

**ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**RURAL AREA WORKING PARTY**

**Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 12 November 2009 at 5.00 pm  
in Room GFR14, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

PRESENT: Councillor J Thorndyke (Chairman)  
Councillors Mrs Bone, Mrs Broughton, Chappell, Clifton-Brown  
(substituting for Stevens), Mrs Levack, Ray, Redhead, Spicer and  
Mrs Whittaker

BY INVITATION: Councillor Griffiths

**1. Substitute**

The Working Party was advised of the following substitution:-

Councillor Clifton-Brown for Councillor Stevens

**2. Election of Chairman**

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:-

That Councillor Thorndyke be elected Chairman of this  
Working Party.

**3. Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:-

That Councillor Mrs Broughton be appointed Vice-Chairman of this  
Working Party.

**4. Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Stevens.

**5. Declarations of Interests**

Members' declarations of interests are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

**6. Terms of Reference and Provisional Work Programme**

The Working Party considered Report A308 (previously circulated) which contained its Terms of Reference, as agreed by the Cabinet, and sought approval for its work programme.

The proposed work programme was based on existing items which had relevance to the Working Party's brief. The intention was for this Working Party to mirror the two other Area Working Parties which had already been established. In formulating a work programme care had been taken not to duplicate areas of work being undertaken by other Working Parties or Panels. The suggested reviews of Rural Area Funding and Rural Cleansing had been included at the instigation of the Leader of the Council, as the Portfolio Holder for Rural Affairs.

The Working Party recognised that monitoring the Rural Area Action Plan was considered to be a core activity of the Working Party and this role would be taken on from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED:-

That the provisional work programme, as contained in Paragraph 2.1 of Report A308, be approved subject to:-

- (i) the Work Programme becoming a regular item for the Working Party in order that it could be monitored and reviewed;
- (ii) a full review of the Work Programme take place annually;
- (iii) consideration of Youth Services Provision include activities for smaller villages;
- (iv) clarification be sought whether the Working Party will be asked to consider the Rural Allocations Document in respect of the work proposed to be undertaken on the delivery of the Local Development Framework; and
- (v) consideration of rural cleansing to include a detailed investigation of street sweeping in view of the shared responsibilities between the Borough Council and the County Council.

## **7. Rural Action Plan Monitoring Report**

The Working Party received and noted Report A309 (previously circulated) which was the Rural Action Plan Monitoring Report for the period ended 31 October 2009. Projects were annotated with a traffic light system whereby:- green represented projects completed, amber represented those in progress and red represented those not yet started or which had encountered a problem.

The Council's three-year Rural Action Plan, which covered the period from March 2008 to February 2011, had been approved in March 2008 with involvement from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In addition to regular monitoring by officers it had been agreed that the development of the Plan would also be monitored on an annual basis by Members and this responsibility had now been assumed by the Rural Area Working Party.

Officers advised that item 4 under the heading of Improving Community Accessibility and items 3 and 15 in the heading of Promoting Stronger and Sustainable Rural Communities should have been indicated as red as this information had been omitted from the report.

The Economic Development Officer provided an update on the items in the Plan, along with a presentation illustrating in more detail a number of its 32 projects. The projects were intended to create quieter and safer village roads, improve community accessibility, maintain and enhance the quality of the environment, and promote stronger and sustainable rural communities.

Members discussed a number of the actions in the plan and related issues and also complimented the Economic Development Officer for her work and enthusiasm in progressing the various projects listed. The Working Party concluded that good progress had been made.

Members commented in relation to the colour code system for indicating progress on projects as to whether some other system could be adopted since colour prints were more expensive to produce than black and white copies. It was agreed that this would be investigated with a view to such a change being adopted for similar reports submitted to other committees, working parties etc.

## **8. Ixworth Draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan**

The Working Party considered Report A310 (previously circulated) which sought approval of the draft Ixworth Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, attached as Appendix A, for consultation purposes.

The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan had been produced in accordance with the advice contained in the latest English Heritage publications:- *'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals'* and *'Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas'*.

Appraisals were being written for each of the Borough's 35 Conservation Areas. These described the Conservation Area, explained a little of its history and development, and identified the features which gave it the special character which had led to its designation as a Conservation Area. A summary of key features was included to guide future development within the Conservation Area.

The Management Plan set out a mid to long term strategy to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and, in particular, to deal with any negative issues, problems and pressures identified in the Appraisal.

In carrying out the Appraisal, an assessment was made as to whether the existing conservation area boundary met a number of criteria and as a result of this, several amendments to the boundary of the Conservation Area were proposed. It was therefore intended to consult at the same time on these amendments. Each resident directly affected by the proposed boundary changes would be written to individually.

Public involvement would be sought in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. Relevant bodies and consultees listed in Appendix 4 of the Statement of Community Involvement, including local amenity groups, would be consulted on both the Appraisal and the Management Plan. A press release would be circulated and posters would be displayed in the village informing residents that the draft document could be viewed at West Suffolk House, Ixworth Library and also on the Council's web site. A drop-in session would also be arranged in Ixworth. Officers confirmed that since part of the Ixworth Conservation Area was within the parish of Pakenham the consultation process would be extended to that parish and include Pakenham Parish Council



**RECOMMENDED:- That**

- (1) the draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Ixworth Conservation Area, as attached as Appendix A to Report A310, be approved for consultation; and**
- (2) any typographical, factual and/or grammatical changes required to the document be agreed by the Head of Planning and Economic Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning.**

*(Councillor Clifton-Brown left the meeting during the discussion of this item and Councillor Griffiths left the meeting at the conclusion of its discussion)*

**9. 'Save Our Villages' Campaign**

The Working Party considered Report A311 (previously circulated) which outlined this national campaign, entitled 'Save our Villages', being promoted by the National Housing Federation.

The campaign requested housing organisations and local authorities to sign up to carrying out actions aimed at ensuring that housing needs in villages were being identified and that further action was being taken to meet those needs. A campaign briefing note, attached as Appendix A to the report, outlined a three point plan that was being recommended to organisations. The aim was for each village to be covered by an Action Plan to ensure it obtained the affordable housing it needed.

Report A311 set out views in relation to the request and work already done by the Council towards meeting the Campaign's objective. The Strategic Housing Team had worked with Suffolk Acre and several Parish Councils and villages to develop housing needs assessments, and this had taken staff and financial resources. To date, there were eleven parish housing needs appraisals completed, which had all identified a need for more affordable housing. These eleven parishes were within five rural wards. There remained a significant number of other parishes in the Borough for which no completed appraisal had been undertaken.

There was a total of 18 rural wards in St Edmundsbury, and to achieve an up to date assessment of housing need for every rural ward would require additional commitment of resources, from both the Council's and Suffolk Acre staff, over the next three years so as to ensure there was an assessment and action plan for each ward. Meeting the full commitment would, therefore, be very difficult to achieve without additional resources. However, it was felt that the Council should sign up to the principle of the three step housing plan, and aspire to meet the commitment for housing needs assessments and action plans to be developed. It was agreed that further reports on progress should be brought to the Working Party on a regular basis.

There might also be an opportunity for Parish Councils to assist in carrying out the assessments and meeting the commitments of the action plan, and it was therefore suggested that this could be explored with them. It was also suggested that the action plans developed from the housing needs assessments could be incorporated into the existing Rural Action Plan where the need to address affordable housing in the rural areas had already been identified. Similarly the Housing Strategy also identified rural affordable housing as an objective for the Council to target.

The Working Party discussed difficulties in the way of carrying out housing needs assessments and action plans:-

(a) Survey Work

There were problems associated with obtaining the data required for the housing needs assessment, even with the help of Parish Councils. Information sought in questionnaires would be confidential and it was also time consuming to provide and, therefore, there may be some reluctance to complete questionnaires. This had the consequence that the overall response might not be truly indicative of housing needs in a parish. Evidence produced needed to be robust and it was not sufficient for the representative views or perception of individual Parish Councils as to housing needs to be taken as the basis for an Action Plan. In addition to logistical problems in distributing and collecting questionnaires there would also be resource implications for analysing the information obtained; and

(b) Local Development Framework (LDF) – Constraints on building in The Countryside

The emerging LDF would, in the case of smaller villages, remove settlement boundaries which would have the effect of applying policies relating to the countryside which would prohibit development as not being sustainable.



**RECOMMENDED:- That**

- (1) the Council signs up to the principle of three step rural housing plan in the National Housing Federation's 'Save Our Villages' campaign and aspires to meet the commitment for housing needs assessments and action plans being developed, within available resources;**
- (2) further progress reports be brought to the Rural Area Working Party on a regular basis;**
- (3) the opportunities for Parish Councils to assist in carrying out the assessments, in consultation with local people, and meeting the commitments of the action plan be explored further with Parish Councils and Registered Social Landlords; and**
- (4) the situation regarding housing settlement boundaries be clarified through the Local Development Framework.**

**10. British Telecommunications plc (BT) Public Payphone Removal: Consultation 2009**

The Working Party received and noted a narrative item which advised that a notification had been received from BT requesting consideration of its plans to remove 53 payphones, largely of the traditional red kiosk form, within the Borough.

The Council had consulted with Parish and Community Councils and would formulate a draft decision on each payphone for further consultation. Draft decisions were due to be advertised from 4 November 2009.

The draft decisions and the justification for each, along with responses received as a result of consultation, would be considered by the Cabinet on 2 December 2009 which would make a final decision on the consultation response.

Consideration would be given to the following factors affecting the significance of each payphone:- the housing types in the area, the number of households in the area, public call revenue, emergency use and mobile phone coverage. Whilst the visual importance of the phone boxes in their setting was not a valid consideration, BT had offered Parish and Community Councils the opportunity to adopt their respective kiosk for retention, without the payphone facility, for £1.

This notification followed on from a similar one received in 2008 when the Council had agreed to the removal of 22 out of 42 phones which were not being used with any significant frequency.

A chart was tabled which showed the location of phone boxes under consideration. A more detailed description of the location within each parish was contained in the edition of the Members' Bulletin of 16 October 2009. The chart also indicated whether the phone box was included in the list of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest, the number of calls recorded, the extent of mobile coverage at the location of the phone box, the parish response where known, and other notes relevant to the consideration. Officers advised that BT had placed notices relating to the proposal in each of the affected phone boxes and that if a social need for the retention of an individual facility could be demonstrated the Council should object to its removal. A question was raised as to whether the statistics relating to telephone calls took into account when the telephone was 'out of order'. Officers advised that BT had not provided information in relation to this point which had also been raised by some Parish Councils during the consultation. It was also queried whether one of the statements relating to mobile phone coverage was accurate, although officers advised that the assessments had been carried out from the location of the phone box and not the wider area of the parish concerned. In relation to the proposal for a parish council to adopt phone boxes, the observation was made that for many of the phone boxes involved maintenance had not been carried out by BT for some time. There would be, therefore, costs for parishes to bring them up to and keep them in a good state of repair. Parishes were being advised by officers not to adopt telephone boxes which had been listed. Members with views on individual proposals were advised to submit these in time for the Cabinet meeting on 2 December 2009.

*(Subsequent to the meeting BT had granted the Council an extension to submit its response to 27 January 2010.)*

## **11. Dates of Future Meetings**

The Working Party confirmed the date of its next meeting as 21 January 2010 at 5.00 pm. The suggested date of 15 April 2010 for the subsequent meeting was not however agreed and officers were asked to submit on 21 January 2010 a list of suggested dates for future meetings for approval.

The meeting concluded at 6.54 pm.

**J THORNDYKE  
CHAIRMAN**