

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 5 November 2008)

1. CONSULTATION ON DIRECT ELECTIONS TO ENGLISH NATIONAL PARK AND BROADS AUTHORITIES (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 60)

The Cabinet has agreed a response, set out in Appendix B to Report A to them, to a consultation document issued by the Department for Environment Food, and Rural Affairs on the membership of National Park Authorities.

Although the consultation in theory covers the whole question of the composition of National Park Boards, it is clear from the Ministerial foreword that the main proposal is “about whether directly elected members could usefully replace or supplement the parish members, or perhaps the local authority members”.

While the principle of greater local democratic leadership of National Parks is very much supported, there are very strong arguments that the tinkering proposed would weaken local influence, and increase rather than reduce the democratic deficit. In the case of at least the New Forest National Park, there is a very good case to bring in more radical reform, and introduce a tailor made solution which would better meet the needs of the New Forest and its communities. In responding to the consultation the Cabinet indicated that they would be happy to assist in developing such a tailor made constitution model.

2. NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK PLAN CONSULTATION DRAFT (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 61)

The Cabinet has agreed a response to a consultation on the draft New Forest National Park Authority Plan.

They welcomed the opportunity to comment on the draft Plan and, in doing so emphasised the need for the New Forest National Park Plan properly to deal with the needs of the 34,000 people who live in the New Forest National Park and the related economic, social and community needs, as well as reflecting National Park purposes. The Cabinet is also urging the NFNPA, in finalising the New Forest National Park Plan, to take on board the comments made in Section 3 of Report B to them. In particular, members drew attention to the housing needs of young people which they feel are not being addressed.

A well attended informal meeting of councillors, on 13 October 2008, to which all members of the Council had been invited, had been able constructively, to produce a draft response to the consultation which formed the basis of the Cabinet’s deliberations. The Cabinet’s full response is set out in report B to them.

The Cabinet stressed the importance of continuing to work with the NFNPA to secure the outcomes set out in their response and with the intention of achieving an outcome where both the Council and the New Forest National Park Authority will have compatible plans that can be mutually supported.

3. NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY RECREATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY CONSULTATION DRAFT (REPORT C) (MINUTE NO. 62)

The Cabinet has agreed a response to a consultation draft Recreation Management Strategy published by the New Forest National Park Authority.

They welcomed the opportunity to comment on the draft Strategy and agreed it is important to continue to work with the NFNPA, with the intention of an outcome that enables both authorities to support each others and partner agencies plans.

In responding, the Cabinet is asking the NFNPA, in finalising their Recreation Management Strategy, to take on board the comments made in Section 3 of Report C to them, as amended, to give particular emphasis to the issues surrounding dog walking and recreational horse riding and the importance to the economy of rural pursuits. Members also felt that if all activities were confined to settlements, as appeared to be the intention, this would not contribute to a living, working society that could enhance the whole of the New Forest National Park.

The Cabinet's full response is detailed in Report C to them.

4. FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN DESIGN STATEMENT (REPORT D) (MINUTE NO. 63)

In line with Natural England's initiative to encourage communities to prepare village and town design statements, a steering group comprising Fordingbridge residents produced a Town Design Statement for their town, which the Cabinet has endorsed.

The Statement will have the status of Supplementary Guidance which, will be afforded a weight commensurate with that of a Supplementary Planning Document in decision making.

The Statement details issues that are important to local people. It is not intended to replace existing planning policies or be a substitute for the protection afforded through conservation area status. It does however allow local voices to be heard and help shape the nature of developments within a particular area.

The Cabinet thanked Cllr Shand and other local members and volunteers as well as NFDC officers for the enormous amount of time and effort they have put into producing the excellent document which is a very good example of local democracy at work.

5. SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY – GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE CONSULTATION (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO. 64)

The Cabinet has agreed a response to a consultation document from the South East Regional Assembly (SEERA) on options for allocating Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople pitches across the south east region.

In 2006 and 2007 the Government introduced new rules requiring all local authorities to allocate sufficient legal stopping places for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. The South East Plan will identify how many spaces are needed in each council area, but not the location of sites.

The Council commissioned, jointly with other Hampshire authorities, a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, which was published in June 2007, and a Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment, which was published in March 2008. These assessments examined the needs for accommodation arising in the area, as well as potential in-migration to Hampshire from neighbouring areas of Wiltshire and West Sussex. These documents have formed the context for considering and responding to the current SEERA consultation.

The research found that, taking into account the supply of vacancies on existing sites, there is a need for an additional 44 pitches in Hampshire between 2006 and 2011. There is a generally low level of need demonstrated for additional permanent pitches in New Forest District, indicating that households are well catered for on the Bury Brickfields site, near Marchwood.

Taking this into account, the Cabinet is of the view that the proposal (Option A in Report E to the Cabinet) that new pitches should be provided as close as possible to where Gypsies and Travellers currently live is the most appropriate way forward which may mean that some council areas have no spaces.

6. PUBLIC OPEN SPACE, FOREST GATE, FAWLEY (REPORT F) (MINUTE NO. 65)

The Cabinet has agreed a proposal for the sale of part of an area of public open space to permit access to a residential development site and for the transfer to the Council of alternative land for public open space use amounting to a net gain of approximately 125 m².

The proposals will enhance two areas of existing public open space that have remained isolated for some years which will fulfill a key planning objective. A modest capital receipt will also be generated. The Cabinet also agreed that a requirement for sympathetic landscaping will be incorporated into any planning application for the site to maintain the aesthetics of the area.

7. HOLBURY HALL, HOLBURY DROVE, HOLBURY (REPORT G) (MINUTE NO. 66)

The Cabinet has agreed to the disposal of Holbury Hall, Holbury Drive, Holbury.

Holbury Hall was acquired in 1968 and has been used as a community hall since that time. Most recently it was let to Fawley Parish Council but they surrendered their lease in 2006. Since then it has been mostly vacant.

The future of the premises has been considered at some length by the Council's Asset Management Group. The group has looked at various alternative uses including possible storage and whether the premises might be suitable for the District Council. The Group concluded that due, in part to its location, it is not viable for retention and recommended that the property be declared surplus to requirements and suitable for disposal.

In planning terms the premises currently has a community use designation. Since the building became vacant various parties have expressed an interest to use the site or buildings as a place of worship. More limited interest has been shown by youth and sports groups. All such uses would be compatible with the current planning designation.

The Cabinet has therefore agreed that the premises be sold by informal tender with conditions that the site should only be used for community type related activity.

**8. NEW FOREST/TEST VALLEY PARTNERSHIP REVIEW (REPORT H)
(MINUTE NO. 67)**

The Cabinet has agreed proposals to revise the management and governance arrangements for the New Forest/Test Valley Commercial Services Partnership. They have endorsed the recommendations of the NFDC/TVBC Commercial Services Joint Committee, as set out in Report H to them, with regard to the future arrangements for the Partnership.

Since the inception of the Partnership in 2002 both Authorities have played a full role in developing joint working arrangements for a range of front-line operational and support services. In the intervening period the areas of partnership working and internal management arrangements have undergone a series of changes to reflect the changing needs of the services in both parent Authorities.

Recent senior management structural changes at NFDC and a review of the senior management structure at TVBC now provide the opportunity to reflect on the current appropriateness of the constitutional management arrangements for the Partnership, from those first adopted in 2002.

Both authorities have highlighted a strong desire to maintain and, wherever possible, to build on the current level of partnership working, whilst at the same time recognising that a more streamlined and flexible approach to partnership governance would be beneficial.

The proposed changes to the partnership arrangements will enable the business to move forward whilst reducing the bureaucracy to a minimum. It will enable the new management structure at NFDC to be fully implemented and a greater focus can then be given to the operational requirements of the partnership.

The Cabinet has agreed that the NFDC/TVBC Commercial Services Joint Committee will be dissolved with immediate effect and is recommending that the Council dissolve the current Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In terms of scrutiny arrangements, the Cabinet noted that reports will be able to be made at any time to an NFDC Review Panel as appropriate.

RECOMMENDED:

That the New Forest District Council/Test Valley Borough Council Commercial Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee be dissolved.

9. COUNCIL OWNED STREET LIGHTS (REPORT I) (MINUTE NO. 68)

Currently the Council uses Hampshire County Council's Lighting Contract to maintain NFDC's street lights and procure energy. The County Council are considering entering into a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) which will mean that after 2009 NFDC will have to make alternative arrangements.

After considering the advantages and disadvantages, the Cabinet has agreed that the Council should include some of its street lights within HCC's PFI and has made the appropriate budgetary provision. Lighting, other than that in conservation areas, will be included in the PFI at an estimated additional annual cost of £37,878 to £53,694 for 2010/11. This is on the understanding that its lighting in sensitive areas will be replaced on a one for one basis and that none of NFDC's street lights will be turned off during the hours of darkness to save electricity without the consent of NFDC.

Members noted that, in response to their previous concerns, NFDC lights in conservation areas will be excluded from the proposals. Some re-designation of street lights will take place where appropriate, to address anomalies such as a mixture of NFDC and HCC owned street lights in the same section of road.

The Cabinet also agreed that should PFI tender rates for maintenance be significantly more than £30 per unit per year (2009 prices) and result in the cost of including of NFDC owned street lighting in the PFI becoming more expensive than the other options considered, then NFDC officers, in consultation with the Planning and Transportation Portfolio Holder, be authorised to arrange the procurement of lighting maintenance and replacement of its street lights through a competitive tendering process when the current HCC Lighting Contract ends.

The Council supports the use of more energy efficient lights including fluorescent units where appropriate and, in due course when their use becomes more viable, units that utilise light emitting diodes. HCC will be asked to take this into consideration as and when appropriate.

In the long term the economies of scale resulting from including NFDC owned street lights being included in an HCC county wide lighting maintenance contract and county wide energy procurement contract will result in lower costs compared with having a local contract.

10. GREEN AUDIT IMPROVEMENT PLAN – OPERATION OF COUNCIL OWNED BUILDINGS (REPORT J) (MINUTE NO. 69)

Following a green audit of the operation of council owned buildings, the Cabinet has agreed a package of measures and an Improvement Plan as detailed in Report J to them.

Growing awareness about the vital importance of the environmental impact produced by our operations has led the council to set up and run a 'Green Audit' process. Operational managers have been tasked with critically examining current practices, particularly with a view to the way that these generate pollution and then seek changes and improvements so that the service impact can be reduced.

The threat of climate change generated by atmospheric pollution by carbon dioxide is the most significant focus for improvements, although there are others. Carbon dioxide is inevitably emitted when fossil fuels are burnt to provide heat and power. The civic buildings carbon footprint for 2007 was 2,856 tonnes CO₂. There are broadly three strategies for reducing increments to this carbon burden:

- Change practices so that they require less (or no) energy
- Burn any fossil fuels that are required at maximum efficiency
- Substitute ambient (carbon neutral) energy sources in place of fossil fuels.

Energy surveys have been undertaken at Applemore Health and Leisure Centre, Marsh Lane Depot and the Town Hall. These were carried out at no cost by the Carbon Trust. Under the Green Audit Plan seven further site surveys will be done but these are being commissioned from commercial suppliers.

The Carbon Trust reports commend the present energy performance of the Council, both in terms of management and the technology deployed, but also go on to make recommendations for improvements. The recommendations are detailed as to process, cost, pay-back and impact reduction and form the basis for the draft Improvement Plan.

As it stands now, implementation of the Improvement Plan is estimated to cost £40,000 per year over the next 2 years. This will cover training and infrastructure improvements and the full cost of replacement plant not otherwise met from current property budgets. The average pay-back of these 'spend-to-save' proposals is estimated at 3 years and the target impact reduction is 380 tonnes CO₂ per year.

**Cllr B Rickman
CHAIRMAN**

(Report of Cabinet 051108.doc)