

GREEN AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL – Meeting held on Wednesday, 5th December, 2007.

Present: Councillors Hewitt (Chair), S Chaudhry, Dhillon, MacIsaac, Parmar, Plimmer, Small and Swindlehurst.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Coad.

PART I

37. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

38. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting held on 25th October, 2007 were approved as a correct record.

39. Presentation – The Activities and Programmes being developed by Supermarkets in Slough to reduce their Carbon Emissions

The Head of Environmental Services and Policy outlined a presentation detailing the environmental policies and carbon management measures that were being undertaken by supermarkets in Slough. He advised that although all the major supermarket chains in Slough had been invited to the presentation, none were able to attend on this occasion. Marks and Spencer had indicated that it would hope to attend on a future date.

The Officer advised that all of the major supermarkets in Slough had now adopted policies and strategies to improve environmental performance and they had all adopted the same common thread to achieve this. As an example he discussed the work of Marks and Spencer, who aimed to set good food standards, whilst improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of people by trading fairly. The company would reduce energy use in its stores and switch to green alternatives, powering all its UK and Irish shops and other buildings with green energy from a variety of sources. The company had plans to open a model green clothing factory, develop and sell ranges of low carbon products and launch campaigns to help customers reduce their carbon emissions. The Officer discussed ways in which Marks and Spencer would tackle food miles, reduce waste, and set targets to reduce food waste from its stores. Measures would be taken to reduce and recycle packaging by using sustainably resourced packaging materials such as cardboard or plastic. It was noted that eight billion carrier bags were used in the UK each year resulting in approximately 100,000 tons of waste and the Group aimed to reduce the use of carrier bags by 33% in the next three years.

The Officer referred to the work of the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), and the agreement of the majority of major supermarkets to the 'Courtauld commitment'. The signatories had committed to support WRAP by designing out packaging waste growth by 2008, delivering reductions in packaging waste by 2010 and identifying ways to tackle the problem of food waste. The Officer discussed

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recent innovations in the packaging industry including the introduction of pouch packaging and PET wine bottles.

In response to the presentation, Members asked several questions and made a number of observations as follows:-

- A Member asked why the packaging industry was moving away from glass packaging towards plastic pouches. The Officer advised that the making of the glass and the transport of the finished glass containers often involved high energy use which increased the footprint of the article.
- A Member was concerned that whilst one of the major supermarkets had announced its Plan A over a year ago there was no evidence that any of its objectives had been carried out yet. When visiting a local branch he noted that many of the goods appeared to be overpacked and overchopped. In response the Officer advised that the store had made progress, but commented that it was often difficult where customers wanted goods to be packaged.
- It was suggested that brown bags would be a good alternative to the packaging presently used for potatoes, carrots and other vegetables- the Officer advised that brown cardboard was one of the biggest recycling successes in the country.
- A Member asked whether there was a table showing which supermarkets had achieved most in terms of being environmentally friendly. The Officer replied that from the information he had seen, probably Asda lead in this area. They were particularly successful in the area of waste.
- A Member observed that various supermarkets seemed to be working together but wanted to know what Slough Borough Council was doing to work with these individual supermarkets. In her opinion it was vital that the Council worked with these stores and she would welcome an opportunity for Members to visit local supermarkets to discuss areas of mutual concern. The Officer advised that because the local stores were part of national chains there was a tendency for decisions to be made on a national basis. There was sometimes local interaction with the Council however, and it was noted that Asda for example had helped the Council with the big green day out initiative. Work had also been done to resolve the problem of abandoned trolleys.
- It was felt that something should be done locally to discourage the use plastic carrier bags in supermarkets by charging for them.

Members discussed at length the ways in which collaborative working with local supermarkets could be taken forward with a view to improving environmental policies and carbon management in Slough.

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Resolved - That:-

- (1) A Panel visit to a leading supermarket in Slough be arranged to initiate discussion on carbon management issues.
- (2) The Head of Environmental Services and Policy submit a report to the Panel on Slough supermarket policies on the issue of plastic carrier bags.
- (3) A campaign be initiated, in partnership with supermarkets and retail businesses in Slough, to discourage the use of plastic carrier bags.
- (4) The creation of a certificate/award scheme be explored to recognise the efforts of supermarkets in the reduction of carrier bag use and good environmental policy.

Resolved - That:-

The press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the item in Part II of the agenda as it involves the likely disclosure of 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 Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

PART II

40. Part II Minutes

The Part II minutes of the meeting held on 25th October 2007, were approved as a correct record.

Chair

(The meeting opened at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 7.37 p.m.).