

Minutes of a Meeting of the Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27 March 2007

Present: Councillor Peter Barnes
" Mick Jones (Chair)
" Ken Browne
" Michael Doody
" Marion Haywood
" Philip Morris-Jones
" John Ross
" Ian Smith

Also present: Councillor David Booth.

Officers: Andy Cowan, Chief Planner, Environment and Economy Directorate
Matthew Epps, European Officer, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Janet Fortune, Regeneration Strategy and Europe, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Oliver Garvey, Strategy Officer, Environment and Economy.
Jean Hardwick, Principal Committee Administrator, Performance and Development Directorate.
Andy McDarmid, Environmental Performance Manager, Environment and Economy Directorate.
John Scouller, Head of Skills, Tourism and Economy, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Andy Smith, European Officer, Environment and Economy Directorate
Paul Williams, Scrutiny Officer, Performance and Development Directorate.
Judith Young, European Development Officer, Children, Young People and Families Directorate.

1. General

Former Councillor Derek Forwood

The Committee stood in silent tribute in memory of former Councillor Derek Forwood, and Leader of the Council, and recorded its recognition of the valuable contribution he had made to the work of the County Council, the community and the personal help and guidance he had given to other councillors.

(1) Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anne Forwood (Vice Chair), Eithne Goode, Pat Henry, Richard Hyde and Chris Saint (Portfolio Holder for Economic Development).

(2) Members' Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

Declarations of personal, non prejudicial interests, were received from Members by virtue of them serving as district/borough councillors as follows

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Warwick District Council – Councillor Michael Doody

Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council – Councillor John Ross

(3) Minutes

(a) Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2007 be agreed as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

(b) Matters Arising

None

2. Public Question Time

None

(The Committee agreed to take agenda item 5, Peugeot Update at this point but the order of the minutes reflects the order of the agenda).

3. Draft European and International Strategy.

Janet Fortune presented the report of the Strategic Director for Environment and Economy.

In 2000, WCC Cabinet agreed six Policy Statements of Intent to act as guiding principles for the Council's European and International Strategy and associated Action Plans. The Strategy was now being reviewed and updated in light of the changing European and international context. The report set out the policy context for this review, provided an overview of the new Strategy and attached a draft Strategy at Appendix A for Members' observations.

Janet Fortune then –

- highlighted a range of European and international projects and activity undertaken over the last six years in support of key Warwickshire County Council strategies (presentation material attached).
- circulated an overview of sub-regional partners' engagement in European & International activity and selected case studies.

Judith Young outlined the international work and links generated by Warwickshire schools in response to the DfES International Strategy for all schools, the aim of which was to have international links by 2010 as recognition of the need to equip children and young people for life in a global society economy. With regard to overseas visits she informed Members that these had been undertaken by way of grants from a range of sources and at no costs to the County Council.

During discussion concerns were noted as follows –

- that funding from the RDA/AWM appeared to be focused on Birmingham and the West Midlands and not Warwickshire or rural initiatives.
- that the EU method of funding was being directed to areas where there were problems rather than benefiting Warwickshire, and in particular as an example, not helping to address the impact of the Peugeot closure.
- that whilst the HUB was seen as a “flagship” enterprise it should include provision to help retrain people in mid-life to increase their skills and improve productivity.

In response Janet Fortune said that EU funding was driven by the Lisbon Agenda relating to jobs and growth. A sustainable urban development priority will be focussed on the main West Midlands conurbation/the City Region. However, it is expected that this will also include parts of Nuneaton and Bedworth through the Regeneration Zone. Some priority is also given to rural business support, including through the new England Rural Development Programme and the Warwickshire Rural Hub, which was seen as an exemplar in these areas. It was accepted that the focus of EU funding was on alleviating deprivation and bringing the lowest standards up to the better standards. She reminded Members that the County Council lobbied for Ryton-on-Dunsmore ward to retain Assisted Area Status, but this was rejected by the UK Government.

Andy Smith added that UK farmers had benefited from EU Policies and were now being encouraged to diversify to non-food crops. WCC is involved in one project on rural innovation with the University of Warwick.

The Chair pointed out that the County Council currently had a Member on the Committee of the Regions and Members should utilise this contact to influence policy and funding streams.

Following this discussion the Committee -

- (1) expressed support for the draft European and International Strategy as set out in Appendix A of the report for submission to Cabinet.
- (2) asked that the service provided at the Hub include provision for retraining people in midlife to learn new skills and increase their employability.
- (2) asked that Members make use of the fact that the County Council has a member on the Committee of the Regions to lobby to influence policy and funding initiatives.

4. Environment and Economy Directorate Complaints and Compliments – April-December 2006

At the suggestion of Councillor Ken Browne, the Committee agreed to take ‘as read’ the report of the Strategic Director for Environment and Economy outlining progress on complaints and compliments received up to December 2006 relevant to the work of this Committee.

5. Peugeot Update

John Scouller presented the report of the Strategic Director for Environment and Economy, which update Members of redundancies and land use issues following the closure of the plant at Ryton-on Dunsmore. In addition he reported that the site had now been sold and completion would take place on 16 April 2007. Following the sale the prospective owners would release details of their proposals and would meet with the Peugeot Partnership Land Use Theme Group.

Discussion followed during which Members expressed their concerns about any proposals that might deviate from the recommended “employment” use for the site and the detrimental impact that any change of use might have on employment opportunities and the economic sustainability of the area and county as a whole.

And Cowan advised that the currently designation of the site was B1 and B2 use (employment use) and not B8 (warehousing and distribution). Once the sale had taken place he would seek discussions with the new owners and the views of officers across the sub-region, which he would report back to Committee for advice and support, as a matter of urgency. The Chair accepted the urgency of this issue and the need for an ad hoc meeting to be arranged once the relevant discussions had taken place.

The Committee –

- (1) authorised the officers, in consultation with the Chair, to arrange a special meeting of the Committee to consider the future use of the Peugeot site, if considered appropriate, and that officers from Rugby Borough Council be invited to attend.

- (2) asked that the Peugeot Partnership be informed of the Committee's decision

6. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan Items Relevant to the Work of this Committee.

(a) Provisional Items for Future Meeting

The Committee considered the provisional items for future meetings and –

- (1) Members were asked to suggest issues that might be appropriate for future consideration by the Committee (Suggestions to be forward to either Jean Hardwick or Paul Williams).
- (2) Asked for a report to the July meeting on the future proposals for the Marconi (Ansty) Site.
- (3) hold a special meeting of the Committee, if required, to consider the future of the Peugeot site (minute 4 above).

(b) Forward Plan items Relevant to the Work of this Committee

The Committee noted the Forward Plan items relevant to the work of this Committee.

7. Any other Business

None

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Chair of the Committee

The Committee rose at 4:15 p.m.