

West Suffolk Joint Growth Steering Group

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Suffolk Joint Growth Steering Group** held on **Tuesday 29 November 2016** at **10.00 am** in the **Council Chamber, District Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall, IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman David Bowman
Vice Chairman Alaric Pugh

Forest Heath District Council

Chris Barker
Ruth Bowman
Rona Burt
Reg Silvester

St Edmundsbury Borough Council

John Burns
Angela Rushen
David Roach
Peter Thompson

In attendance:

Paula Fox

33. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Palmer (FHDC) and Jim Thorndyke (SEBC).

34. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes present at the meeting.

35. **Minutes**

The minutes from the meeting held on 28 June 2016 were received and confirmed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment (as set out in ***bold/italics*** below):

"26. **Election of Vice Chairman for 2016/2017**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Alaric Pugh (SEBC) be elected as ***Vice*** Chairman for 2016/2017."

36. **West Suffolk Community Energy Plan (Presentation)**

(The Chairman agreed for this item to be brought forward on the agenda)

The Service Manager (Environmental Health) was in attendance to provide a presentation to the Steering Group on the West Suffolk Community Energy Plan and its role in driving growth. Circulated with the agenda papers was a copy of the West Suffolk Community Energy Plan, approved by both Councils in December 2014, which aimed for the wider community in West Suffolk to be able to make sustainable energy choices, reduce the impact of energy cost volatility and to move away from the use of fossil fuels.

The presentation covered the following main areas:

- The Government renewables policy where 15% of energy consumed in the UK should come from renewables by 2020 (sub-divided into 30%: electricity; 12%: heat; 10%: transport). The UK was three quarters of the way towards the 30% electricity target, which was expected to be exceeded by 2020, but was not halfway towards meeting the heat target and the proportion of renewable energy used in transport had actually reduced.
- The uncertainty around the outlook for winter 2016/2017 had increased. Existing power stations were closing/being mothballed, with future stations coming on-line. There was also a changing demand for the provision of power and where energy sources were being consumed.
- The restrictions within West Suffolk with the capacity provision of electricity and also with the gas provision to homes (40% of homes were off the gas main) and the impact which this was having on families having to use more expensive forms of heating.
- The improvements both Councils were undertaking in relation to investing/installing energy efficiency measures, renewable energy technologies and designing in local energy generation in their own property.
- Supporting businesses with advice from BEE Anglia to make informed investment decisions and helping access to financial support to make improvements. The Councils were also involved with the following energy initiatives:
 - 'Greener Business Grant' which allowed businesses to take forward simple measures to make energy improvements.
 - 'West Suffolk Solar for Business' which supported local businesses to provide them with solar energy. There were currently 16 properties within the Solar for Business portfolio, which provided the Councils' with a Internal Rate of Return (IRR) of an average of 11%.
 - 'Suffolk Carbon Charter' which helped businesses in West Suffolk to gain recognition for their environmental commitment.
- Supporting families and communities, through initiatives such as Suffolk Energy Action and Suffolk's Warm Homes, Healthy People.

- Future actions in the Community Energy Plan:
 - Continuation of improvement of energy efficiency in the Councils' existing estate.
 - Generation of energy in the Councils' new-build public estates (ie Mildenhall Hub, Western Way development, West Suffolk Operational Hub)
 - Development of smarter energy contracts and the use of the Councils' own electricity in its buildings.
 - Investment in other energy generation technologies for value returns.
 - Continuation to promote and invest in domestic and business energy efficiency.
 - Extension of the Councils' Renewable Energy for Business offer for power and heat.
 - Development of local energy tariffs for local residents and businesses.
 - Work with the energy industry and other suppliers to remove the constraints for growth.

Members then asked questions of the Officer in which responses were duly provided. The following questions asked had subsequent actions (as set out in **bold** below):

1. How developers could be encouraged to invest in the concept of provision of energy efficiency solutions within new housing developments (ie provision of roof solar panels). The Officer explained that the Councils had looked at this issue previously to see how it could be encouraged, however, some developers were not keen to invest in longer term concepts, aside from the house building itself. **It was agreed for Officers, in liaison with the appropriate Portfolio Holders, to engage with developers to understand the barriers to investing in the provision of energy efficiency within new developments. It was also agreed that consideration also needed to be given to the development of the Councils' future planning policies with regard to the energy efficiency requirements for homes/buildings.**
2. The amount of influence which the Councils' had with the energy suppliers and also how much the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were interested in relation to energy infrastructure, as this was as a potential constraint to growth. This was particularly pertinent to the Suffolk Planning and Infrastructure Framework (SPIF). The Officer explained that UK Power Networks had expressed an interest to becoming more involved with infrastructure discussions. There were, also however, concerns as to who would be responsible for the initial investment risk on infrastructure projects. **It was agreed for a discussion to be held with UK Power Networks to better understand their infrastructure constraints, both strategically and operationally.**
3. Provision of electric cars, as part of the business support package. The Officer explained that the supporting of electric vehicles for business, was not included with the West Suffolk Community Energy Plan, as this specifically concentrated on property and assets. Electric vehicles still remained quite costly to purchase and there currently remained

insufficient infrastructure in relation to being able to charge the vehicles. However, the Councils' had submitted a funding bid to DEFRA to look at the advocacy/support of commercial electric vehicles, linked to air quality. **It was agreed to continue to push for the use of commercial electric cars and the associated infrastructure.**

4. Reference was made to the difficulty of electricity storage, particularly in relation to the Forest Heath solar farm, where in the summer months, large quantities of electricity were being produced and where the demand on usage was probably at its lowest. The Officer explained that solar farms did have a profile of storage which fluctuated, particularly in the summer. However, there was also an increase in demand for cooling, which could also change the electricity generating profile. It was acknowledged that electricity storage was an issue and UK Power Networks were the first distribution operator in the UK to build and trial a large scale battery storage facility at Great Buzzard. Domestic battery storage was also becoming more available. The Councils' were also looking at battery storage as an opportunity to uplift the value from the solar farm and that this could be a potential future commercial opportunity. **It was agreed that the development of battery storage (both domestic and commercial) continued to be monitored.**

With there being no decision required, the Steering Group **noted** the presentation, along with those actions which had been identified in 1. to 4. above.

(Councillor Alaric Pugh joined the meeting at 10.05 am and Councillor Peter Thompson joined at 10.08 am, during the discussion of and prior to the voting on this item.)

37. **TechEast (Presentation)**

Neil Miles, Chairman of TechEast, was in attendance to provide an update on progress with the establishment of this organisation.

There was a thriving digital tech sector in the region which employed over 15,000 people. This was a high value sector which was fundamental to everyone's lives and businesses in terms of technology. TechEast's main purpose was to provide a network to drive and promote the digital tech sector across the region. TechEast was a not-for profit organisation, working across both Norfolk and Suffolk, building activities and relationships and would be generating a number of projects and activities.

TechEast had produced a six point manifesto, underpinned by a detailed three year business plan of activities:

1. To promote digital tech growth and excellence in the East using local tech businesses as examples in order to attract new business and talent from other parts of the UK and internationally.

2. To establish a TechEast 'embassy'; a physical presence in London showcasing businesses and the sector, aiding business development and encouraging government investment.
3. To galvanise the sector by speaking with one voice to amplify the benefits for tech companies in the East.
4. To excel by sharing best practice between members and ensure that TechEast companies were amongst the best run tech companies in the UK.
5. To be recognised as the UK's most open and collaborative digital tech cluster where new companies and entrepreneurs could thrive and grow in a supportive environment.
6. To work with local and national educational partners to develop the relevant sector skills and benefit from cutting edge research.

By succeeding with this manifesto this would create 5,000 jobs, generate an extra £650m GVA of economic growth in the East and be one of the UK's Top 5 tech cluster by 2020.

Neil explained that the TechEast Board had been appointed in July 2016. The TechEast 'embassy' was now open and was located near to Liverpool Street Station, London. This was available for use by its members and offered small scale office space with hot desks, free wi-fi, meeting rooms and events/networking opportunities. TechEast's membership offer for local businesses had also been recently launched.

Councillor Alaric Pugh thanked Neil for this informative update and explained that it would also be useful for the Members of the Steering Group to be provided with a copy of TechEast's three year Business Plan, which provided the further detail of its purpose and desired outcomes. Neil agreed with this approach and also stated that he would be willing to come back to the Group in the future to provide a further update on progress.

With there being no decision required, the Steering Group **noted** this update, along with a further update on TechEast's progress being reported to the Steering Group in Autumn 2017.

(Councillor Peter Thompson left the meeting at 11.15 am, prior to the commencement of this item)

38. **Date of Next Meeting**

Under this item, the Service Manager (Economic Development and Growth) took the opportunity to discuss with the Steering Group a proposed Work Programme for 2017.

The Group had previously agreed that the format of their meetings should be based on themes, with one/two topics per meeting in the form of presentations/discussions. It had also been acknowledged that the agendas would need to remain flexible to allow for new topics which may require

discussion. Councillor Pugh also stated that a report from the Steering Group should also be presented directly to Cabinet, which outlined actions/recommendations from the Group.

The Service Manager (Economic Development and Growth) then provided some suggested topic areas for inclusion in the work programme for 2017, including:-

1. Suffolk Planning and Infrastructure Framework (SPIF) update and the wider South East work (*to be considered in early 2017*).
2. Infrastructure (including roads, rail, broadband etc..).
3. Skills (including an update on the Suffolk Skills Strategy) (*to be considered in early 2017*).
4. Policy Updates (including Housing Policy White Paper (which was due for publication in early 2017), Local Plans, Masterplans and Vision 2031).
5. Cambridge to Norwich Technology Corridor (*to be considered in Autumn 2017*).
6. Developer Relationships (including countryside; promoting to developers; agents and industry).
7. Sector Programme Updates (including Destination Management Organisation (DMO)/tourism industry; Agri-tech; Film Suffolk (*to be considered in Autumn 2017*); TechEast (*to be considered in Autumn 2017*)).
8. Land and premises update.

With there being no decision required, the Steering Group **noted** the proposed items for inclusion in a Work Programme for 2017.

It was also **noted** that the next meeting of the Steering Group would be held on Tuesday 21 February 2017 at 10.00 am at West Suffolk House, Bury St Edmunds. Additional meetings of the Steering Group could also be arranged, as and when required.

The Meeting concluded at 11.55 am

Signed by:

Chairman
