

**ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**RURAL AREA WORKING PARTY**

**Minutes of a meeting held on Wednesday 15 June 2011 at 5.00 pm  
in Room GFR14, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

PRESENT: Councillors Mrs Broughton, Clifton-Brown, Nettleton (substituting for Redhead), Pugh, Ray, Mrs Rushen (substituting for Hale), Stevens, Thorndyke and Mrs D A Whittaker

BY INVITATION: Councillors Clements and Spicer

**1. Substitutions**

The following substitutions were declared:-

Councillor Mrs Rushen for Councillor Hale; and  
Councillor Nettleton for Councillor Redhead.

**2. Election of Chairman**

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:-

That Councillor J Thorndyke be elected as Chairman of the Working Party.

**3. Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:-

That Councillor Mrs S O Broughton be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Working Party.

**4. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hale and Redhead.

**5. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2011 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**6. Declarations of Interests**

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

## **7. Terms of Reference**

The Working Party considered a narrative item which asked the Working Party to review the Terms of Reference for the Rural Area Working Party.

The current Terms of Reference for the Working Party were:-

- (a) *Maintain an overview of the issues relating to the wellbeing, economic prosperity and future development of the rural area of St Edmundsbury and to make recommendations to the Cabinet about actions required to promote its success;*
- (b) *oversee the development and monitor the implementation of the Council's Rural Action Plan (and any replacement) and to make recommendations to the Cabinet accordingly;*
- (c) *consider service related and other issues which relate specifically to the rural area and to liaise with parish councils and other partners as appropriate;*
- (d) *appoint steering groups for any issue within the remit of the Working Party, and to co-opt non-voting members to these steering groups in order to provide alternative viewpoints and expert advice; and*
- (e) *invite interested parties to meetings as considered appropriate.*

A discussion was held on how the Working Party liaised with Parish Councils and other partners and it was felt that the Terms of Reference should be amended to include reference to '*the Parish Conference and other appropriate means*' being inserted into item (c).



### **RECOMMENDED:-**

***That, the Terms of Reference, contained in agenda item 7 of the Rural Area Working Party agenda dated 15 June 2011 be approved, subject to paragraph (c) being amended to read:-***

***'consider service related and other issues which relate specifically to the rural area and to liaise with parish councils and other partners through the parish conference and other appropriate means, as appropriate.'***

## **8. Parish Conference: Debrief**

The Management Support Officer informed the Working Party that 33 representatives from Parish Councils had attended the Conference with 17 feedback forms received. The forms had stated that the content was good and useful and indicated that a 6.00 pm start-time appeared to have been well received.

The Management Support Officer sought the Working Party's views on whether the open forum should be moved after the information items, whether the programme and how it had run had been adequate and whether the 20 October 2011 would be a suitable date. The Working Party felt that the conference on 12 May 2011 had run smoothly and agreed with the proposed date.

Mrs Broughton queried whether there would be an Allotment Workshop at a future conference as it had been cancelled on 12 May 2011. The Management Support Officer advised that a Workshop would be included at a future conference.

## **9. Rural Bus Cuts: Identify Practical Solutions**

The Working Party was advised that the session regarding Rural Bus Cuts had arisen following a petition from residents of Stansfield. The Working Party welcomed and invited comments from representatives of ABC Buses, Mulleys Motorways, Suffolk Acre and Suffolk County Council, as well as Mrs Barton, Mrs Whelan and Mrs Martin, residents of Stanfield.

The Working Party were advised that the purpose of the session would be to see if the Council could help those parishes with no or very limited service, what could be done to improve the existing provision to parishes and what the Rural Vision 2031 needed to say about rural transport.

Mr McGill from Suffolk County Council outlined the Demand Responsive Transport currently offered and explained that the budget had been reduced from £4.3 million to £2.1 million.

Councillor Stevens questioned whether bus services were recompensed for taking concessionary fares. The County Council advised that a proportion of the adult fare was reimbursed.

*(Councillor Clements arrived at the meeting at 5.30 pm)*

The Working Party were advised of some case studies from other counties regarding community transport schemes. Community car schemes, car share, community bus schemes, passenger vehicle hire schemes and ring and ride schemes were some of the schemes currently in operation. The Working Party felt that St Edmundsbury already offered similar schemes to those outlined.

*(Councillors Clifton-Brown and Nettleton left at 5.40 pm)*

The Working Party noted Report C21 (previously circulated) which contained the Suffolk County Council's transport solutions toolkit, however, Members queried who the toolkit was aimed at. The County Council advised that any resident could use the toolkit and it was on the County Council's website. Councillor Ray raised concern that some residents maybe unaware that the toolkit existed and suggested that it be included as an item at the next Parish Conference.

Councillor Pugh stated that existing funding options should be investigated for the next 3 - 5 years but alternative funding options which were unavailable at the moment, such as supermarkets and schools, should also be investigated for the future.

In conclusion, the Working Party felt that work needed to be undertaken on improving timetable adherence. It was noted that the residents of Stansfield felt that, if people could catch a reliable bus service on a given day, they would be willing to change their existing routine. Greater use of scheduled services would also increase the capacity of demand responsive transport at a time when its budgets were under pressure. It was also felt that a hybrid service could be developed which used demand responsive or community transport schemes to bring passengers from the smaller villages to the main routes so that they could then use the timetabled bus services. Suffolk County Council and operators also needed to promote the timetables and Demand Responsive Transport systems more widely. The Borough Council could assist in this work, and also help rural communities to develop their own community transport

schemes. It was also felt that schemes which took services out to rural communities should be investigated.

The Chairman thanked the representatives for their participation in the debate and informed everyone present that bus timetables were available at the meeting to distribute to their parishes. Reflecting its debate at the meeting, the Working Party made the following recommendations to Cabinet regarding practical actions and long-term policy objectives.



**RECOMMENDED:- That**

- (1) *the Borough Council work with the County Council and bus operators to promote existing rural bus services and community transport, including:-***
  - (a) *publicising existing bus timetables and demand responsive services to customers through its website, offices, publications and internal bulletins;***
  - (b) *offering practical assistance to communities wishing to use the County Council's new toolkit for community transport;***
  - (c) *targeting the Borough Council's own limited rural funding at promotion, facilitation and coordination of rural transport schemes rather than direct delivery;***
  - (d) *raising awareness amongst borough and parish councillors through the Members' Bulletin, Rural News, Parish Conference and future Vision 2031 consultation events; and***
  - (e) *targeting any Rural Initiatives Grants Scheme funding for rural transport at promotion and coordination, rather than direct delivery; and***
- (2) *recognising the existing challenges faced by rural communities, and the long-term pressures which will be caused by fuel scarcity/prices and an ageing population, the new Rural Vision 2031 include short and long-term actions to improve rural transport and accessibility to services, along the following lines:-***
  - (a) *focusing timetabled bus services on main routes only, where they are viable and sustainable;***

- (b) extending the 'reach' of these bus services (geographically and time-wise) by making better use of demand responsive transport services and by encouraging new kinds of transport schemes (led by communities, social enterprises, schools/colleges, supermarkets, etc); and*
- (c) looking at ways in which services can be brought out to rural communities, to minimise the need for travel, looking at current good practice (e.g. the collection/delivery of prescriptions) and the opportunities provided by new technologies and faster broadband.*

*(At this stage in proceedings, the Chairman agreed that agenda item 11 would be considered before agenda item 10.)*

## **10. Rural Vision 2031: Issues consultation summary**

The Working Party received and noted Report C20 (previously circulated) which informed the Working Party of the outcomes of the Rural Vision 2031 Issues Consultation.

The Council prepared a vision document for the whole of St Edmundsbury in 2005 called Vision 2025 which was designed to give a clear and shared vision of how residents saw St Edmundsbury in 20 years time. In addition, the Local Plan adopted in 2006, provided detailed planning guidance to 2016 and was in the process of being replaced by the Local Development Framework. Work had commenced on combining the corporate and land use aspirations for the rural area into Rural Vision 2031.

On 13 January 2011, the Working Party considered a narrative item on the process for preparing the Rural Vision 2031 document and asked for suggestions for engaging local people. The initial public engagement took place between 3 March and 30 May 2011. A wide variety of consultation methods were used that conformed to the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement for the preparation of the Local Development Framework. A summary of the events held during the consultation period were attached as Appendix A. Comments received during the consultation period were attached as Appendix B.

The Planning Policy and Specialist Services Manager circulated a revised Appendix A outlining all the Council run events between 3 March 2011 and 26 May 2011.

## **11. Street Lighting**

The Working Party received and noted a narrative item and presentation provided by Mr Richard Webster, Electrical Services Manager at Suffolk County Council (SCC), in respect of SCC's proposals to control the timings and light level output of the street lighting in rural areas.

SCC would be investing £2.5 million to install an 'intelligent lighting system' affecting over 55,000 street lights across Suffolk. This would enable street lights to be dimmed and lighting hours to be controlled from a central location. Overall, the investment would deliver annual savings on energy costs approaching £500,000 and carbon reductions of over 4,000 tonnes per annum. In general, it was proposed that

street lighting would be turned off in residential areas between midnight and 5.30 am, and dimmed in other areas. However, there were certain locations where lighting levels and operating times needed closer examination such as major junctions, public car parks and some residential areas. The Borough and Parish councils could buy into the scheme for their own street lights provided that they were of a suitable standard.

Mr Webster advised that he had copies of maps relating to the rural area, which identified the existing locations of street lights. A detailed discussion was held and Members questioned the timescale, flexibility and impact on anti-social behaviour of the proposals. Councillor Pugh queried whether LED lights would be used. Mr Webster stated that LEDs would be used and came with a 25 year life cover. LED lights were 18 watts compared to the conventional 80 watt lights currently used.

Arising from discussions Mr Webster agreed to provide Members with details of which lights the Borough and parish councils owned, the costs and payback period for new lights and specific lighting proposals for each of the rural wards.

*(Councillor Spicer and Mr Webster left the meeting at the conclusion of the item.)*

## **12. Rural Post Offices: Benefit Cheques**

The Working Party received and noted a narrative item which outlined proposed changes to the way benefit cheques are dealt with across the Borough.

Members stated that there were very few Paypoint outlets across the Borough and felt that the Prime Minister should be contacted querying why Post Offices were not being supported. Members felt that Postmasters should be promoting to their customers the alternative methods to access benefit payments at their Post Offices.

## **13. Rural Area Working Party Work Programme**

The Working Party received and noted Report C22 (previously circulated) which set out the Working Party's Work Programme to the end of 2011.

The Working Party were advised that issues arising from the Rural Areas Vision 2031 document would be fed into the Work Programme. Councillor Ray suggested that some voluntary organisations be invited to make a presentation to the Working Party on how the Borough Council help and support rural organisations.

## **14. Dates of Future Meetings**

The Working Party confirmed the following dates for future meetings in 2011/2012:-

12 September 2011;  
9 November 2011;  
17 January 2012; and  
14 March 2012.

All meetings to commence at 5.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 7.03 pm.

**J THORNDYKE  
CHAIRMAN**