

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2011**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Blackmore (Chairman)
Councillors Beerling, Ross, Verrall, Vizzard and Yates

72. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast

Resolved: That all items be web-cast.

73. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Jenni Sharp sent her apologies.

74. Notification of Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

75. Notification of Visiting Members

There were no visiting Members.

76. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

Councillor Beerling disclosed a personal interest in Item 8 by virtue of previous employment with Golding Homes and Councillor Yates for his involvement with the Paper Industry.

77. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information

Resolved: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

78. Amendment to Order of Business

It was resolved that item 7, Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 January 2011, should be taken after item 8, Securing Water Supplies.

79. Securing Water Supplies

The Chairman welcomed Alan Turner, Principle Regeneration & Projects Officer at Kent County Council and thanked him for coming along at such short notice.

Mr Turner began by giving Members a brief outline of his role. He explained that he was the technical lead on water issues at KCC and Chair of the Partnership 'Water Demand Management' developing water initiatives with consumer groups and Councils with the involvement of the Environment Agency and Water Companies. Mr Turner told the Committee there had been a particular focus on Ashford as there were acute issues there but these were now reduced. Members questioned the involvement with Ashford relating its growth point status and possible similar issues for Maidstone. The Committee asked how the water supply could continue taking into account the growth estimated of approximately 10,000 homes in Maidstone and the already distressed state of the existing aquifers. Mr Turner said that he was not sure if there would be a problem. He explained there were a number of supply options and a great deal of potential for improved water efficiency.

Mr Turner referred to the recent Water Enquiry and the 5 companies that supply Kent. Part of the problem he suggested was that Kent was constrained by the fragmented geography of water companies areas and limited trading and sharing of water resources so there was greater potential for this. Members asked if there was a wider water infrastructure and how Maidstone would fit into this. The Officer explained that there was not a national water grid and it was too energy intensive to move water around long distances. Mr Turner explained that the water industry regulator OFWAT was considering splitting water companies into two areas of operation; retail and strategic and that in time this may form two types of business that would break down the vertical monopoly.

Members raised concerns over regeneration projects and developers and discussed with Mr Turner the use of underground reservoirs, storm drains and the possibility of recycling this water on sites. Mr Turner explained that there were new requirements for development to deal with surface water on site. He explained that if there was capacity to do so water companies may allow a surface water connection to a combined sewer however, this would no longer be the normal practice. In future the Flood and Water Management Act would charge developments with the responsibility of demonstrating that they were using Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems and where possible recharge ground water so it did not contribute to downstream flooding. Mr Turner explained that the details of this were with Department for Rural Affairs (DEFRA) but that KCC would have new responsibilities for sustainable surface water management including responsibility for adopting and owning sustainable drainage features. He explained that KCC were waiting to hear from DEFRA and for national guidance. The Committee questioned the part planning authorities like Maidstone would take. Mr Turner explained that the details had not been decided but an officer had been appointed who had been to all the district councils involved. The local knowledge he said would be found at a district level and the authority at a county level.

With the overall plan for Kent and 100,000 new houses and business to be supported by the damaged aquifers the Committee questioned whose responsibility this would be. The Officer told members that the quality and control of pollution of ground water was the responsibility of the Environment Agency. Members raised the issue of pollution and damage caused by various industries to the water supply. The control of pollution was cited as the responsibility of the Environment Agency but Mr Turner said the dependence on ground water aquifers was a shared concern and the pollution of groundwater was another pressure on the water supply that was not always considered. Mr Turner spoke of the horticultural sector who he described as the fastest growing non domestic sector. He explained that they were working with South East Water, the Environment Agency and growers to find more effective irrigation solutions.

Members questioned whether the use of smaller reservoirs was being investigated as a back up solution for emergencies. Mr Turner explained that with surface water reservoirs there was a geographical problem and was not aware of any locations in Maidstone where smaller reservoirs would make a difference. Members raised the possible location of Thurnham. Mr Turner explained that this had been investigated and a consultant had looked into this at the time of the Water Enquiry at the suggestion of Councillor Horne. Mr Turner explained that the site at Thurnham did not provide enough space to be a suitable locations and embankments were needed to be built to a certain height. Mr Turner confirmed that where smaller reservoirs were in use that they were not the best solution to carry forward stored water from winter for summer and autumn. Members gave an example of small reservoirs being used as a buffer at the hospitals and also mentioned the use of lakes.

Mr Turner explained that when considering water and the future it should not only be reservoirs that are considered. Attention needed to be given to recycling what we used already, reduce water wastage and protecting existing resources. Mr Turner explained that there had been some disappointment at the South East Water's Draft Resource Management Plan as it had not considered indirect effluent reuse via river systems which he felt has potential for maintaining main river water flows and utilising water supplies more effectively. He explained that it was costly to treat the water but that long term benefits might outweigh this; a possible scheme on the River Medway was being investigated by Southern Water.

Members thanked Mr Turner for attending and the Chairman asked if any further questions could be forwarded to him. The Committee resolved that a second meeting would be beneficial to examine the issues surrounding water that were to be included in the Core Strategy.

It was resolved:

- a) That a second meeting should be arranged to include Lee Dance, Development Control and Carolyn McKenzie from KCC.

80. Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 January 2011

Resolved: That the minutes be approved subject to the amendments of minute number 68 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

81. Climate Change Framework

The Chairman welcomed Jennifer Hunt, EMS Project Officer. Ms Hunt came to present a draft version of the Climate Change Framework to gain the Committee's feedback.

Ms Hunt gave the Committee a background to the draft report, explaining that the report was to demonstrate how Maidstone Borough Council planned to replace the Climate Change Action Plan. The Officer explained that the report was intended to be overarching and to put into context work that was already been carried out in the existing action plans. She explained that the objectives related to all current and future action plans and strategies.

Members felt that it was important that the language used was as simple as possible as it was a subject that could sometimes be difficult to immediately engage with for Members and the general public. Ms Hunt responded to the request and agreed that this was important and she would ensure that this was taken into account when the document was revisited and revised. The Officer explained that it was deliberately short and to the point for this reason.

Ms Hunt tackled the public scepticism that could exist with regard to Climate Change explaining that CO₂ levels were at an unprecedented high since industrialisation and the climate had been reacting to a different gas make up and this was blocking energy leaving the atmosphere causing the Earth's temperature to rise. Members questioned the natural methods of dealing with CO₂ such as by planting trees. Ms Hunt explained that the Framework itself was overarching and that trees were a fundamental part of dealing with CO₂. Through the remit of the strategies in place they were aiming to reduce the level of CO₂ the Council were producing. A Member summarised the information presented explaining that the Council itself consumed a lot of energy so their contribution was to reduce it's emissions by becoming more energy efficient.

Members recalled a County Scheme the previous year where trees were being given away free of charge which had benefited a number of communities. The Committee also made reference to the stipulations associated with new road building which meant trees have to be planted. Members asked for a definition of the term 'zero emissions'. Ms Hunt explained that the term referred to a building that generated enough energy to support itself in terms of heat and water measures to become self sufficient in terms of energy. Members also sought understanding of the conversion factor used for carbon depending on the energy type. The

Officer explained that some energy sources would have a greater impact and all were converted into a carbon equivalent for measurement. It was felt that reports like the Carbon Framework would help explain Maidstone's efforts and inform the public.

Members discussed the inefficiency of older properties and the grants and initiatives that were available to tackle this. The Officer informed the committee that the Heat seekers scheme was to be rolled out the whole borough so homes would be targeted directly with regard to their insulation needs. Members expressed the need for Planners to take these issues forward so higher Sustainable Code Levels were set and enforced. Members discussed this issue and the position of the Council; that they were unable to enforce anything over Level 1 and the expense of complying to a higher level was unattractive to developers. Ms Hunt informed the Committee that Housing Associations whose developments were required to reach a Level 3 in Sustainable Code were no longer moving towards level 4 and were now going to push the onus back on to district Council's to align the requirements with their policies for developments. Members discussed the lack of take up of insulation grants available to the elderly and those receiving some benefits. Ms Hunt explained that the schemes were promoted but hoped the new Green Deal would prove more successful.

Members questioned the innovation in the document and made reference to the Council leading the way by using an electric car as part of its fleet to help demonstrate its commitment. The Officer explained that the innovation was found in the Carbon Action Plans that were already in place and this document remained an overarching framework for those.

It was resolved That Jenny Hunt be thanked for attending the meeting and it be recommended that the document should contain a glossary for technical terminology used to make it more accessible.

82. Local Strategic Partnership - Written Update

Members considered the written update on the Local Strategic Partnership. The Committee discussed the information provided and the purpose of the Partnership; resolving that it was a networking tool. Members felt that there was nothing in the document that they had not been previously been made aware of.

Members felt that the two delivery groups had relevance to the Committee's remit and discussed inviting the appropriate delivery group Chairman along to their next meeting.

It was resolved:

- a) That the LSP should be thanked for their update and passed the following questions from the Committee:

- What were the delivery groups doing to avoid duplication;
- What solutions were they looking to achieve through their aims and objectives;
- What were their priorities linked to; and
- What were they hoping to deliver and by when.

83. Future Work Programme

Members reviewed their future work programme taking into consideration the Forward Plan and the relevant Performance Indicator Exceptions provided in the report.

It was resolved:

- a) That Communal Spaces would be removed from the future work programme;
- b) That Lee Dance, Carolyn Mackenzie and Development Control should be invited to the next meeting to continue looking at water;
- c) That Georgia Hawkes, Jennifer Gosling and David Edwards be invited to attend the next meeting to provide an update on the Best Value Review on waste and recycling
- d) That King Street Multi Story Car Park be kept on the future work programme and revisited at an appropriate time; and
- e) That written updates should be requested from Jason Taylor on Mote Park in relation to the Performance Indicator Exceptions Report and on King Street Multi Storey Car Park from Steve Goulette.