

Date: 26 January 2006

TO: All Members of the Executive
FOR ATTENDANCE

TO: All Other Members of the Council
FOR INFORMATION

Dear Sir/Madam

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **EXECUTIVE** to be held in the **GUILDHALL, ABINGDON** on **FRIDAY, 3RD FEBRUARY, 2006** at **2.30 PM**.

Yours faithfully

Terry Stock
Chief Executive

Members are reminded of the provisions contained in Part 2 of the Local Code of Conduct, and Standing Order 34 regarding the declaration of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

A G E N D A

Open to the Public including the Press

A large print version of this agenda is available. Any background papers referred to may be inspected by prior arrangement. Contact Steve Culliford, Democratic Services Officer on telephone number (01235) 540307.

Map and Vision

(Page 10)

A map showing the location of the venue for this meeting, together with a copy the Council Vision are attached.

STANDING ITEMS

1. Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

To adopt and sign as a correct record the public minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 6 January 2006, (previously circulated).

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive any declarations of Personal or Personal and Prejudicial Interests in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

In accordance with Part 2 of the Local Code of Conduct and the provisions of Standing Order 34, any Member with a personal interest must disclose the existence and nature of that interest to the meeting prior to the matter being debated. Where that personal interest is also a prejudicial interest, then the Member must withdraw from the room in which the meeting is being held and not seek improperly to influence any decision about the matter unless he/she has obtained a dispensation from the Standards Committee.

4. Urgent Business and Chair's Announcements

To receive notification of any matters which the Chair determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the Chair.

5. Statements and Petitions from the Public Under Standing Order 32

Any statements and/or petitions from the public under Standing Order 32 will be made or presented at the meeting.

6. Questions from the Public Under Standing Order 32

Any questions from members of the public under Standing Order 32 will be asked at the meeting.

7. Referral under the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules or the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules

In accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Rules, to receive feedback from consultation on the budget as follows:

1. from the consultant undertaking focus group consultations
2. businesses (if any) which attended budget briefings
3. the Opposition Group input (if any)

8. Referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Other Committees

Scrutiny Committee – 19 January 2006
Audit Service Area Annual Report 2004/05

The Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 19 January 2006, considered issues arising out of the Audit Service Area Annual Report 2004/05. Councillor Roz Smith, the Executive Member with responsibility for Audit was in attendance at the meeting to assist the Committee better understand the working relationship between a Portfolio Holder and an Assistant Director. In considering this matter, the Committee referred the following to the Executive for consideration:-

- The Executive should ensure that in the interests of transparency there is an adequate public debate at its meetings on issues contained in individual Annual Reports and that such discussions are recorded in the Minutes of the meeting
- Operational reports, such as Service Plans, should be drafted so that acronyms used are spelt out in their full form in the first instance. Such reports could also include a glossary of terms used. Furthermore, a rolling glossary of terms used across the Council could be held on the Council's website

9. Items Deferred from the Previous Meeting

None

10. Financial Monitoring

(Pages 11 - 13)

Members are requested to consider any significant budget variances and the requests for virement or permanent budget adjustments.

KEY DECISIONS

11. Forward Plan

(Pages 14 - 18)

To receive the Forward Plan containing Executive decisions to be taken from February to May 2006.

Recommendation

that the Forward Plan be received.

12. Final Budget Proposals 2006/07

The Executive is requested to consider how its final budget will be presented to the Council.

Recommendation

That the Executive invites the Chair of the Executive to delegate authority to himself to prepare and submit to Council the final budget proposals for 2006/07.

13. Local Development Framework: Draft Statement of Community Involvement

(Pages 19 - 91)

At its meeting held on 23 January 2006, the Strategic and Local Planning Advisory Group received and considered report 213/05 (attached to this agenda for information) regarding the draft Statement of Community Involvement. The draft Statement was placed on deposit for public consultation from 25 November 2005 to 6 January 2006. The report summarised the responses received and recommended changes to the draft document. The Advisory Group considered these in detail and agreed with the recommended changes.

The Advisory Group considered additional information received from a local resident, Mr Hocken, for reference to be made to the issue of a potential air quality monitoring assessment declaration as a result of any planning application being explicitly included in paragraph 6.4. However, the Advisory Group felt this to be unnecessary. In relation to Thames Water's proposed reservoir, the officers were asked to update the draft Statement as further information

became available. The Advisory Group also noted that the Ramblers' Association would be consulted as part of the Local Development Framework despite not appearing in the list of consultees in Appendix 1.

The Executive is requested to adopt the recommendations of the Advisory Group for the draft Statement of Community Involvement to be updated and submitted to the Secretary of State.

Recommendations

- (a) *that the representations made to the draft Statement of Community Involvement be agreed, as set out in the schedule appended to report 213/05;*
- (b) *that the draft Statement of Community Involvement be approved for submission to the Secretary of State as amended in Appendix A; and*
- (c) *that prior to the publication of the draft Statement of Community Involvement, authority to make minor and editorial and presentational amendments be delegated to the Assistant Director (Planning).*

OTHER MATTERS

14. Local Plan to 2011: Grove Development Forum

(Pages 92 - 103)

At its meeting held on 23 January 2006, the Strategic and Local Planning Advisory Group received and considered report 212/05 (attached to this agenda for information) regarding the Grove Development Forum. In March 2004, the Council agreed to investigate setting up a development forum to help with the delivery of the proposals for the development of the strategic housing site to the west of Grove. The forum would consist of local council representatives and other stakeholders, including local employers. The report looked at the principles of establishing a process of information dissemination, discussion and consultation with local people.

The Advisory Group considers that the forum should consist of twelve elected members representing the local community (1 County Councillor representing Wantage/Grove; 3 Grove Parish Councillors; 1 East Challow Parish Councillor; 1 East Hanney Parish Councillor; 1 Wantage Town Councillor; 3 District Council Ward Members for Grove; 1 District Council Ward Member for Wantage Segsbury; 1 District Council Executive Member). However, when transport and flooding/drainage issues are discussed, there should be an invitation to other local Parish Councils from the surrounding area to send a representative. As the forum will be advisory only with no voting ability, it is suggested that it is not necessary for there to be proportional representation under the Widdicombe Rules. The Advisory Group agrees with the report's proposals for the role of the forum and the employment of independent external facilitators to manage it. The suggested scope and content of the first two meetings is also supported.

Members also asked that the Executive sought legal guidance as a matter of urgency for elected Members of the forum. Members should be advised of what they could do and should not do in their role as a forum member, bearing in mind that some may be Members of the Development Control Committee that determines the planning application.

Recommendations

- (a) *that the Grove Development Forum be established, as set out in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.9 of report 212/05;*
- (b) *that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to appoint an external facilitator to lead*

the forum, and to confirm the source of funding for this;

- (c) *that the number of elected representatives be limited to 12 (1 County Councillor representing Wantage/Grove; 3 Grove Parish Councillors; 1 East Challow Parish Councillor; 1 East Hanney Parish Councillor; 1 Wantage Town Councillor; 3 District Council Ward Members for Grove; 1 District Council Ward Member for Wantage Segsbury; 1 District Council Executive Member) for the core group of the forum, but when transport and flooding/drainage issues are to be discussed representatives from other surrounding Parish Councils should be invited to attend and participate; and*
- (d) *that the Executive seeks legal guidance as a matter of urgency for elected Members of the Grove Development Forum. Members should be advised of what they can do and should not do in their role as a forum member, bearing in mind that some may be Members of the Development Control Committee that determines the planning application.*

15. Draft Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing

(Pages 104 - 133)

At its meeting held on 23 January 2006, the Strategic and Local Planning Advisory Group received and considered report 211/05 (attached to this agenda for information) regarding the draft Planning Policy Statement 3 on Housing. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has published a consultation paper on this new Planning Policy Statement. This and the good practice guides to be published alongside it will replace the old Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) statement 3 and its updates. The closing date for comments is 27 February. The Executive's comments are sought.

The key sections of draft Statement are attached at Appendix 1 to the report for information. The report highlights the key areas which the Council could support and where objections and concerns should be raised. In summary, the Advisory Group had serious reservations about the document and considered the proposed PPS3:

- moves from a plan-led system to one of responding to market demand
- is contrary to the Government's objectives of ensuring sustainable development, community involvement in the planning process, prioritising the development of brownfield sites; the efficient and timely provision of infrastructure and securing the maximum amount of affordable housing through the planning system
- lacks clarity and will significantly increase the complexity of the processes for preparing development plans with major resource implications

The Advisory Group considers that:

- low cost market housing can have a role to play in providing affordable housing in areas where house prices are not as high as the Vale (paragraph 4.1 of the report refers)
- additional resources will be needed to complete the studies and assessments introduced in the draft Statement in a reasonable timescale (paragraph 4.3)
- investing in areas of low demand will help to bring forward brownfield sites for redevelopment (paragraph 4.5)
- car ownership is not the same as car use and that adequate car parking needs to be provided in residential areas (paragraph 4.9)
- the Government should be more explicit about the funding to be available for affordable housing (paragraph 4.10)
- paragraph 4.12 of the report should be strengthened before a response is made to the Secretary of State. The demand-led planning ethos set out within the draft Statement must not allow the precious rural environment to be destroyed.

The Advisory Group feels strongly that the draft Statement is seriously shortsighted in its principles. This is an all-party view. Copies of the Executive's resolved position should be publicised by being sent to the Local Government Association, the Planning Officers' Society, the

five Oxfordshire Members of Parliament, other Oxfordshire District Councils, and be posted on the Council's website. There should also be a press release and a 'user-friendly' executive summary for the website and the press.

Recommendations

- (a) *that the comments contained in the bullet points above, Section 4 and Appendices 2 and 3 to report 211/05 all be sent to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as the basis of this Council's comments on draft Planning Policy Statement 3 and its associated draft guidance, subject to paragraph 4.12 being strengthened to urge protection of the precious rural environment; and*
- (b) *that copies of the Executive's resolved position be publicised by being sent to the Local Government Association, the Planning Officers' Society, the five Oxfordshire Members of Parliament, other Oxfordshire District Councils, and be posted on the Council's website. An executive summary and a press release should be posted on the Council's website.*

16. Green Travel Plan

(Pages 134 - 151)

To receive and consider report 221/05 of the Assistant Director (Planning).

Introduction and Report Summary

The Council is committed to the development of a Green Travel Plan (GTP) for its staff and elected Members which embraces travelling thoughtfully to, from and whilst at work. In doing so, the Council acknowledges the frequently held view that the success of a Green Travel Plan depends on its ownership by staff.

The first Vale GTP, developed in 2004/05, received only limited support from staff and unions. Accordingly, in listening to the comments made on the original Plan, the Council now aims to take forward a new GTP which contains a range of more moderate measures which would be easier to implement; and to proceed at a more measured pace whilst continuing to signal the Council's commitment to green travel.

The purpose of this report is to up-date Members on the development of the revised GTP and seek the endorsement of the Executive on the measures proposed in phase 1 of the plan, which will allow this phase to be developed through to implementation.

The Contact Officer for this report is Gordon Willcox, Section Head (Transportation), telephone 01235 540390

Recommendations

That the Executive :

Endorse the measures for phase 1 of the Vale's Green Travel Plan as set out in appendix C of this report, whilst noting that this project is not a Council Priority, and requests that the Assistant Director (Planning) commence the detailed planning of the individual measures within phase 1 of the Plan, subject to budgetary constraints and the availability of staff resources.

Agree that the Assistant Director (Planning) in consultation with the Executive Member responsible for the Vale's new Green Travel Plan, at the appropriate time, determine the launch date for the Plan, and advise the Executive accordingly.

Expressly for the purpose of Regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992, agree that the necessary deemed consent be sought for the provision of new cycle parking adjacent to The Abbey House, Abingdon.

Request that the Chief Executive undertake a review of the Council's existing Flexible Working Arrangements Policy.

17. Reservoir

(Pages 152 - 154)

To receive and consider report 222/05 of the Reservoir Advisory Group.

Introduction

At its meeting on 6 January 2006, the Executive noted that a Reservoir Advisory Group had been set up to advise the Executive on matters relating to Thames Water's provisional proposal for a reservoir to the south-west of Abingdon. The Advisory Group met on 17 January to consider the latest position and has made recommendations below.

The contact officer for this report is Steve Culliford, Democratic Services Officer, telephone 01235 540307.

Recommendations

that the Advisory Group's business remains confidential until the Advisory Group has indicated otherwise and recommends so to the Executive; and

that this Council should act as if it were the determining authority in any application for a reservoir proposal.

18. Empty Homes

(Pages 155 - 165)

To receive and consider report 223/05 of the Strategic Director.

Introduction and Report Summary

The Executive will be aware that the approved Housing Strategy for 2004/5 - 2007/8 contains an action to develop a specific strategy to address the issue of empty homes in the private sector across the District.

This report introduces this strategy to the Executive and considers the implications of its implementation.

The Contact Officer for this report is Paul Staines (Assistant Director Housing and Community Safety) (01235 547621)

Recommendation

That the Executive approve the Empty Homes Strategy attached as appendix 1 to this report.

19. Customer Contact Strategy

(Pages 166 - 175)

To receive and consider report 224/05 of the Strategic Director.

Introduction and Report Summary

This report draws on a number of sources notably:

- The Consultants Report in respect of Customer Contact Strategy
- Business Case in respect of Customer Contact Strategy

- Project Appraisal Local Services Point 2
- Consultants Report in respect of partnering and/or outsourcing of Revenue and Benefit Services and
- Best Value Review Revenues and Benefits

The report draws together the issues arising from the above documents and recommendations for the adoption of a Customer Contact Strategy.

The Contact Officer for this report is Tim Sadler Strategic Director, 01235 540360.

Recommendation

That the Executive recommends to Council the Customer Contact Strategy attached to this report.

20. Freedom of Information Act

(Pages 176 - 179)

To receive and consider report 225/05 of the Monitoring Officer and Solicitor.

Introduction and Report Summary

As Members will be aware, the above legislation came into force on 1st January 2005 and gives the public the right to request information from the Council which then has an obligation to respond promptly and within 20 working days by either disclosing the requested information or refusing to disclose on the basis of one of the statutory exceptions.

The 2000 Act gives greater public access to general information held by Public Authorities, like the Council and the 2004 Regulations provide a specific statutory regime for the disclosure of environmental information. Although "the right to know" is similar in both cases, the provisions are not identical and this is relevant when considering the issue of charging the public for the information sought.

The Council now has the benefit of one year's experience of dealing with this legislation and 12 months on the time is right to decide whether or not the Council should seek to charge for the information in the future.

The Contact Officer for this report is David Quayle, Monitoring Officer and Solicitor [telephone number: 01235 540312].

Recommendations

To note that there is currently no charging Policy in respect of "right to know requests for information and to consider whether such a Policy should be approved by the Council.

If Members are of the opinion that a Policy should be put into place, then the Executive is invited to consider the draft Policy attached at Appendix A and to recommend its adoption by the Council.

21. Exclusion of the Public, including the Press

The Chair to move that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the remainder of the meeting to prevent the disclosure to them of exempt information, as defined in Section 100(I) and Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act when the following items are considered:

- Item 22 Minutes
(Category 7 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (other than the authority).
(Category 9 - Any terms proposed or to be proposed by or to the authority in the course of negotiations for a contract for the acquisition or disposal of property or the supply of goods or services).
- Item 23 Property Matters
(Category 9)

EXEMPT INFORMATION UNDER SECTION 100A(4) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

STANDING ITEMS

22. Minutes

To adopt and sign as a correct record the Exempt minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 6 January 2006, (previously circulated).

OTHER MATTERS

23. Property Matters

To consider any property matters.