

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL

10 JANUARY 2011

- Present :-* Councillor Nigel Offen (Chairman)
Councillors Nigel Chapman, Margaret Fisher and
Michael Lilley
- Substitute Members :-* Councillor Sue Lissimore for Councillor Mike Hardy
Councillor Colin Mudie for Councillor Lesley Scott-
Boutell
- Also in Attendance :-* Councillor Tina Dopson

18. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2010 were confirmed as a correct record.

Councillor Sue Lissimore (in respect of her being a Borough Council allotment holder) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

19. Allotment Strategy

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Life Opportunities inviting the Panel to review the draft Allotment Strategy and to note the consultation responses that had been received. The comments of the Panel would be used to inform the further development of the Strategy before formal adoption by the Portfolio Holder in February 2011.

Councillor Dopson, Portfolio Holder for Communities, attended the meeting and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel. Councillor Dopson explained that there was no statutory requirement for an Allotment Strategy but there was a number of people on a waiting list for allotments and there was a need to manage their expectations in a viable and sustainable way.

Bob Penny, Parks and Recreation Manager and Claire Pick, Parks and Recreation Officer, presented to the Panel a background report explaining that there had previously been no formalised approach to the provision and management of allotments by the Council and there was a risk that the trends in demand, pressures on funding and the lack of an adopted approach to the management of the Council's sites could reduce the quality of the allotment provision.

The Allotment Strategy followed four key strands:

- Allotment provision and waiting list management;
- Site management and user involvement;

- Allotment infrastructure;
- Income and expenditure – financial strategy.

The Strategy had included responses obtained from recent surveys of allotment holders and those on the waiting lists for an allotment. Examples of good practice had also been gathered and guidance had been obtained by reference to the Local Government Association publication 'Growing in the Community'. The Strategy itself was also accompanied by a comprehensive Action Plan identifying target dates, partners and potential funding sources.

It was pointed out that under the current financial model there was a net loss in the allotment budget. However, as the demand for allotments was high and the survey results of allotment holders and those on the waiting lists confirmed that allotments were recognised as good value for money, the strategy proposed an approach whereby income exceeded expenditure to enable site improvements to be funded by allotment income. In addition some funding for allotment projects has been obtained from Section 106 agreements as well as external funding such as the Cory Environmental Trust grant scheme.

The Chairman welcomed Sally Young and Ron Grogott from Colchester Allotments Association to the meeting and invited them to address the Panel. Sally Young explained that the Association had been pleased to work with the Council and to be involved with the development of the Strategy. Suggestions made by them and their members had already been taken on board, such as the review of water tank provision which modified the Local Government Association recommendations to consider area of cultivation per tank rather than number of allotment plots.. Whilst the proposals to increase charges would not be popular, the Association understood the reasons behind these measures. In particular the division of plots into half plots was welcomed as it acknowledged the amount of work involved in managing an allotment and provided an opportunity for more people to participate in allotment gardening.

The Panel discussed the issues raised and gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- The need for Parish Councils to consider adopting the principles contained in the Strategy;
- The potential to negotiate with the Commander of Colchester Garrison and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Essex with a view to securing the designation of land within their control for use as sites for additional allotments, particularly for use by army and university personnel and their families;
- The benefit of reciprocal arrangements between tenants and householders unable to maintain their own gardens and potential allotment holders currently on the waiting list;
- Advice from officers to such enquiries was to direct people to the website landshare.net – 'connecting growers to people with land to share';
- The need for more to be done to increase the amount of allotment land available to meet demand by such initiatives as reduced rents for land with poorer facilities or with only short term tenancies;
- Suggestions to increase awareness of the availability of grants and funding for

- individual allotment organisations;
- The potential issue for discussion within the Parish Clerks Forum for increased involvement in allotment holdings on the part of Parish Councils by means of an arrangement which would enable the Parish Councils to seek assistance from the Borough Council if demand for allotments was poor;
 - Welcoming the initiative for orchard growing and other similar projects on land not necessarily suitable for conventional allotment cultivation;
 - The need to address the current deficit in the allotment service, particularly if an expansion of the number of sites and/or plots was envisaged in the future and the associated impact of any accelerated increase in charges for many allotment holders.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The contents of the draft Allotments Strategy and the consultation responses be noted and the Portfolio Holder for Communities be recommended to adopt the Strategy on behalf of Colchester Borough Council, bearing in mind the issues identified by the Panel during the course of its consideration;
- (ii) In addition, steps be taken to encourage local Parish Councils to consider adopting the contents of the Allotments Strategy in respect of any allotment land managed by them.

Councillor Margaret Fisher (in respect of her membership of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

20. Integrated County Strategy

The Panel considered a report by Executive Director, Ian Vipond concerning the vision, strategic focus and priorities for Greater Essex (the area covered by Essex County, Southend, and Thurrock Councils) identified in the Integrated County Strategy (ICS) and the role of Colchester in driving the local economy.

It was explained that in 2009 work began to identify key issues that were affecting different parts of the County and what key pieces of investment might benefit the local and ultimately the national economy. In parallel with this work the County Council also started an Economic Assessment of the locality and in February 2010 it was agreed that, under the chairmanship of Colchester's Chief Executive, a process was launched, in tandem with all districts/boroughs County and unitary authorities across Greater Essex, to develop and agree an Integrated County Strategy (ICS).

The ICS was conceived as a way of better articulating the spatial and economic development aspirations of a wide area using a process which would support the quality of partnership working with local authorities and agencies across Greater Essex. In many ways this has been a forerunner of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) arrangements that was now commencing.

The ICS aimed to provide the connection between national and local policy, identify strengths and potential, and considered how key assets could be used to improve the area for residents and make Greater Essex an even more attractive location for businesses. Moreover, within the context of public spending cuts and reduced public intervention, the ICS aimed to identify the key strategic projects which would provide the maximum return on investment and greatest benefits.

An initial collection of over 400 priorities suggested by partners had been tested against strategic impact and deliverability criteria from which a clear, concise and agreed set of priorities had been developed which would guide future investment in localities and the wider area.

The ICS summary document outlined the key outcomes of the ICS process, showing a strategic focus in three areas:

- Low carbon energy, including the important role of Essex University and Harwich port;
- Key towns, specifically including Colchester and;
- Thames Gateway South Essex

The partnership of authorities was seeking endorsement of the ICS by each of the Local Authorities and it had already been approved by Essex County Council's Cabinet. The document had been published and would potentially be launched to central government once agreed by all partners.

The Panel discussed the issues raised in the report and gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- The importance of working in partnership in order to merge ideas and efforts in order to achieve greater outcomes;
- How this initiative would impact upon the sub-regional partnership work undertaken with partners in Suffolk and the Haven Gateway.

RESOLVED that the Portfolio Holder for Strategy recommends to Cabinet that it endorses the vision, strategic focus, and priorities for Greater Essex identified in the Integrated County Strategy (ICS), in so far as it relates to the Haven Gateway and Colchester.

21. Work Programme 2010 -11

The Panel considered a report from the Head of Corporate Management setting out the current situation regarding the Panel's work programme for 2010/11.

An update on the Cycle Paths and Cycle Town Initiative had been scheduled for the meeting in February 2011.

As it was some time since it had been possible to convene the Waste Prevention and

Recycling Options Appraisal Task and Finish Group as a consequence of the Street Services Fundamental Service Review, it was considered that it would be necessary to review the scope and membership of the Group prior to setting up another meeting. The members of the Panel were asked to invite their political groups to review their representations on the Task and Finish Group with a view to confirming their nominations at the meeting of the Panel in February 2011.

Energy Savings Trust this is still awaiting scheduling pending more information on future arrangements following the Cabinet Office's announcement of the abolition and reshuffling of a number of environmental quangos

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The current situation regarding work programme for 2010/11 be noted;
- (ii) The political groups be invited to review their representations on the Waste Prevention and Recycling Options Appraisal Task and Finish Group for confirmation at the meeting of this Panel in February 2011.