

**GREEN AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL – Meeting held on Thursday,
25th October, 2007.**

Present:- Councillors Hewitt (Chair), Coad, Dhillon, Parmar, Plimmer, Small and Swindlehurst (until 8.05 p.m.).

Also present under procedure rule 30:- Councillors MacIsaac and Smith.

Apologies for absence:- Councillor Finn.

PART I

26. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

27. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting of the Panel held on 4th September, 2007 were approved as a correct record.

28. Flooding – July, 2007

The Assistant Director, Transport and Planning presented a report outlining the consequences of the exceptionally heavy rainfall that fell in Slough on 20th July, 2007 which, whilst it did not result in widespread flooding, did give rise to problems in a number of locations around the town. The report detailed the various problem areas in question and outlined whether the responsibility for remedial action was on with the Borough Council, Thames Water, the Environment Agency or Buckinghamshire County Council. The report also outlined the causes of the flooding in each case and commented that the incapacity of Thames Water's public sewer system clearly contributed to the majority of the flooding incidents. Many of the problems were considered to be preventable with routine maintenance and clearing of problems already highlighted by the Council prior to the flooding. Some flooding resulted from known and "difficult" or costly to resolve capacity problems. However, in some cases lack of maintenance or mitigation measures exacerbated the problem. A few problems were unexplained and required further investigation but were likely to reveal a significant underlying capacity problem with both the foul and surface water systems in the Borough which, despite supposed separation, were linked at times of peak capacity.

The two water courses directly linked to flooding Huntercombe Stream and Salt Hill Stream were "taken over" by the Environment Agency from the Council in 2006. Particular concerns over the management of the Huntercombe Stream had been raised with them prior to the flooding. In addition, the management of the Haymill dam had only transferred to them in April and again concerns over the lack of routine maintenance had already been raised.

The highway drainage system appeared to have functioned well with the only obvious problem being related to soakaway capacity.

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The report identified a number of matters requiring resolution including the fact that alternative communication methods were required at an operational level with both Thames Water and the Environment Agency when their call centres were overwhelmed as in this case. Moreover, the adequacy of the emergency response from both TW and EA had proved insufficient and their apparent policy of referring the public to the Council reinforced the perception that the Council was responsible for the failure of their assets. On this point, protocols had been agreed for handling future situations. The lack of maintenance on behalf of both TW and EA had proved to be a contributory factor to the flooding and there was also a need for a joint approach to surface water drainage with all relevant agencies. This would be pursued through a partnership group and a prioritised programme of work. The report also identified the fact that key infrastructure at risk needed identification and, where appropriate, a contingency plan outlined. There was a need for more training and preparation to ensure that the unavailability of an individual in an emergency situation did not reduce the level of response available.

Since the flooding incident, significant progress had been made in many of the areas outlined. However, the large majority of the localised flooding incidents needed to be actioned by Thames Water and Officers were taking this work forward with a structured action plan.

Members made specific reference to a number of particular problem areas. In respect of the problems at Five Points, Burnham Lane and Lammas Road, there had been extensive carriageway flooding for much of the day caused by water pouring down from the Burnham area. Officers accepted that this had been a particular problem and negotiations would be taking place with Buckinghamshire County Council on this as the area in question was close to the Buckinghamshire boundary.

With regard to the carriageway flooding in Cippenham Green which had been exacerbated by wood chippings washing off planting areas, Officers would look into the possibility of some form of barrier being put in place to prevent this happening in future.

Members also sought clarification as to who was responsible for ensuring that local streams and watercourses were kept clear of dumped rubbish as this had clearly contributed to flooding in places. The Officers responded that the Environment Agency had been given strategic responsibility but that they had no additional resources to carry out such works. In addition, it was not always clear who was responsible for particular pieces of land. It was suggested that, if Members were aware of particular problem areas where dumped refuse was causing a problem to watercourses, they should advise Officers accordingly with a view to ensuring that a community clean-up or other initiative was organised to tackle the problem.

Given that many of the problems that had arisen were the responsibility of Thames Water, the Committee requested that they be invited to attend a future meeting of the Panel to explain their programme for carrying out improvements to the drainage system to avoid similar problems occurring in the future. In addition, Officers were asked to write to the Environment Agency on those issues that were clearly their responsibility seeking confirmation of the remedial actions that they would be taking.

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Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That Thames Water be invited to a future meeting of the Panel to discuss the action they are taking to alleviate the flooding problems in Slough and to comment on their areas of responsibility.
- (c) That Officers write to the Environment Agency seeking their comments on those areas falling within their strategic responsibility.

29. Pavement Obstruction Enforcement Policy

A report was considered setting out the problems arising from the Council's current policy in respect of goods and other obstructions placed on pavements. Currently, where businesses used the pavement for displaying goods or similar activities, and a problem of obstruction was being caused, the Council wrote to the businesses asking them to refrain from doing so but did not take any further action. This policy had been generally ineffective and it was now proposed that, in future, where businesses were obstructing the pavement and did not move items upon request, then further action would be taken against them in the form of a request to a Magistrate under the Highways Act to allow the Council to remove the obstruction. This proposed new policy was being considered by the Cabinet at its next meeting and the Panel was asked for its views on the proposals.

Consultation had been undertaken with all businesses and other interested parties which had given rise to an inconclusive outcome with some shops being in favour and others opposed to the new policy. However, the view of Officers was that improving the environment for pedestrians was a key factor in promoting walking as a viable transport mode and the new policy would assist the more vulnerable users, particularly the elderly and the young. The new policy would do away with the existing position and allow certain licensed areas to display goods on the pavements only where this was considered to be appropriate.

Members were generally in favour of the new policy and supported its adoption by the Cabinet. However, it was considered essential that it was properly and fairly enforced and there was some concern that, without additional budgetary or other resources, it may not be possible to carry out proper enforcement. Officers commented that it was intended to undertake the work within existing resources and that the Highways Inspectors along with the Food Safety Team would include this work within their existing roles. However, Members felt that the Cabinet should be requested to ensure that the new policy was appropriately resourced to ensure that it could be adequately and fairly enforced.

Resolved - That the report be noted and welcomed and that the Cabinet be advised of the Panel's support for the proposals, subject to an assurance that appropriate resourcing is put in place to ensure adequate enforcement of the new policy.

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30. Transport Scheme Priority List

The Assistant Director, Transport and Planning presented the recently produced Transport Scheme Priority List which provided a means of prioritising the various traffic and safety schemes in the town, given that there were never sufficient resources to carry out all of the work. The schemes were assessed and prioritised based upon selection criteria including casualty rates, Local Transport Plan objectives and targets together with achievement of corporate priorities. It was proposed that the list would be updated and reported annually to Members.

A Member asked whether it was possible to indicate how many of the schemes on the list were likely to be undertaken in the current year, given the available resources. However, Officers did not have detailed financial information available at the meeting but would happily discuss the matter with the Member elsewhere.

A Ward Member expressed surprise that the scheme relating to “Langley High Street – Rat Running” appeared so low on the list given that there had been a large petition on the matter and an understanding that some action would be taken by the Council. Officers explained that the prioritisation had to be based upon a number of factors including casualty figures. However, Officers would speak to the Member concerned about this issue outside of the meeting.

Reference was also made to problems with children having to cross Northborough Road to get to school and the Officer undertook to discuss this meeting with the Ward Councillor concerned.

Resolved - That the Panel support the adoption of the Transport Scheme Priority List, subject to Officers discussing the individual issues raised with the Members concerned.

31. Doorstep Crime Initiative Update

The Panel considered an information report on “doorstep crime” initiatives in the Borough. Members welcomed the work being undertaken and suggested that consideration be given to using local churches to reach elderly or other vulnerable people.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

32. Safe Food Award and Healthy Eating Award – “Catering for Health”

The Panel considered a report giving details of the enhancement of the existing Safe Food Award Scheme with the “Catering for Health” Award which encouraged and recognised healthy catering practices and menu choices at restaurants and other eating places within the town. Given the health profile of Slough, with high rates of circulatory disease, diabetes and a lower life expectancy than other surrounding Boroughs, it was considered to be essential that the authority aimed to reduce health inequalities by encouraging caterers to play their part in health promoting practices by reducing the number of fatty, salty and sugary foods served or added as ingredients to dishes without consumer knowledge. It was envisaged that publication of the scheme and findings on the Council’s website and by regular

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award ceremonies would bring additional motivation to improve standards of hygiene and extend the range of healthy foods offered within the Borough.

In welcoming the initiative, Members noted that there were still a large number of premises that were not meeting the full food safety requirements and Officers explained the work that was taking place to bring all premises up to the necessary standards. This included a risk rating system so that those premises with the biggest problems received the most attention. In addition, if breaches were serious enough, notices would be served or premises closed.

A Member asked whether any research had been undertaken into whether there was a correlation between those areas with the highest levels of poor food safety and healthy choices and the areas of greatest deprivation in the Borough. Officers responded that this was an area that was currently being looked into so that targeting of the most deprived areas could be undertaken.

A Member was concerned that some of the data on health was somewhat out of date. It was pointed out that this was a problem generally in that statistical information was often several years old. However, work was being undertaken to obtain more up to date statistics where possible.

A Member asked whether there was resistance in Slough to healthier school meals as there had been in some parts of the country. Officers responded that there had been a very good take up in Slough's schools with a better take up than average.

Resolved - That the report be noted and welcomed.

33. Fraud Act 2006 and Trading Standards

The Panel considered an information report setting out details of changes in Trading Standards enforcement of fraud related investigations brought about by the Fraud Act 2006.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

34. Forward Agenda Plan

The Panel noted its Forward Agenda Plan for future meetings.

It was noted that the Cabinet had not accepted the Panel's recommendations concerning the traffic calming measures in Northern Road and Cumberland Avenue and the view was expressed that the matter should be reconsidered by the Panel. It was noted that it would not be possible to reconsider the issue under the six months rule before March, 2008 and Members asked that it be included in the Forward Plan for the March meeting.

A Member suggested that, when Thames Water attended the Panel to discuss the issues arising from the flooding, they also be asked for their comments on whether there was adequate drainage capacity in the town for the increasing number of housing units being provided under the Local Development Framework.

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A Member asked for a report back to the January or March meeting on the outcome of the consultation exercise on refuse and recycling options.

A Member suggested the future presentation to the meeting on issues relating to the canal.

35. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved - That the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting as the item to be considered contained exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as defined in Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

PART II

(The following is a summary of the matter considered in Part II of the meeting)

36. Slough Concessionary Bus Fares

The meeting considered a report setting out the changes required to the Slough concessionary bus fares scheme to bring it into line with recommended practice and to prepare for the start of the free national concession from 1st April, 2008 and agreed a number of recommendations for the Cabinet's consideration.

Chair

(The meeting opened at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 9.05 p.m.)