

## MINUTES

### STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

10 NOVEMBER 2015

**Present:**

<b>Councillors:</b>	Adshead	Hicks
	Anderson (Chairman)	Howard
	Ashbourn	Matthews
	Birnie	Riddick
	E Collins	Wyatt-Lowe (Vice-Chairman)
	Fisher	

<b>Officers:</b>	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning and Regeneration
	Kevin Langley	Assistant Team Leader – Regeneration Team
	Chris Taylor	Group Manager - Strategic Planning and Regeneration
	Craig Thorpe	Group Manager - Environmental Services

**Also Attendance:**

Councillor Sharon Adshead  
Councillor Janice Marshall  
Councillor Graham Sutton

The meeting began at 7.35 pm

**36**            **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 13 October 2015 were confirmed by the members present and signed by the Chairman.

**37**            **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor S Hearn and Councillor Bateman

Councillor Birnie substituted on behalf of Councillor Bateman

**38**            **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

*There were no declarations of interest.*

**39**                    **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

*There was no public participation.*

**40**                    **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None.

**41**                    **ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORTS**

C Thorpe introduced the report and advised the Committee that quarter 2 had been slow which may be the calm before the storm at Christmas time. C Thorpe went through the key service achievements in quarter 2. Waste services carried out an induction was provided to St Albans staff who are temporarily tipping their food waste at Cupid Green and they hosted the Mayor's visit to Cupid Green where worked with teams emptying bins and picking litter for the day. With regards to Environmental Services Projects, the Clean, Safe and Green Community Champion award was awarded to Friends of Chipperfield Common and the individual award was presented to John Savage from Tring. There were also highly commended runners up: Berkhamsted based litter picker Colin Garrett and Boho Boxmoor. The Clean, Safe and Green department have set up a new team with new equipment dedicated to cleaning the new Town Centre removing graffiti and fly posting. The Green Flags awards saw Dacorum retain its three existing flags and were awarded one new flag for Bunkers Park. C Thorpe also advised the committee on personnel changes and they have recruited new drivers which reduces the use of agency workers. Also, the new FirstCare system is working well after a few teething problems but sickness rates are still high. Return to work compliance is being monitored however it is difficult to complete these assessments in the recommended 8 days as many staff members are not office based. Furthermore, co-mingled waste recycling decreased from quarter 1 as did garden waste but that is to be expected at this time of the year. All targets have been achieved on the performance report but the recycling rate target was 60% but for this quarter it reached 53.6% and this is slightly down on quarter 1 where the recycling rate hit 56%.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe thanked C Thorpe for the useful report highlighting the work that the service carries out. Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe questioned whether the new Town Centre cleaning team would also be focussing on the Old Town as the town now has two new, beautiful zones to up keep.

C Thorpe said that the new cleaning team has been brought in for both the New and Old Town, it just happens to be that the launch of the new team coincided with the completion of the New Town.

Councillor Matthews referred to page 9 in the agenda and asked why there were no figures provided for general waste collection.

C Thorpe said that he has never reported these figures to the committee but that information is supplied by Hertfordshire County Council so it is possible to report on residual waste figures in the future if members would find that useful.

Councillor Matthews stated that in his street, he was aware of residents putting out their food bins religiously every week at the beginning of the scheme. However, he said he had noticed a drop in the number of food bins being put out. Is the food waste drop off related in an increase in general waste?

C Thorpe said that there is work to be done on this. The department is putting together a project next week where the team will go out with a clicker before the food waste is collected to establish the rate of participation. This will identify areas where participation is low and then they can be targeted after Christmas. The service is also planning on door step campaigns. It is possible to use data for Hertfordshire County Council as a comparison.

Councillor G Sutton suggested that the drop off in recycling rates may be because this quarter has coincided with the summer holiday period.

Councillor Anderson asked if it was possible to publicise that people are able to throw their food waste out every week over the Christmas period where a high volume of food is thrown away.

Councillor Hicks asked if the drop off in food waste collected was due to the residents running out of the green plastic bags.

C Thorpe did not think this was the case as the green plastic bags would have probably run out last quarter.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe commented upon the current high profile campaigns by celebrity chefs and wondered if they might have an effect in the future. Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe suggested that the Council should have their own waste campaign and promote good household management.

Councillor Hicks stated that most food waste is actually vegetable peelings and therefore are not waste but a by-product.

Councillor G Sutton mentioned the celebrity chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's waste campaign and TV programmes. He suggested that it was clear from these programmes that people were unaware of the recycling process and perhaps it might be useful to get in touch with Channel 4 to use their material.

C Thorpe said that the service is currently in discussions with a large food retailer to take part in a national campaign to reduce food waste and grants would be given out. It is in its infancy but should be able to report on this in the next quarter.

Councillor Anderson suggested if it would be possible to introduce some kind of enforcement in the future.

C Thorpe replied saying that it has been proposed to put large 'No Food Waste' stickers on the recycling bins which is not an enforcement measure but trying to encourage residents.

Councillor Marshall asked the Chairman to confirm if he wanted residual waste figures brought to the committee.

Councillor Anderson stated he would.

Councillor Birnie asked what the return to work compliance consists of and why it takes so long to complete.

C Thorpe explained that the reason for absence is logged and upon their return to work, targets are set and it is established whether they are fit to return to work and what support is needed to help them when they do return to work. He also mentioned that some staff come back with a phased return to work so it is difficult to meet with them.

Councillor Matthews returned to the previous point regarding enforcement. He stated that he understood the need for compliance but would find it difficult to put anything in place without having carried out a survey of non-compliance.

Councillor Anderson suggested that chipping bins would be another way of tracking waste however there is the issue of civil liberties.

Councillor Marshall said that the refuse collectors do look in the recycling bins but people do hide non-compliant rubbish under rubbish that should be in the bins. It is not easy to determine misuse of the system.

Councillor Howard said that some people do compost their rubbish and do not use the green bins. Councillor Howard also stated that as we are in a society now where free plastic bags are not provided, will residents not use plastic bags and instead just throw the food waste away loose and then there is the issue of unpleasant smell in the bins which then may discourage them from using their food waste bin.

C Thorpe said residents can also wrap rubbish in newspaper. Essentially, the aim is to divert as much waste away from landfill as possible.

Councillor Ashbourn echoed what Councillor Matthews said regarding enforcement and there are costs associated and therefore it is important to be sure of the problem that needs solving.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe asked C Thorpe how much it costs to take waste to landfill.

C Thorpe said £94 a tonne and food waste costs £35 a tonne. The Council are rewarded by Hertfordshire County Council for diverting waste away from landfill through the Alternative Financial Model.

Councillor Anderson said that he feared a point will come when the Council would have to 'up the anti' and use enforcement. It will then be important to communicate to residents what this enforcement is and why it is being put in place. This also requires justification and relates back to Councillor Matthews point regarding a survey being carried out.

Councillor Birnie asked if there were any comparative figures between authorities.

C Thorpe said that with regard to recycling rates, Dacorum Borough Council is 3<sup>rd</sup> out of the 10 authorities.

Councillor Birnie said that would be a useful set of statistics to be presented regularly to the committee.

### **Outcome**

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

### **42                    PROVISIONAL OUTTURN QUARTER 2**

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

### **43                    PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT & REGENERATION QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORTS**

J Doe introduced the report and told the committee that there were no performance indicators showing as reds to report, but workloads remain high. Also, performance is improving with regards to planning applications. Applications that have been refused and then subject to an appeal has risen and this trend needs to be monitored. The success rates at defending appeals in Dacorum is good. There has been improved performance within the land charges service which is above target with the average turn around, running at 8.2 days compared to the target of 10 days.

The number of new homes completed is monitored closely because there are Core Strategy targets to meet. The target is 430 houses a year and only 47 new homes had been completed in quarter 2. This is not something the Council can directly control because aside from the council house new builds programme, Dacorum Borough Council is not a developer but often a facilitator. This might be something the committee ought to keep under scrutiny because delivery rates are quite low. With regards to the risk register, J Doe has carried out a fundamental review of risks and there will be new risks to report on in quarter 3.

Councillor Ashbourn referred to paragraph 6 of the report regarding the rise in appeals. Are we able to determine the proportion of private applications versus developers?

J Doe said he did not have these figures but typically, when the economy is performing well, the larger developers will challenge more if they believe there is chance of getting planning permission on appeal.

Councillor Birnie suggested that the rise in the planning application appeals could be affected by publicity from the government and people presuming that their planning application will be approved. Also, there have been a large number of contentious planning applications in front of the Development Control Committee.

J Doe said that the department does not get a huge number of appeals and looking at the data for quarter 2, there were 34 planning refusals and only 13 of these resulted in an appeal. On page 45 of the agenda, there is a target number for refusals. Applicants are encouraged to get it right first time because if they resubmit a plan within six months, they do not have to pay another fee.

Councillor Matthews referred to page 46 with regards to enforcement cases. He asked why there was a large number of enforcement cases?

J Doe said that the priority 3 cases are the less pressing ones whereas priority 1 cases are usually listed buildings and preserved trees at risk of felling. Mainly, the point is that there is a lot more activity at the moment. The workload has increased generally and with that there is more building and people contacting the Council more often to check whether new developments have received the appropriate permission and are proceeding with no problems. A lot of the cases relate to neighbour enquiries regarding the building of domestic extensions and questioning if they have planning permission or not. The first thing the department does is to establish whether the works have planning permission and largely they do. Officers do go out on site to check they are compliant with the approved plans.

Councillor Hicks said that only 47 new homes are completed and the target is 430, do you know how many new home planning applications were granted?

J Doe explained that close records are kept of planning applications granted and these figures are available on the Council's website.

Councillor Hicks said that it might be possible that some developers may have planning permission but are waiting for prices to increase again before they start building.

Councillor Anderson said that information is usually contained in the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) which is a very usual source of information in relation to planning.

J Doe said the most recent report will go to Cabinet in December.

Councillor Marshall stated that the weekly list of planning applications on the website is invaluable and asked whether it would be possible to add the appeals submitted?

J Doe said this can be added to the weekly list. Appeals are currently reported through the Development Control Committee.

### **Outcome**

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

## **44                    MAYLANDS BUSINESS CENTRE UPDATE**

C Taylor introduced the report and said that the report can be split into two parts, 1) the growth and activity of the Maylands area and 2) the activities that the Economic Wellbeing Team have been involved in across the borough.

Currently, the Maylands Gateway is waiting for the police service to decide whether they want to relocate to Maylands and vacate their current site in the Town Centre as

part of the Forum development. The land is council owned and there has been persistent interest in the land. The land is in a good location and there are only a few sites of this size available. If the police decided not to move to the Maylands site then the land will be marketed. The Homes and Community Agency owned land was under a bidding process in August. They have received 15 bids for further consideration. On the Aviva owned land there is currently a proposal going to the Development Control Committee on 17th December for a retail development. There has been constant interest in the land at the Maylands site. It is important to consider the financial and employment implications of any new development in the Maylands area.

An Enterprise Zone bid was unsuccessful in 2011 but a new application has been submitted by Herts LEP and if successful, it could generate enough money to pay for the road improvement/construction and site servicing infrastructure. The Maylands Urban Realm Improvements contract is about to be issued and they should be on site in the New Year. This project will involve widening the pavements, planting trees and improving the lighting. C Taylor said that this was something that the businesses in Maylands had been pushing for. The Maylands area is under independent ownership which means the urban realm then suffers. Hopefully this regeneration will also encourage walking and cycling through the area.

The Maylands Business Centre Extension on the site adjacent to the current site will aim to move forward providing additional industrial units and currently there are 19 businesses on the waiting list. Dacorum Borough Council have also purchased Woodhouse, a corner site at the Heart of Maylands and the plan is for the ground floor to become an office space acting as a satellite to Maylands Business Centre. It was agreed from the start that the site would need to have an active ground floor with residential units above as this is an employment site.

Councillor G Adshead asked if the Smiths building would provide 300 new jobs for the area or if these jobs will be transferred from Watford.

C Taylor said that these 300 jobs will be transfers from Watford but over time, people may leave due to the relocation of the site.

Councillor Ashbourn asked the officers that once all the parcels of land have been settled and developed, what is the long aspiration for the Maylands area.

C Taylor said that the last site has been taken and an employment study will be undertaken going forward to assess what the town needs. There is a great need for employment land.

Councillor Ashbourn asked if they hoped to attract a certain type of business.

J Doe said that they hope to develop a Green Technology area. However, they cannot insist on that but that is currently an area with large growth. Hemel Hempstead is seen as a good location logistics wise with the Maylands area being on the M1 motorway.

Councillor Matthews asked what the key factor was in attracting Smiths to the area.

C Taylor said that with regards to this particular company, it was down to the premises available. Smiths were looking at the Hemel Hempstead site and one in Biggleswade who were actually offering more. The Council has worked closely with the business to provide them with easy transport links between the railway station and Maylands and some additional parking.

J Doe said that car parking was a big issue for the company and C Taylor added that it was about going that extra mile to make them feel wanted in Dacorum.

Councillor Birnie stated that there was a shortage of land for industry. If the police decide not to move to Maylands, how will you ensure it is not used for a residential purpose?

C Taylor replied that there is a separate brief of what will and will not be accepted on that site. The site must be used for office space and it is contrary to policy if not.

Councillor G Adshead asked if this would have an impact on the police presence in the Forum.

C Taylor said that the police neighbourhood team will be present in the Forum. The site at Maylands will include custody suites.

C Taylor then went back to the report and referred to the Business Ambassadors Scheme. The scheme was about getting businesses to buy into the local economy. Part of the deal was getting them to sell and promote Dacorum Borough Council outside the area. On December 11<sup>th</sup>, the ten year anniversary of the Buncefield explosion, businesses will meet and the Hemel Hempstead Story will be launched which is a short book promoting the area in business terms. The Ambassador Scheme will also be launched.

Councillor G Sutton took the opportunity to thank J Doe, C Taylor and the team for all their hard work and for being one of the most proactive teams in the area.

Councillor Anderson referred to Annex A in the report and asked if anything was in place for providing protection in case of another incident in the future.

C Taylor said the redeveloped parts had 54 extra planning requirements after the Buncefield explosion and several new safety features were needed which were also put in place in oil depots across the country.

J Doe said that were many health and safety guidelines that had been followed and the sites close to the Buncefield site are mainly service areas which have low employment which allows for a quicker and easier evacuation if needed.

Councillor G Sutton said the standard was obviously much safer now. The two tanks on the St Albans land are now a better standard. With regards to these oil depots being too close to usage areas, there is a oil storage facility on the M6 in Birmingham right in the middle of residential, retail and industrial areas.

Councillor Birnie asked what the caravan park was and if it was well used.



J Doe said it was for the storage of caravans. C Taylor said it was normally full and 40% of the caravans are Dacorum owned and it prevents them from being stored on the roadside.

Councillor Birnie asked what the return on this site was.

C Taylor said the net figure was around £60-80,000.

Councillor Matthews referred to page 59 of the agenda and the Economic Wellbeing Team. He asked what is the Tourism income?

C Taylor replied that the Council has employed a Tourism officer as there is economic activity to be gained from tourism in the borough. The officer has been working closely with local tourism businesses such as the XC Centre, the Snow Centre and the Warner Brothers Studio Tour in Watford. These businesses pay into a fund and are therefore buying into a service to give them a voice.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe referred to page 60 and asked how the Council was supporting new businesses.

C Taylor said that there was a trained business advisor on site at the Maylands Business Centre and to help with business plans and other support activity along with an economic wellbeing team. There is also an online advice channel that businesses can use.

### **Outcome**

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

## **45                    HEMEL TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY & TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT**

K Langley updated the committee on the Town Centre. The strategy was put in place in October 2014 and all the works in the centre are expected to be finished by March 2016. The department is working closely with Clean, Safe and Green to maintain the areas. The vacancy rates in the Town Centre have fallen from 22% to 13%. There is going to be a Saturday market in the Old Town hopefully starting in December. The Pavement Strategy will help to move and encourage shops to extend onto the streets.

Councillor Birnie said he was concerned about the Saturday market in the Old Town and was worried that it may cause problems for the existing market in the Town Centre.

J Doe said that the Old Town market will offer different specialised products to that of the current market. C Taylor added that it was focused on food and only there from 9am-12pm whereas the existing market is open all day. The aim is to encourage people up the Old Town and increase foot fall. K Langley also said that the markets

will be owned by the same operator so it is not in their interests to have competitive markets.

Councillor Anderson said that Kings Langley have a very successful local produce market in the High Street and maybe a focus on local produce will help visitor numbers.

Councillor Hicks stated that the Pavement Strategy is quoted at raising £38,000 and was this in addition to the market income.

C Taylor said two contractors have seen the potential and have approached the Council about running the site and generating a steady stream of income. K Langley said that currently the income is about £10-15,000 and the Council struggle to find new audiences. The companies that have approached the Council already have the contacts needed to fill the space and have quoted an 80% occupancy rate with a trial to begin on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015.

Councillor Anderson asked what metrics had been used to review the Council's running of public events in the Old Town. The previous organiser had been raising significant amounts of money for charities and community organisations, and what evidence was available to support the view that the Council was tapping into more income or investment.

C Taylor said that the team were currently working on the report for the recent Halloween event in the Old Town. She said that it was just as successful this year as last year. It is estimated that 4-5,000 people attended the event and in the future more security contractors may need to be brought in to ensure the event is safe and secure at all times. Next year, the task is to generate some income from the event.

K Langley said that currently, there is a small amount of income generated by the rides and the food stalls but this was nowhere near enough to cover the cost of the whole event.

Councillor Howard said that some residents have complained to her about the gradient of the footpath in some areas of the High Street and that it is too steep to walk on, especially when wet.

K Langley said that had not been reported to the team but will make sure it is looked into.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe took the opportunity to say how wonderful she felt the Old Town looked now all the works were complete and that the market was a great way of drawing people in.

## **Outcome**

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

**46**

**WORK PROGRAMME**

The work program for 2015/16 was agreed.

The Meeting ended at 9.15 pm