



Buckinghamshire County Council
Select Committee
Transport, Environment and Communities

Minutes

TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 19 May 2015, in Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.02 am and concluding at 11.45 am.

This meeting was webcast. To review the detailed discussions that took place, please see the webcast which can be found at <http://www.buckscc.public-i.tv/>
The webcasts are retained on this website for 6 months. Recordings of any previous meetings beyond this can be requested (contact: democracy@buckscc.gov.uk)

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr W Bendyshe-Brown, Mr D Carroll (Vice-Chairman), Mr P Gomm, Mr S Lambert and Mr W Whyte (Chairman)

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr M Farley, Mr P Markham, Mr S Newell, Mrs K Sutherland (Secretary) and Ms J Wise

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr Chapple OBE, Mr Butcher and Mrs Lesley Clarke OBE.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Warren Whyte declared an interest for Item 6 as the Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum and a member of the Bucks Archaeological Society.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th April 2015 were confirmed as a correct record.

The Chairman advised members that a brief update report from the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) Commissioners in relation to work with partners on Legal Highs would be received at the 23rd June meeting. The Chairman also requested that a status update report



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



should be requested on the introduction of BCC's Sustainable Drainage duties for 23rd June. These items would be added to the Work Programme.

ACTION:

Committee Adviser

Members discussed the Country Parks item which came to the meeting in April. Whilst the Committee had agreed to undertake an Inquiry into Country Parks, the Chairman was concerned about the lack of clarity around the legal ownership and it was suggested that this should be resolved before members developed a scope for this piece of work. It was agreed that the Committee Adviser would liaise with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment to progress this.

ACTION: Committee Adviser

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman advised members that the S106 Inquiry Report had been very well-received at Cabinet. The Committee had been congratulated on an in depth report and all seven recommendations were agreed, two in part by Cabinet.

The Committee also noted the short update provided by the Community Safety Manager in response to members' concerns that the original consultation exercise undertaken for the Safer Bucks Plan had not yielded enough responses, particularly in the Aylesbury Vale area.

6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT DUTIES

The Chairman welcomed Mr Phil Markham, Senior Archaeology Officer, Mr Simon Newell, Environment Team Leader, Ms Julia Wise, Historic Environments Record Officer and Mr Mike Farley, Bucks Archaeological Society to the meeting. Mr Markham took members through his report, which provided an overview of the role of the Archaeology service and the legislation under which they operate, partnership working with the district councils as the local planning authorities, how the team generate income currently and the future challenges and opportunities for the service. The Chairman then invited Mr Mike Farley of the Bucks Archaeological Society to inform members of the history and work of the Society and how the Society interacts with the Council's Archaeology team.

During these discussions and in response to subsequent questions from members the following main points were noted:

- Mr Farley outlined why the Archaeology Service was very important. Buckinghamshire has historical sites of great significance and whilst developments of new houses, shopping centres and roads were very positive it was vital that the implications of development on our heritage was recognised and the Archaeology team played a key role in protecting this for future generations.

- Fortunately the profession of Archaeology has grown over the years and it was important to have qualified people to assess what was needed to protect historical sites. An up to date Historical Environment Record(HER) was key to informing future developments in the county.
- Bucks Archaeological Society respected the professionalism of the service provided by Buckinghamshire County Council and wanted to encourage greater public awareness of their work. Some of the Society's members volunteered in the county archives and at the museum. But there were concerns that the service was over-stretched, as keeping the HER updated and providing advice and monitoring the progress of large developments was demanding, as it was so important to ensure that standards were being met. Also HS2 would increase the workload for the team and they were already struggling to support any significant Outreach work.
- A member commented that he was aware that although Planning officers at the district councils knew about the HER, they did not always consult it – was there anything that could be done to ensure that developers consulted the HER at pre-application or at least, when preparing to submit their application. Julia Wise agreed that it would be helpful if consulting the HER could be included on the pre-application checklists for all the district councils and if the Planning officers reinforced the need to consult the HER at an early stage.
- It was noted that when the team were busy it was inputting new information into the HER which would be held up. Julia Wise would have to prioritise dealing with developer inquiries over the inputting duties. The only reason the HER was currently as up to date as it is, was due to Julia's personal dedication in working longer than her contracted hours. Simon Newell recognised this and felt it was a priority to secure additional support in this area.
- Members asked if volunteers could be used to help with data inputting but Mike Farley and Julia Wise explained that this was very difficult. Whilst volunteers compiled the original HER back in the 1970s, it now required an experienced professional to be able to distil the significance of what has been found. Background research and field work are often undertaken by two different people, so the wider context is not always clear when reading a report for the HER. The HER was a very complicated database and has to comply with national standards, so volunteers would need a large amount of training and monitoring.
- Members were concerned that the maintenance of the HER was so reliant on the expertise and dedication of one person. The Environment Team Leader was asked whether external funding could be secured to support this area. Simon Newell gave an example of a local authority in Surrey which charges a HER search fee as a requirement of the planning process, which then generates an ongoing revenue stream to support the maintenance of the HER. Additional staff would be needed to meet the increased demand but this was being considered. Also the possibility of establishing Service Level Agreements with the district councils was being explored. This was already in place for the Ecology service. In the short term Simon Newell hoped to appoint a part-time HER assistant using funding from HS2, but this might only be up until April 2016. There was also scope to secure funding from developers via Community Infrastructure Levy and S106 agreements.

- A bid for Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) had been submitted in partnership with the Chilterns Conservation Board for the preservation and promotion of Hill Forts across Buckinghamshire. If the bid was successful then again some funding might be available for the HER.
- The Chairman advised that he was aware of some situations where planning conditions, including the submission of Archaeological reports had not been met. Phil Markham explained that generally planning conditions were enforced but BCC were reliant on the district councils for enforcement.
- 'Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past', a more user friendly and accessible version of the HER for public use had been migrated onto new software and was not totally up to date due to a technical issue with the publication process. The software providers were looking into this and the fact that the number of hits the website receives stopped being counted following the switch. Julia Wise was asked to report back to members with an update on when this problem would be resolved.

ACTION: Julia Wise

- In response to a question regarding value for money, Simon Newell assured members that the service being delivered was very good and the quality of advice given was not in dispute, but the challenge for the future was how the small team could continue to maintain this level of service with the demands of extra developments, HS2, Cross Rail etc.
- The Chairman asked if there was a plan in place, given the challenges highlighted, to enable the team to improve their Outreach work etc. Simon Newell explained that now the Transport, Environment and Economy (TEE) Business Unit was up and running, there were delivery plans in place and a key goal for the team was to increase Outreach. Strategies were being developed in order to achieve this goal. Initial discussions had also been held with the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) around raising the profile of Bucks Heritage and how BCC can support partners and the public by supplying data, especially via the HER.

The Chairman thanked Simon Newell, Phil Markham, Julia Wise and Mike Farley for attending the meeting. The Committee had a discussion about a suitable outcome from the session which had highlighted some areas of concern, particularly in relation to the resourcing of this area. The Chairman proposed and members agreed that it would be appropriate to write to the Cabinet Member with some informal recommendations, including the following:

- It would be worth investigating making a chargeable search of the HER a mandatory part of the planning process in Bucks, as has been adopted in Tandridge, Surrey.
- The team need further resources to ensure that the HER can be kept up to date.
- It would be useful to strengthen relationships with the district councils further to ensure increased levels of engagement during the application process and effective enforcement thereafter. Service Level Agreements could be worth pursuing in order to secure a consistent income stream for the service.
- Members were keen to see the 'Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past' website maintained and for further plans for Outreach to be supported and adequately resourced.

ACTION: Chairman & Committee Adviser

(Post-meeting note: Subsequent to the meeting the Chairman of the Select Committee was appointed to the post of Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment. Therefore it was agreed that a copy of the minutes would be sent to him as a reminder of the informal recommendations that the Committee wished to make.)

The Committee requested that a further update from the Archaeology team should be included in the Work Programme for the early part of 2016.

ACTION: Committee Adviser

7 COMMITTEE INQUIRY - OUTLINE SCOPE

The Committee received and noted the draft Outline Scope for a proposed Inquiry into Flooding in Bucks 2013-14: Lessons Learned. Members agreed that they wished to go ahead with the Inquiry and that the Committee Adviser should organise meeting dates accordingly.

ACTION: Committee Adviser

8 SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2015-16

Members discussed forthcoming agenda items on the Work Programme and suggested other topic areas that the Committee might wish to consider in future. These included; Fracking, Economic Development and the possibility of developing a Heritage Route through the county, East/West Rail and HS2.

9 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 23rd June 2015 at 10am in Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury. There will be a pre-meeting for Committee Members at 9.30am.

CHAIRMAN

