

REPORT OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

(Meeting held on 6 September 2000)

1. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (MINUTE NO. 35).

Mr Howe, a public participant, drew the Committee's attention to the traffic problems associated with the shops along Long Lane, Holbury. Vehicles parking on their forecourts had to cross the footway, and reverse on to the service road. This was made particularly hazardous when drivers ignored the yellow lines and parked in the service road. Although the County Council had brought forward proposals to try to help the problems, they had not found support among local people as the danger to pedestrians had not been addressed. The recently published Totton and Waterside Transportation Strategy document had covered every settlement along the Waterside except Fawley. Although Fawley was at the end of the A326, it was a significant settlement with several schools and a large industrial complex. Mr Howe sought the District Council's help in pursuing a solution to the problems at Long Lane.

It was agreed that Mr Howe's comments would be put to the County Council, who would be asked for an appropriate response. In addition, these concerns would be drawn to the attention of this Council's representatives on the County Council's Totton and Waterside Transportation Panel so that they might pursue them through this forum.

2. PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO.36).

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting of the Planning and Transportation Review Sub-Committee held on 7 June 2000, and confirmed their recommendations. These were:

- (i) An expenditure plan bid for further funding towards environmental improvements at Fawley Square, in the sum of £55,000.00, for the year 2001/02, subject to there being partnership funding sufficient for the scheme to go ahead;
- (ii) An expenditure plan bid for funding towards environmental improvement works to Milford sea front in the sum of £50,000.00 for the year 2001/02, subject to there being partnership funding from Hampshire County Council;
- (iii) The allocation of £15,000.00 to carry out initial improvements to either Fordingbridge, or Milford-on-Sea, with the decision on which scheme shall be implemented to be made in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee and local members;
- (iv) That work on the overall package of proposals for Fordingbridge gateway should be continued, subject to the outcome of a car parking survey, with a view to making an expenditure plan bid in the 2001 budget round;

- (v) That the County Council should be advised that this Council would support proposals for the refurbishment of Totton Town Centre being made public at any early stage so that local people may have the opportunity to contribute to the process and to gain ownership of the final proposals. This point was raised again in the debate on measures to improve Totton Town Centre which was debated under Report G – see note 7 below.;
- (vi) That a bid be made for £5,000 to retain the posting of site notices at all planning application sites, as well as the introduction of a neighbour notification scheme. This issue was also debated separately under Report B on the agenda. See note 3 below; and
- (vii) That regular bulletins on progress in negotiations on complex planning applications should be sent to members of the Development Control Sub-Committee, for example by e-mail.

3. PUBLICITY FOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS – NEIGHBOUR NOTIFICATION (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 37).

Further to minute 8 of the meeting of the Planning and Transportation Review Sub-Committee held on 7 June 2000, members were advised that 11 of the 12 Parish Councils who had responded to consultations, had expressed a strong wish to retain the posting of green site notices at each application site.

The Citizens' Panel expressed a strong preference for the introduction of full neighbour notification. It was not however possible to introduce full neighbour notification, and to post green notices at all application sites, within the current budget allocation. The Review Sub-Committee had asked that the town and parish councils should be consulted about the introduction of full neighbour notification and the use of site notices. It was noted that some parishes already carried out direct neighbour notification themselves, and the two systems worked well together. However, there were genuine concerns that direct neighbour notification could miss some of the affected parties, who would however be advised of a potential development by a site notice. Although not all parishes carried out neighbour notification, the retention of site notices appeared to be the greatest priority to them.

Whilst recognising the value of direct neighbour notification, the Committee accepted the view of the Parish Councils that site notices should be retained. As it was not possible to introduce direct neighbour notification, and to retain site notices, within this year's budget, it was agreed that direct neighbour notification should not be introduced at this stage. The public will continue to be advised of planning applications by the posting of green site notices and the use of press notices. The question of introducing full direct neighbour notification will be reviewed again in the future.

4. PROCEDURES AT MEETINGS OF THE PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION SITE VISIT WORKING PARTY (REPORT C) (MINUTE NO.38).

The Committee considered whether the public and Town and Parish Councils should continue to be invited to address the Working Party during site visits. This system had been operated before the introduction of full public participation at meetings of the Development Control Sub-Committee, which allows interested parties to address the meeting on all planning applications. There was concern that allowing the public and town/parish councils to speak at site visits could be perceived as allowing them an unfair advantage through increased access to the members taking the decision. Members believed that the public participation at meetings of the Development Control Sub-Committee, where the decision was actually taken, was the most appropriate forum and it was no longer necessary to allow the public to address them on site as well. While some members favoured allowing Parish Councils to continue to address the Working Party, the majority felt that site visits should be confined to allowing members to familiarise themselves with the physical features of the site alone. All other information gathering, and opportunities to address them, should be provided through the forum of the Sub-Committee meeting. The format of site visits has therefore been changed to the effect that:

- (i) Applicants, objectors and Parish/Town Councils shall not be invited to attend meetings of the Working Party. The site owner may need to be present to allow access, but will not be allowed to speak;
- (ii) That the Planning Officer will only point out the factors which the Working Party members need to view on site, and not deal with any other issues such as interpretation of policy;

Members also debated the issue of Councillor attendance at site visits. They had previously received legal advice that, when a site visit is to be held, the majority of Councillors who will be taking the actual decision on the application should attend the site visit. It was therefore agreed that, whenever the Committee is considering holding a site visit, the Chairman should remind them that there should be a clear commitment from the majority of members that they will attend.

5. DEVELOPMENT CONTROL – A USER’S GUIDE – CONSULTATION DRAFT (REPORT D) (MINUTE NO. 39).

The Committee considered an analysis of the responses to the questionnaire survey which had been issued with the User’s Guide to Development Control. A total of 86 responses had been received, the majority having been completed by applicants, agents and Town and Parish Councils.

In general, the respondents had been satisfied with the development control service and with the various processes used in reaching a decision. One finding of interest was that 97% of respondents felt that the high environmental standards required by the Council were justified, and 80% believed that such standards were normally achieved.

A number of issues have been identified where improvements could be made. These include:

- (a) Continuing training and support for new and more junior staff to improve the quality of advice that is offered on planning proposals;
- (b) Continuation of professional development sessions to help ensure a consistent approach to development proposals across the whole district;
- (c) Offering informal advice in as much detail as possible, although this will always be constrained by the level of resources available;
- (d) Improving site monitoring of development sites in conjunction with Building Control Officers; and
- (e) Careful application of the amended plan procedures to ensure that only very minor and uncontentious changes are approved without full consultation.

The user's guide will be revised, in the light of the comments received, and published in a low cost, photocopied format to keep the cost within the existing budgets. Some members indicated that they might wish to see an expenditure plan bid to allow the guide to be produced in a smarter, printed format in future.

6. NEW FOREST DISTRICT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT (REPORT F) (MINUTE NO 41).

The Committee was advised for key changes which had been made to the Landscape Character Assessment following an extensive public consultation exercise. They were shown photographic slides of examples landscape character areas and of the landscape types which had been included in them.

The landscape character assessment covers all of the New Forest District and also the rest of the Heritage Area outside the District, in order to provide a comprehensive reference document which will be of value to a wide range of statutory organisations operating in the Forest. The study has been funded jointly by this Council, Hampshire County Council, the Countryside Agency and English Heritage. The scale of the study has partly defined the extent of detailed information on each area. Additional, more detailed, factual information can be kept as a supplement to the main documents. The main report will be used as supplementary planning guidance, with additional technical information and methodology in a separate document. The Committee was advised that some words have been omitted from the text relating to the Hampshire County Structure Plan Policy E6, as set out in paragraph 3.2 of the report. They were advised that the words "in the whole countryside" should be added after sub-paragraph (c).

The "New Forest District Landscape Character Assessment" (main report) has been approved and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance to Policy E6 of the 1996-2011 Hampshire County Structure Plan (adopted 2000) and to Policy DW-E1 of the New Forest District Local Plan (adopted 1999).

The Officers were commended on the quality of the landscape character assessment report.

7. TOTTON TOWN CENTRE (REPORT G) (MINUTE NO. 42).

The Committee was advised of progress in developing proposals to improve the Town Centre at Totton. A series of community workshops held earlier in the year had established a number of key themes. These included:

- (i) Rumbridge Street should be included in the Town Centre (and perhaps, by implication, Junction Road as well);
- (ii) The land in the centre (to the North by the roundabout and the Water Lane triangle) should be brought back into use by people, and the influence of the motor car reduced;
- (iii) There should be improved access for people around the centre of Totton; and
- (iv) Local concern about the potential impact of any proposals on areas around the Town Centre, through rat running and on-street parking.

There should be attention to youth and “people” issues; and the scale and quality of development were important.

In addition, members considered that there was a need to debate whether it should be an overall objective to see the amount of traffic in the Town Centre reduced.

The community workshops had identified a number of key issues which needed further public debate, at an early stage in the development of any proposals, to ensure that the priorities and solutions adopted met the aspirations of local people. On this basis, the County Council should be reminded of the need to go out to public consultations on any proposals at an early stage in their preparation.

It was noted that the proper resolution of the problems in the Town centre would require significant expenditure to resolve problems with the infrastructure, such as the railway crossing and through traffic routes. It was, however, still possible to make significant improvements, and all avenues should be pursued.

It was agreed that a further report, including a revised joint action programme and draft short term improvements, would be submitted before the end of the financial year.

Consideration would also have to be given as to whether the town centre community involvement workshop should be reconvened in the review of the joint action programme

8. PRIMARY SHOPPING FRONTAGE POLICY DEVELOPMENT ADVICE (REPORT H) (MINUTE NO. 43).

The Committee have approved draft supplementary planning in support of Policy BU-S2, Section F5 of the New Forest District Local Plan. The draft Supplementary Planning Guidance, which will guide the development of primary shopping frontages, has been approved for public consultation.

9. HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL’S BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HIGHWAYS NETWORK MANAGEMENT (REPORT I) (MINUTE NO.44).

The County Council have divided the highways function into 3 subject areas in order to carry out their Best Value review. The subject areas are:

- ◆ Member and Public Interface – seeking greater involvement with both County and District Members and improving access to services for the public
- ◆ Policy and Standards of Maintenance – policy development within the County Council; and
- ◆ Operational Management and Service Delivery

The review process is being led by officer working groups, whose membership is drawn from both the County and the Districts. At an early stage in the process it was agreed that there should be a “clean sheet” approach with all options being fully explored and evaluated.

To date, much of the work towards the review process has involved data collection. There has not, so far, been any substantive analysis of the information gathered. This is causing increasing concern as the timetable for the review process is constrained to meet the County’s need to put their maintenance contract out to tender. There was concern that the report to the County’s Committee would be prepared without adequate consultation with the Districts, and also that the District’s ability to respond would be compromised by the lack of comparative data.

The Committee believed that it was essential that the principles of Best Value were applied correctly, to ensure that the most efficient and cost effective means of delivering highway services to the District was identified and implemented. The differential in quality of service between the Highways Agency area, operated by this Council, and the rest of the District, was a source of continuing concern.

In addition, the provision of the highways function cannot be seen in isolation. The employees who work mainly on highways also play an important role in this Council’s emergency response. It is unlikely that a contractor engaged to cover the whole of Hampshire County could provide the same degree of responsiveness. The removal of the highways function from the District would also increase the on-costs attracted by other services, such as coast protection, who use the same depot premises. It is important that the best value review process does not result in costs being shifted from one organisation to another without any increase in the quality and efficiency of the service available to the public.

In the light of these arguments, the Committee believed that there was evidence that the best option would be for highway service delivery to be based on District areas. They accordingly confirmed the Council’s policy to seek to retain the Island Agency and to expand the arrangement to the whole of the District. This would ensure that a locally accountable and uniform standard of service could be delivered across the District. The Committee regretted the lack of comparative data which would allow a proper appreciation of this option.

The County Council have been advised that this Council:

- (i) Supports a Best Value Review which clearly demonstrates that all aspects of Best Value have been addressed and which seeks to improve on existing working arrangements;
- (ii) Is concerned that the proposed timescale may preclude the proper evaluation of all options and full consultation with the District Council;
- (iii) Considers it is vital that the agreed clean sheet approach is maintained throughout the review process;
- (iv) Considers that the future delivery of the highway network management must take into consideration those District Council functions currently delivered in an integrated manner;
- (v) Considers that the financial benefits/cost of any change must be judged against the overall impact on council taxpayers;
- (vi) Would wish to ensure that the rights of individual employees are taken full account of within any revised arrangements; and
- (vii) Reminds them that it is this Council's policy to seek to retain the current Island Agency and to seek to extend the arrangement to the whole of the New Forest District.

**Cllr Mrs P A Wyeth
CHAIRMAN**