

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR & MONITORING OFFICER
TO THE ABINGDON AREA COMMITTEE
25th MARCH 2008

The Abingdon Area Forum and the Sustainable Community Strategy

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

1.1 This report provides information about the responses at the Abingdon Area Forum held on 14th November 2007 and the preparation of the Vale Sustainable Community Strategy.

1.3 The contact officer for this report is Toby Warren, Head of Community Strategy; Tel: 01235 547695, Email toby.warren@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

2.0 Recommendations

(a) *that members note the information contained in the report*

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

This report supports the Council's Vision and Priorities. It also supports the Vale Community Strategy. It does not conflict with any Council strategy or policy.

4.0 Background

4.1 The Local Government Act 2000 requires that district councils produce a community strategy for their area in partnership with public, private and voluntary sector service providers.

4.2 Following the publication in the autumn of 2006 of the white paper about the future of local government ('Strong & Prosperous Communities') the Vale Partnership Board (which is made up of the District Council and key agencies which influence quality of life in the Vale) commenced a review of the Vale Community Strategy 2004-2008.

4.3 The white paper specifies that all community strategies should be sustainable. Sustainable communities balance and integrate social, economic and environmental components of their community; meet the needs of existing and future generations; and respect the needs of other communities in the wider region.

- 4.4 A sustainable community strategy also recognises that the Local Development Framework must be a key component in the delivery of the sustainable community strategy, setting out its spatial aspects and providing a long-term spatial vision.
- 4.5 The new Vale Sustainable Community Strategy will set out the vision for the future of the Vale, identify the issues that will affect our future and identify the priority actions that will help us to achieve that vision. The strategy will be based on evidence that demonstrates particular local needs and also takes into consideration the resources that are available and the aspirations of local residents, employers and community organisations.
- 4.6 In the autumn of 2007 the Council and its partners published a joint 'Issues and Options' report. The report outlines the issues that the Council and Vale Partnership has identified so far and starts to consider ways in which they might be dealt with. Some issues will be tackled through policies and proposals in the Local Development Framework; others will be addressed through the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 4.7 The Council and its partners understand the importance of involving residents in the preparation of important strategies and officers arranged a number of consultation events during the eight week period of public consultation on the joint 'Issues and Options' report. These events included meetings with younger people, older people, housing association tenants, businesses and faith groups. A public forum was also organised in each of the Vale's four areas; Abingdon, North East, South East and West
- 4.8 Each area forum was chaired by the chair of the area committee and the meetings, which focused on round table discussion between residents, councillors, partners and officers were facilitated by a specialist company called 'Dialogue'. 'Dialogue' was commissioned to ensure that an independent party recorded the public response at each forum.
- 4.9 At each area forum each discussion table was provided with a sheet listing nineteen key issues and challenges for the future that had been identified by the Council and its partners:
- Meeting the needs of an ageing population
 - Meeting the needs of a migrant population
 - Fostering a greater sense of community
 - Tackling health problems and inequalities
 - Reducing crime and the fear of crime
 - Helping young people get the skills for work

- Involving young people in the life of the Vale
- Providing open space, sport, recreation and cultural facilities
- Helping those without cars access jobs and services
- Providing good quality affordable housing
- Helping businesses and the local economy to prosper
- Improving the economic vitality of the local town centres
- Tackling the causes of climate change
- Adapting to more extreme weather conditions
- Using natural resources wisely
- Reducing the amount of waste and increasing recycling
- Protecting the natural environment
- Enhancing the built heritage
- Tackling low income and deprivation

5.0 Abingdon Area Forum Consultation Responses

5.1 The Abingdon Area Forum was held at the Guildhall and involved about fifty-five local residents and councillors.

5.2 Participants identified the following Vale wide and local issues as being particularly important:

- Fostering a greater sense of community
- Providing open space, sport, recreation and cultural facilities
- Providing good quality affordable housing
- Helping businesses and the local economy to prosper
- Improving the economic vitality of local town centres

5.4 There were a number of common positive attributes that were highlighted across the Vale during discussion on the 'Vision for your Area':

- the surrounding countryside
- a strong community spirit
- beautiful rural setting.

5.5 There were a number of common negative attributes that were highlighted across the Vale during discussion on the 'Vision for your Area'

- lack of facilities
- lack of variety in employment
- limited public transport/dependency on cars
- house prices
- lack of/closing of shops

At the Abingdon Area Forum participants felt that there was a need to tackle traffic congestion and reduce the difficulties involved in cycling in the town.

- 5.6 Participants wanted to preserve the history and archaeology of Abingdon and promote tourism. The River Thames was seen as a major tourism asset for the town.
- 5.7 The proximity of Oxford was seen as a problem for local shops because many local residents shop in Oxford rather than Abingdon.
- 5.8 Participants wanted to see a revitalisation of the town centre with a better transport strategy, free car parking (for at least two hours), a good information centre and an arts/performance centre. The possibility of another bridge over the Thames was raised.
- 5.9 Participants wanted local people to become more involved in the local community and more people should be able to live, work and shop locally.
- 5.10 Some participants felt that the Church has a role in building community spirit and that neighbours should be encouraged to get to know each other.

6.0 Abingdon Area Forum Conclusions

- 6.1 There were a number of issues for the future that were clear at all the area forums including the Abingdon Area Forum:
- A need for more good quality affordable housing in the Vale
 - A need for initiatives to attract new business and sustain existing local enterprise and employers in the Vale.
 - A need for a coordinated approach to and increased investment in public transport across the Vale
 - A need for new local facilities and a sustained effort to maintain community spirit
 - A need for improved access to community facilities and services for all

7.0 The Next Stage in Preparing the Sustainable Community Strategy

- 7.1 The public consultation period for the joint 'Issues and Options' report ended on 31st December 2007. As well as the responses to from the area forums and other consultation events the Council received written responses from a large number of residents and organisations. The Council is also surveying the 'Vale Voice' citizens' panel. All responses are being analysed and discussed within the Council and with partner organisations. The responses will inform the draft Vale Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 7.2 Once the draft strategy has been prepared it will be subject to public consultation and another round of area forums is being organised.

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Background Papers: None