the developer’s guide and had invited them to adopt a similar approach to developer contributions.

(2) In addition, Mr Hardy confirmed that he would check with Mr Nigel Smith progress on the actions set out on page 3.3 of the meeting notes.

2. “Kent: What Price Growth?” – Review of Progress

(1) The original version of “Kent: What Price Growth?” was published in June 2003. Since then, there had been 3 full financial years during which to see evidence of progress towards the goals set out in June 2003. A short progress report was published in May 2005, but a fuller review and update was now appropriate.

(2) Mr Hardy said that he would be leading this review during 2007 and proposed to focus on a number of key issues designed to document and assess what had happened over the last 4 years. These included:-

- Financial support from central government and the Early Years;
- Action in Kent by government agencies and NDPBs;
- Additional KCC spending and changes in spending priorities;
- Private Sector investment;
- Additional District Council spending and changes in spending priorities;
- Investment secured from developers by KCC and districts;
- The development and effectiveness of local delivery structures;
- Housing and employment site completions (including use of brown field land);
- Job growth and inward investment;
- Type and scale of affordable housing delivered;
- Progress on design and quality;
- Progress on transport issues;
- Water supply, air quality and energy issues;
- Retail developments and town centre regeneration;
- Case studies on a selection of projects eg., Fastrack and Ashford Gateway.

(3) Mr Hardy said that this range of work was clearly a notable task and as far as possible he would present information on a district by district basis. Some issues would need to be addressed more thematically, for example, progress on rural issues. In terms of funding and investment Mr Hardy said he would distinguish between the amounts which had been agreed during the period and the amounts that had actually been spent. In the “Leading Kent” section, he said he would look for evidence of the aspirations set out there

having been translated into policy and action. When up-to-date information was available, he would update the “Opportunities and Challenges” section.

(4) During a wide-ranging discussion, Members of the Informal Member Group asked a number of questions relating to the review to which Mr Hardy responded as follows:-

Climate Change and investment in Flood and Coastal Defences – Mr Hardy said that the County Council was addressing issues related to Climate Change in a number of ways and was itself taking a lead by setting itself challenging targets to reduce its carbon emissions. As to dealing with investment in sea defences and dealing with any potential flood problems in areas such as Ashford and Thameside, that was the lead responsibility of the Environment Agency, although KCC together with the local authorities in Kent were obviously having an input into this work. Mr Hardy that the Agency had produced a headline study on flooding issues entitled “Naturalisation of the Coastline” and copies could be made available on request.

Housing Issues – discussion on housing issues formed a major part of the meeting and focussed on:-

- the provision of affordable housing and the need for there to be consistency across Kent in both policy and implementation related to affordable housing;
- development of brownfield sites;
- the need to have flexibility and consistency in the way that developer contributions were applied;
- the importance of infrastructure provision going hand in hand with housing development.

Responding to the comments made, Mr Hardy said that the Kent Housing Group was looking at a number of issues including the provision of affordable housing on a district by district basis. The Group had also been working on a standard Section 106 Agreement and this was being put to individual councils to take through their democratic processes to get approved. As regards the development of brownfield sites, Mr Hardy said the County Council very much encouraged such sites to be developed in preference to greenfield sites wherever possible. He said the County Council also very much supported the provision of housing to meet local needs, particularly in rural areas.

Sustainable Communities – following on but closely related to the discussion on housing the Informal Member Group also discussed issues related to sustainable communities. It was suggested and agreed that as part of the review, a case study could be included to give clarity in explaining the concept and mix which goes into having a sustainable community. Mr Hardy said that the Kings Hill development could be the basis for such a case study but that there was also some work which the County Council undertook with Medway Council a couple of years ago. Also ongoing developments like that at St Mary’s Island would be included in the survey. This work would also include looking at what local shopping was available together with pre-school and adult education provision. The review would also look at what pressures there may be for sites currently earmarked for commercial development being taken up for housing. With regard to patterns of shopping, Mr Hardy said that a number of footfall surveys which had been carried out in the past at a number of towns across Kent would be reviewed and he said that would include looking at shopping patterns in Dartford and Gravesham both pre and post construction of Bluewater.

Transport – the Informal Member Group also discussed transport issues particularly related to train services through Kent and proposals by Eurostar to reduce services calling at Ashford International Station. Mr Hardy said these points would be picked up by a piece of work into transport issues which was currently been undertaken by Mr Mick

Sutch, Head of Transport Planning and Strategy in the Environment and Regeneration Directorate.

3. Date of Next Meeting

The Informal Member Group agreed that it should hold its next meeting once the first draft of the review document was available.