

Minutes of a Meeting of the Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 September 2007

Present: Councillor Anne Forwood (Vice Chair) (in the Chair)

- " Peter Barnes
- " Gordon Collett
- " Michael Doody
- " Richard Hyde
- " Barry Longden
- " Philip Morris-Jones
- " John Ross
- " June Tandy
- " Sid Tooth

Also Present: Councillors Alan Farnell (Leader of the Council) and Colin Hayfield (Portfolio Holder for Adult, Health and Community Services).

Officers: David Clarke, Strategic Director of Resources.
Emma Curtis, Political Group Assistant, Performance and Development Directorate.
Andy Cowan, Head of Planning, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Peter Endall, Senior Solicitor, Performance and Development Directorate.
Jean Hardwick, Principal Committee Administrator, Performance and Development Directorate.
David Hill, Economic Strategy Advisor, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Roger Newham, Head of Transport Planning, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Chris Simpson, Regeneration Project Engineer, Environment and Economy Directorate
John Scouller, Head of Skills, Tourism and Economy, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Mandy Walker, Group Manager, Regeneration Projects, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Paul Williams, Scrutiny Manager, Performance and Development Economy Directorate
David S Williams, County Economic Development Officer, Environment and Economy Directorate.

Others present: Marian Plant, Principal, North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, Martin Ward, Principal King Edward VI College and Ben Spinks (Peer Review Team).

1. General

(1) Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Eithne Goode, Mick Jones, Pat Henry, Mick Stanley and Councillor Chris Saint (Portfolio Holder for Economic Development)

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

Councillor June Tandy declared a personal interest in item 7, Nuneaton and Bedworth Masterplan – Consideration of Colleges' Co-location Option as Chair of the Sustainable Neighbourhoods Board.

2. Public Question Time

None

3. Common Agricultural Policy - Reform

Councillor Peter Barnes, with the aid of a power point presentation, explained the Common Agricultural Policy (presentation material attached). He highlighted the-

- (1) Single Farm Payments scheme and the management requirements for the Entry Level Scheme.
- (2) The future – biotech options, new crops, leisure pursuits and planning policies (sustainable development in rural areas).

In reply to questions he said that -

- the future of farming was in diversification.
- development of farm buildings was allowed if it related, for example, to tourism (holiday lets) and "live and work" units.

The Chair thanked Councillor Barnes for his presentation, which she said was very interesting.

4. Peugeot site - Planning Application Update

John Scouller reported that the anticipated planning application for change of use of the former Peugeot site had not yet been submitted and that a temporary application only had been submitted for use of part of the site. He would ensure that Members were kept informed of the position with regard to this site and report progress to the next meeting. The Chair added that, a special meeting of the Committee would be convened, if it was considered necessary.

5. Local Authority Business Growth Initiatives (LABGI)

Members considered the joint report of Strategic Directors of Resources and Environment and Economy, requested by the Committee at its July meeting. The report outlined the use made by the Council of the Local Authorities Business Growth Initiative (LABGI) and also included comments on government intentions for the scheme and their proposals for it to be reformed.

Discussion followed and, in reply to questions, David Clarke and John Scouller said that –

- (1) Surplus LABGI money not spent in the current year could be rolled over into the following year.
- (2) The introduction of LABGI by the Government was to stimulate local prosperity and economic growth.
- (3) The LABGI grant was not specifically earmarked by the County Council for economic development but included within the overall County Council budget. This system enabled the authority to have flexibility about how it allocated its resources and Members could influence this allocation at its annual budget meeting.
- (4) Distribution of LABGI money to the district/borough councils was as follows –
North Warwickshire – None
Nuneaton and Bedworth - £81,000
Rugby - £54,000
Stratford - £359,000
Warwick - £307,000
- (5) Business taxpayers were not formally consulted on the distribution of LABGI grant money. It was considered that the current distribution mechanism was unfair and destabilising for district/borough councils.

David S Williams reminded Members of the Government's sub-national review of economic development and regeneration, which he said would give Regional Development Agencies a key role in co-ordinating business support and delivery within the regions and would strengthen the role of local authorities.

During discussion Members –

- (1) Recognised the need to monitor LABGI expenditure year on year.
- (2) Acknowledged that a significant element of LABGI money was used for economic development.
- (3) Noted with concern that North Warwickshire was not eligible for LABGI money.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report and asked that the Committee's concerns be noted and communicated to Cabinet for further consideration.

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

(a) Future Work Programme

Members noted the future work programme of the Committee.

(b) Forward Plan

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

7. Any Other Business

The Chair agreed to the discussion of the following item as urgent business on the grounds that this issue had been called-in from the Cabinet meeting of 6 September 2007

8. Nuneaton and Bedworth Masterplan – Consideration of Colleges’ Co-location

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development in connection with a “called-in” decision of Cabinet of 6 September 2007. The decision related to the proposal to co-locate North Warwickshire and Hinckley College and King Edward VI College into Nuneaton town centre, as compared to the original masterplan proposals.

Councillor June Tandy, a signatory to the call-in request, outlined Members’ concerns, which were –

- (1) that the proposals were put forward as a ‘variation’ to the masterplan when it was believed that they were major changes. She added that the masterplan had been agreed after full public consultation, over a long period of time, and covered issues such as housing, retail and office accommodation.
- (2) That it was in April 2006 that Members of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Area Committee first became aware of the changes and it was suggested at that time that the proposals should be reconsidered and that full consultation and a traffic impact assessment undertaken.
- (3) That the proposal was not part of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council’s Area Action Plan.

Councillor Tandy added that she had attended the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council’s meeting the previous week and fully accepted that a decision had been made but that it was subject to provisions relating to a range of issues of concern.

Councillor Tandy then moved that the proposal be referred back to Cabinet with a recommendation that no action be taken until full public consultation had taken place and a full traffic impact assessment carried out.

Discussion followed during which the following comments were noted against the Cabinet's decision–

- (1) That the proposal, if it included the sale of the King Edward VI College site, would have a detrimental impact on the number of parking spaces available in the town centre.
- (2) That the residents of Nuneaton and Bedworth should have the opportunity to have a say on the proposals in the form of public consultation
- (3) That local newspaper surveys had shown that a greater number of people were against the proposal than in favour of it (56% against/44% in favour).

Further comments were noted –

- (1) That the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, at a recent meeting, had supported the proposal subject to further provisions, and that the County Council should work together in partnership to achieve resolution of this issue.
- (2) That the proposal should be supported on the grounds of providing greater educational and employment opportunities and to take advantage of the educational funding currently available.

Councillor John Ross then proposed that the Committee should ask Cabinet to look again at the transport and infrastructure issues and to consult with the Borough Council on its recent decision relating to this item.

Discussion followed during which Roger Newham reported that the level of transport generated by the proposals would have no greater impact as compared to the masterplan proposals but highlighted that the Colleges could achieve a high level of green transport options.

Councillor Tandy, seconded by Councillor Barry Longden, recommended that Cabinet be requested to take no further action on the Colleges' Co-location Option until such time as a full public consultation exercise is carried out and a full traffic assessment is undertaken, and with 4 Members voting in favour, and 3 Members voting against (2 Member abstaining) it was –

Resolved that the Committee recommend that Cabinet take no further action on the Colleges' Co-location Option until such time as a full public consultation exercise is carried out on the proposal and a full traffic assessment undertaken.

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Chair of the Committee

The Committee rose at 4:05 p.m.