

ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

RURAL AREA WORKING PARTY

**Minutes of a meeting held on Wednesday 14 March 2012 at 5.00 pm
in Room GFR14, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

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

BY INVITATION: Councillor Mrs Mildmay-White

30. Substitutions

The following substitutions were declared:-

Councillor Houlder for Councillor Ray.
Councillor Mrs Rushen for Councillor Mrs Broughton.

31. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Broughton and Ray.

32. Record of Previous Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 23 January 2012 was confirmed as a correct record.

33. Declarations of Interests

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

34. Review of Year 1 (2011/2012) of the current Rural Action Plan

The Working Party received and noted Report C393 (previously circulated) which gave an update on progress on implementing projects contained within the Rural Action Plan and thus formed the first Annual Monitoring Report.

The Rural Action Plan had 37 projects which aimed to help the Borough Council achieve its vision for the rural area ie: 'Active, sustainable and thriving communities in peaceful and unspoilt countryside'. The projects came under four headings:-

- (a) *Empowerment* - enabling communities to help themselves;
- (b) *Environment* - improving both the built and the natural environment;
- (c) *Prosperity* - to generate a healthy economy; and
- (d) *Well-being* - actions which improve the quality of life of individuals and communities.

Some projects were carried out on an annual basis, whilst others were one-off projects that would be completed before the end of March 2014.

A traffic light approach had been adopted, whereby:-

- (a) 'Red' indicated that a project was behind schedule and/or over budget;
- (b) 'Amber' indicated that the project would not be due to start in year 1 or had been slightly delayed due to external factors; and
- (c) 'Green' indicated that the project was on time and on budget.

The progress report was attached as Appendix A to the report and showed that no projects had a red indicator, 4 projects had an amber indicator and there were 33 projects marked green.

The Working Party asked that further information be e-mailed to them on which projects had been grant aided under the Rural Initiatives Grants Scheme. The Rural Coffee Caravan Information Project was discussed and Members were advised that villages who had not previously received a visit could request this via the Project Manager, and it was suggested that further publicity to this facility could be given via local village magazines. The Working Party acknowledged that improvements to the One Suffolk website development package might give extra impetus to villages in establishing their own websites. It was suggested that further promotion could be achieved by holding a workshop session at a venue in the Borough and/or as an item at a Parish Conference meeting. Officers advised that a leaflet on environmental organisations was being published and would be made available for the Parish Conference and to community groups requesting it.

(Councillor Stevens arrived in the meeting during the discussion of this item.)

35. Rural Profiling Project

The Working Party considered Report C394 (previously circulated) which sought approval of a draft brief for a Rural Profiling Project and an associated pilot scheme.

The background to the report was that in April 2010 the Working Party had recommended that a more systematic approach be adopted, within available resources, to providing rural housing needs surveys on a three yearly cycle as part of the budget and service planning process for 2011/2012. Cabinet had subsequently approved an annual sum of £10,000 for this work.

The report stated that since that time there had been developments which would influence the delivery of affordable housing, and included:-

- (a) the Localism Act 2011, which meant that decisions about housing were to be taken locally;
- (b) changes in the way new affordable housing was to be funded, introduced by the Homes and Community Agency (HCA). Registered providers were now required to set out their bids for new homes in a four year programme and not, as previously, as schemes progressed; and
- (c) Suffolk County Council had begun to introduce a 'Flexicare' policy aimed at keeping people independent and living in their home as long as possible.

The report drew attention to the need to review how local housing needs surveys were carried out. It, therefore, proposed that a pilot project be developed which would involve a different approach, whereby survey work sought to provide broader information regarding the village to help shape future housing supply and ensure

appropriate support services were developed too. The draft project brief was attached as Appendix A. If the pilot project was agreed it was suggested that Ixworth, and surrounding villages, might be a suitable area in which to carry out the pilot project. An interim report on progress could be made to the Working Party at its meeting scheduled for 14 June 2012, and a final report being presented to the Working Party's meeting on 8 November 2012.

In discussing the report, the Working Party felt that there was some overemphasis on involving, and provision for, older people and the terms of reference for the pilot project should be broader based so as to include all sections of the community. It was accepted that work on any Neighbourhood Plans being developed by Parish Councils would be dovetailed with work on the pilot project, and that it would be appropriate for an elected member to serve on the Pilot Project Steering Group.



RECOMMENDED:- That

- (1) the draft project brief, as contained in Appendix A to Report C394 be approved subject to the amendment of Section 5.3 of the first bullet point in the second paragraph to read 'focus groups to help develop understanding of aspirations and fit with national/local policies'; and**
- (2) agreement be given for a pilot scheme to be implemented which will be funded from the £10,000 already approved for carrying out housing needs survey work.**

36. Rural Area Working Party Work Programme

The Working Party received and noted Report C395 (previously circulated) which contained the proposed work programme for the Working Party.

A question was raised as to whether the item on Schools Reorganisation should be retained within the programme. It was agreed that this matter should continue to be included and thus kept under review.

37. Dates of Future Meetings

The Working Party approved the following dates for future meetings:-

Thursday 14 June 2012;
Monday 3 September 2012;
Thursday 8 November 2012;
Thursday 24 January 2013; and
Wednesday 13 March 2013.

All meetings to commence at 5.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 6.15 pm.

**J THORNDYKE
CHAIRMAN**