



Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel

Report of: Councillor Fran Oborski
Date: 17th May 2006
OPEN

Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel - Annual Report 2005 - 2006

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a comprehensive update on work undertaken by the Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel during the 2005/2006 municipal year.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Panel has met ten times during the 2005/2006 municipal year.
- 2.2 The Panel agreed its Work Programme and topics for future scrutiny with regard to the Council's Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and Key Commitments at its first meeting on 29th June 2005.

3. Scrutiny Review Topics And Work Areas

- 3.1 The Panel's formal work programme included the following Scrutiny exercises.

3.1.1 Mobile Phone Masts

At the Panel's second meeting on 21st July 2005, the Panel discussed the issue of mobile phone masts and equipment as being a subject of great importance to the general public. Concerns over mobile phones continue to be expressed at a local and national level, with frequent coverage in the media. The existence of conflicting findings from research into links between health and masts has resulted in a perceived health risk. On this basis, Members agreed to undertake an in-depth review into Mobile Phone Masts within the District.

The Panel appointed a Task and Finish Group to research current available information concerning mobile phones and masts to consider:

- Health Issues related to mobile phone masts.
- Public views on mobile phone use and phone masts.
- Planning regulations and appeals.
- Current policies regarding masts on Council owned land.

The Task and Finish Group is scheduled to make its final recommendations to the Panel at its meeting early in the new municipal year, with the Panel's recommendations going to Cabinet on 29th June 2006.

3.1.2 Telecommunication Masts (Planning Control) Bill

As part of the Panel's review into Mobile Phone Masts it also considered an open letter from the Campaign for Planning Sanity dated 7th January 2006, requesting support for the Telecommunications Masts (Planning Control) Bill, which was due to be presented for its second reading on 24th February 2006.

The Bill called for a more robust planning regime that would protect more sensitive locations from future development. It also called for greater capability for local planning authorities to control telecom development within their own borders as well as providing greater support for the removal of existing installations that were considered to be sited insensitively.

A request was made to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 18th January 2006 to consider a number of recommendations to the Cabinet, which were duly considered and agreed by the Cabinet at its meeting on 26th January 2006. As a result, the Cabinet sent a letter expressing the Council's support for the Bill.

3.1.3 Entry into Employment - Adult Education

At its meeting on 12th October 2005, the Panel appointed a Task and Finish Group to consider the local provision and co-ordination of Adult Learning for local residents. The Panel received a Presentation from Tim Mason, Director of Curriculum, Strategy and Workforce Development at Kidderminster College. Members were informed that the changing employment pattern within Wyre Forest was leading to an increase in service sector jobs and a decrease in manufacturing. Job opportunities for people with low level skills were dropping whilst demand for those with qualifications was increasing.

3.1.4 Visitor Economy: making the most of the District's Key Assets

Also at the Panel's meeting on 12th October 2005, Members appointed a Task and Finish Group to undertake a review of the local provision and co-

ordination of key visitor assets within the District. This review was postponed until the new municipal year when more information would be available.

3.1.5 Review of Council Motion: 23 and 24 Bridge Street and the Bridge Street Partnership Project, Stourport on Severn

The Cabinet Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 20th October 2005 considered a Motion which had been submitted by the Labour Group at Council on 21st September 2005. The Motion related to Policy ST4 of the District Local Plan concerning Bridge Street in Stourport-On-Severn and was referred to the Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel to consider at its meeting on 23rd November 2005.

After considering all of the facts the Panel referred its recommendations to the Cabinet at its meeting on 16th February 2006, which were duly noted.

3.1.6 Decriminalisation of on-street car parking

The Panel convened a special meeting on 7th December 2005 to consider the proposals for the decriminalisation of on-street parking in the District. The Cabinet had requested the Panel to review it prior to the Council considering the budget implication. The Panel considered views from a number of stakeholders who had been invited to the meeting and consequently, a number of robust recommendations were submitted to Cabinet for consideration on 22nd December 2005. These were supported and agreed by Cabinet and were accordingly referred to Council at its meeting on 1st March 2006 as a matter which required a decision.

3.1.7 Land Use Implications of the Wyre Forest Schools Review

At its meeting on 26th April 2006, the Panel considered possible land use implications of the Wyre Forest Schools Review.

Members agreed that the Panel would undertake an in-depth review into the issues in the new municipal year.

3.1.8 Police and Communities Together (PACT)

The Joint Community and Leisure Services and Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panels on 23rd March 2006 received a presentation from the Police on the history and development of the PACT project.

It was recognised that PACT was still in its infancy and that existing arrangements would continue to be rolled out across Wyre Forest, Bromsgrove and Redditch.

On this basis, it was agreed that a further joint meeting of the Community and Leisure Services and Environment and Economic Regeneration and

Policy and Scrutiny Panels would be held in June 2006, when more information would be available.

4. Other Topics Covered by the Panel's Work Programme

4.1 During the Municipal Year 2005/2006 the Panel also reviewed the following:

- Bewdley Town Centre Management Forum Partnership Funding
- STC.4
- Statement of Community Involvement
- DC Practise Note 3
- Provisional Local Transport Plan 2
- Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Bridge Street Enhancement Area (Local Plan Policy STC.4)
- Street Naming and Numbering Revised Procedures Policy Note
- Black Country Study Choices Consultation
- Highways Agency: Proposals to De-trunk the A449 and A456 and revoke the Kidderminster, Blakedown and Hagley Bypass and Slip Roads Order
- The Local List, Stourport-on-Severn
- Ward Development Plans
- Home Zones around Schools
- British Waterways Partnership Working
- Kidderminster CCTV Incidents - "Evening Economy"
- Consultation Draft Worcestershire Transportation and Development Control Guide
- Survey of Environmental Issues on the Trading Estates along the Stourport Road
- Local Development Framework - Local Development Scheme
- Cabinet Member Update - Kidderminster Town Centre

4.2 The Panel also received quarterly briefing from past Scrutiny Reviews including the Evening Economy, Opportunity Bewdley and Stourport Forward.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Successful outcomes

As Chairman of the Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel, I am very pleased with the high level of participation and commitment from both panel members and invited experts such as in the Phone Masts Scrutiny and with the PACTs review. Most members of the Scrutiny Panel have excellent records of attendance at main panel meetings with a healthy level of participation.

5.2 Areas Identified for Improvement

We need all the Party Leaders to emphasise to their members that in agreeing to be a panel member, Councillors are also accepting a responsibility to take part in Task and Finish Groups. Some Members of the Panel did not make themselves available to take part in Task and Finish Groups and were therefore leaving all the work to the "regular stalwarts". This is unfair and needs to be addressed in the new municipal year.

- 5.3 Finally, I would like to pass on my grateful thanks to all Members of the Panel for their contributions and assistance in the various Scrutiny exercises, without whose attendance at our meetings and active involvement the Panel would not have been the success it is. I would also like to thank, on behalf of the Panel, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Economic Regeneration for his active support during the year. I would also like to thank those officers who attended the meetings and/or the Task and Finish Groups.

6. Appendices

None.

7. Background Papers

Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Agendas:

29th June 2005
21st July 2005
12th October 2005
23rd November 2005
7th December 2005
12th December 2005
11th January 2006
8th February 2006
15th March 2006
26th April 2006