

ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

RURAL AREA WORKING PARTY

**Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 13 March 2013 at 5.00 pm
in Room GFR14, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

PRESENT: Councillor J Thorndyke (Chairman)
Councillors Clifton-Brown, Houlder (substituting for
Mrs Broughton), Pugh, Ray and Redhead

BY INVITATION: Councillor Mrs Gower, Portfolio Holder for Housing,
Licensing & Environmental Health,

21. Substitution

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Houlder substituting for Councillor Mrs Broughton.

22. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Broughton, Hale, Mrs Rushen and Stevens.

23. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24. Declarations of Interests

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

(Councillors Mrs Gower and Pugh arrived at the meeting prior to the discussion of the following item.)

25. Rural Profiling Project

The Working Party considered Report D324 (previously circulated), which, having taken into account the discussions at the Working Party's meeting on 24 January 2013 and views expressed during the Vision 2031 consultation, proposed a list of villages for inclusion in the pilot project. The list, it was suggested, provided a range of rural locations in terms of size and spread between the north and south of the Borough.

As background the report pointed out that affordable housing need had historically been evidenced by carrying out local housing needs surveys. The intention of the pilot was to go beyond the scope of such surveys and look in broader terms at housing need. There were a number of drivers for this including:

- (i) Localism Act;
- (ii) changes in the way affordable homes were funded; and

(iii) Suffolk County Council's Flexicare policy.

The pilot was about ensuring that the Borough Council had the right information to make informed choices about future residential developments and the affordability of housing options available. Principally, the pilot would seek to identify need in terms of housing and solutions to meet these needs. However, housing could not be looked at in isolation and the pilot would also look at needs beyond housing, which were associated with the wider community, such as care and support and space for home/community working. Stephen Hill of C20 Future Planners had facilitated a discussion at the Working Party's meeting on 24 January 2013 and had provided examples of where local communities themselves had led on developing housing solutions to meet need within their localities. Crucially the pilot was thus about empowering the local community to shape their own solutions.

Officers gave an update to the list of villages proposed for inclusion in the pilot project as follows:

(a) **Local Service Centres**

Additional to those villages already listed, Risby had expressed an interest in participating.

(b) **Infill Villages**

Coney Weston had now responded and expressed an interest in participating.

(c) **Countryside**

Hawstead had responded and expressed an interest in the project.

The report gave an outline, as a case study, of a project already being carried out for the parish of Stradishall which had been approached along similar lines to that for the proposed pilot project.

The remainder of the report dealt with the key tasks involved over three stages involved in carrying out the pilot project study along with estimated costs for each stage.

In response to Members' questions/suggestions, officers advised that they were confident that work on the pilot project could be carried out within the budget of £10,000 and that there were sufficient staff resources for the purpose. In appropriate circumstances funding contributions would be sought from partner organisations involved in the pilot. It was agreed that assistance would be sought from the relevant Suffolk County Council Locality Officers because of their detailed knowledge of the parishes involved and the possibility of funding sources for aspects of the work. It was also agreed that information obtained from studies undertaken in connection with the project would be made available on the Council's website via Home Link and other of the Council's web pages. It was accepted that work on the project amongst the various villages would not reach the same stage at any given time and therefore progress was likely to be staggered. Officers acknowledged that if the project was successful there would be merit in using the Council's own staff as facilitators for other parish studies rather than engaging external specialists as this would obviate the expenditure involved in the case of the latter. There was considerable expertise within the Council's own staff and

this could be utilised in respect of issues raised in the pilot study. Outside consultants would only be engaged when the necessary skills were not available internally. If a suitable model could be designed this would be made available on the website for other parishes not involved in the pilot to utilise in formulating community initiatives although this would be a matter requiring further investigation. A progress report on work on the pilot project would be submitted to the meeting of the Working Party on 29 July 2013.

26. Review of Year 2 (covering the period 2012/2013) of the Current Rural Action Plan

The Working Party received and noted Report D325 (previously circulated) which provided a review of the 37 projects undertaken during 2012/2013 in pursuance of the Rural Action Plan. Progress on each of the projects was contained in Appendix A attached to the report.

Officers gave a presentation to highlight some examples of the work undertaken over the last year to deliver the Rural Action Plan.

Members discussed the publicity arrangements for the Rural Coffee Caravan and asked that information about planned visits to parishes be included in the Members' Bulletin to enable Ward Members to promote these events with Parish Councils/Meetings. Members also asked for copies of the information leaflet relating to this project to be supplied to them. Members were advised that if they were aware of villages which wished for a visit to be made they should contact officers who would forward the request to the project coordinator. Reference was made to the varying success of Community Speedwatch Schemes because of the availability, or not, of sufficient volunteers.

27. Parish Conference Planning

Officers advised that the next Parish Conference would be held on Monday 10 June 2013 from 6.00 pm (registration and refreshments from 5.40 pm) until 8.30 pm at the Stour Valley Community School, Clare (formerly Clare Middle School).

Following discussion with officers the Working Party agreed that, subject to speakers being available, the following programme for the event be arranged:

(1) Information Item – Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation

Officers to approach the Local Government Association to see if it is able to provide an abridged version of the presentation given at the Member Development Session on the same topic on 28 November 2012.

(2) Main Topic – Policing Issues

Suffolk Constabulary to be invited to give a presentation on topical matters including Community Speedwatch which could be supplemented by a spokesperson from a successful Parish Speedwatch scheme. As an alternative it was suggested that the Automobile Association be approached to provide a speaker on the Speed Awareness courses provided by them.

- (3) **Workshop Sessions** (40 minutes duration and to be staged simultaneously):
- (a) Community websites, potentially involving a speaker from ONE Suffolk which organisation provided free websites for community groups and utilising a local case study (a Member suggested Wickhambrook Village be approached);
 - (b) Participatory Budgeting – to be led by the Suffolk Association of Local Councils

(4) **Additional Suggestion**

Community Action Suffolk (an organisation which is bringing together several community and voluntary sector groups and which will be in place from April 2013) to be invited to give a presentation on its structure and funding sources available to community groups in view of its expertise and experience in relation to the latter.

It was suggested that guided tours of the Community School be given beforehand.

Officers confirmed that invitations to attend the conference had been extended to include community organisations/groups in addition to Parish Councils. It was requested that wide promotion of the event be given in the Members' Bulletin and other Council publications. In view of a possible misconception that the event was solely for Parish Councils it was suggested that consideration be given by representatives at the forthcoming conference to changing the name of the event to, for example, 'Rural Conference' or 'Villages Conference'.

In relation to the following Autumn Conference, which was to be held at The Apex on a date to be confirmed, it was suggested that the following be identified as potential topics:

- (a) Broadband Update – Suffolk County Council and British Telecom to be invited;
- (b) Planning Service – update;
- (c) Rural Economic Development Support - presentation by Menta, the Suffolk Enterprise Agency;
- (d) Vision 2031 – update;
- (e) Rural Profiling – potentially approach Stephen Hill of C20 Future Planners to give a presentation. Introductory reference to this session to be made at the June Conference through delegate information packs.

Conducted tours of The Apex before the conference to also be arranged.

28. Rural Area Working Party Work Programme 2013

Officers submitted a work programme for the remainder of the year and the following topics were scheduled:

Rural Vision 2031 document	May 2013
Landscape Quality Assessments	July 2013
Parish Conference Planning	July 2013
Rural Profiling Project – Update	July 2013
Riparian Owners	July/October 2013
Rural Youth Work Programme	October 2013
School Reorganisation	as appropriate

In relation to Educational Attainment in Suffolk, officers advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had set up a Task and Finish Group to examine this matter. It had been requested that two Members from this Working Party be invited to serve on this Group. Officers advised that Councillor Mrs Rushen had volunteered for one place. It was agreed that Councillor Mrs Broughton be approached to establish whether she is willing to serve on the Group.

29. Dates of Future Meetings

The following dates of future meetings were confirmed:

Thursday 7 May 2013;
Monday 29 July 2013;
Wednesday 30 October 2013;
Monday 27 January 2014; and
Wednesday 26 March 2014.

All meetings to commence at 5.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 6.27 pm.

**J THORNDYKE
CHAIRMAN**