

Green and Built Environment Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 26th March, 2008.

Present:- Councillors Hewitt (Chair), Dhillon (until 7.10 p.m.), Parmar, Plimmer, Small and Swindlehurst (from 6.40 to 7.40 p.m.).

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Coad and Maclsaac.

PART I

53. Declarations of Interest.

None.

54. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting of the Panel held on 29th January, 2008 were approved as a correct record.

The following issues were raised as matters arising:-

Cippenham Development – Completion of Sports Pitches

Following the discussion at the last meeting, the Assistant Director, Transport and Planning reminded the Panel that the condition under the Section 106 Agreement limiting the number of homes that could be occupied before the four sports pitches were completed had still not been complied with as the areas in question had not been seeded and it was now getting perilously close to becoming a breach of condition. The developers were talking to officers regularly and the last discussion had taken place some three weeks previously and they continued to monitor the position closely. There was still time to comply with the condition through, for example, turfing the areas in question although this would be more expensive. If the condition was not complied with, consideration would be given as to what enforcement action the Council should take and Members would be kept updated on the position.

Report on Distribution of Burglar Alarms

It was noted that the report requested at the last meeting on People 1st's policy in respect of the distribution of burglar alarm had not been received and officers agreed to endeavour to ensure that it was submitted to the next meeting.

Northern Road/Cumberland Avenue – Traffic Management Scheme

In response to a Member's question, the Assistant Director Transport and Planning advised that the safety audit being undertaken into the revised scheme had not yet been finalised but it was proposed to submit a comprehensive report to the June meeting of the Panel. Members requested

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that this report, as well as including the safety audit and police accident statistics, should also include full details of any comments received from the local Residents' Association/Neighbourhood Action Group as well as representations by individual residents and this was agreed.

Members expressed some concern that local people were not being kept informed of progress and it was agreed that a briefing note be prepared for the Residents' Association and the Neighbourhood Action Group so that they were aware that a further report on the matter would be considered in June.

55. Drugs and Alcohol Action Team Update

The Head of Drugs and Community Safety made a presentation to the Panel updating it on the work of the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) drawing attention to a number of issues including the following:-

- Restructuring of the DAAT
- Work to reduce the harm caused by illegal drugs.
- Work to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.
- The DAAT's performance over the past six months and its delivery plan for the coming financial year.

He concluded that performance had improved over the recent period and the restructuring and tendering of the Drug Intervention Programme (DIP) contract should further improve delivery in the coming year. Planning for 2008/09 was on track and included new options in relation to action against the problems caused by alcohol. He would report further to the Panel on progress in six months' time. Of particular note was the fact that there had been an increase of some 16% in the number of drugs users who were participating in treatment programmes as well as a small increase in the number who stayed in treatment for 12 weeks or more. Whilst much work still needed to be done, this trend was encouraging. It was also noted that, as compared to other authorities in the Thames Valley area, Slough was getting a higher percentage of drugs users into treatment and had a relatively high success rate in people under arrest being tested for drugs use.

Members raised the following issues in the subsequent debate:-

- Whilst the increase in the number of people in treatment was welcomed, Members asked whether any information was available on the number of rough sleepers in Slough at the present time as this could be an indication of the level of drug and alcohol misuse. Whilst the officer did not have that information available at the meeting, he undertook to provide it to the Member concerned.
- It was confirmed in response to a question that, whilst the DAAT had changed certain of the partner agencies it used to deliver some aspects of its work, its relationship with SHOC and Look Ahead was unchanged.
- A Member asked for additional information about the length of time individuals were in treatment and the relapse rate of those individuals

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who had gone through a treatment programme. The officer undertook to ensure that the requested information was provided.

- A Member noted that there were incidents of “chaotic” residents or tenants who, as well as being a danger to themselves, often caused considerable problems for those around them and sought clarification of what action the Council was taking to address this difficult issue. The Strategic Director of the Green and Built Environment confirmed that this issue had been identified as one requiring urgent attention and a cross-Directorate workshop including all relevant service areas had been set up to undertake a full review of the current procedures for dealing with such individuals with a view to completing the piece of work by July. Members requested that the outcomes of this important piece of work be reported back to the Panel and this was agreed.
- A Member asked whether, where an individual was arrested for drug possession, consideration was given where possible to them receiving treatment rather than being prosecuted. The officer responded that, wherever possible, the DIP endeavoured to get individuals into treatment as an alternative to prison but, at the end of the day, it was a decision for the legal system.

On completion of the presentation and questions, it was –

Resolved – That the current position be noted and welcomed and that a further report be submitted to the Panel in six months’ time.

56. A Single Use Plastic Carrier Bag Policy For Slough Borough Council

The Head of Environmental Services and Quality submitted a report as requested by the Panel on the possible introduction of a single use plastic carrier bag policy within the town. In introducing his report, he referred to the fact that whilst certain trials had already been carried out in places, the national picture had changed recently in that the Chancellor in his budget statement announced that supermarkets would be forced to charge their customers for carrier bags but would be given one year to voluntarily end reliance on single use carrier bags. Proceeds from the tax would be passed to environmental charities and it was proposed to introduce this legislation for enactment in 2009. It was suggested that this could result in a 90% reduction in the number of carrier bags in circulation.

Given the more helpful national picture, the Council could more confidently endeavour to introduce a local policy, whilst bearing in mind that it would not be possible to force local retailers to comply with it. He outlined the five key elements of such a local approach, namely –

- A publicity campaign using the “Cleaner, Safer, Greener” theme and integration with the existing work plan.
- A redesign of the “Keep Slough Clean” jute bag with a number available for free distribution at events or as prizes and it may be possible to secure sponsorship for this.

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- Production of a guide showing retail outlets that had undertaken to charge for plastic bags, perhaps integrated in some way with the Fairtrade directory.
- Retail outlets that were responsive to the policy could receive some form of door sticker or certificate to inform customers of their “green credentials”.
- Overview of the Council’s own internal practices e.g. at Wexham Nursery, libraries and events to ensure that single use plastic carrier bags were not being given away.

Members welcomed the proposals whilst noting that significant improvement would only be achieved through national legislation as local authorities had no enforcement powers in this area at the present time. However, it was felt that the Council should be endeavouring to take the lead locally wherever possible.

Resolved – That the report and the proposed local approach be welcomed and endorsed.

57. **Emergency Plan for Notifiable Animal Disease Outbreak**

The Emergency Planning Officer introduced her report outlining the new Borough Council Emergency Plan for notifiable animal health outbreaks and advised that a copy of the full document was available for Members to view in the Members’ Room. She outlined the legislative background and the key elements as set out in the Plan, advising that the role played by the lead officers in this authority would be key to the effective control and eradication of a disease situation and ensuring that the needs of the local community were provided for. Whilst it would have been hard to imagine a year ago that Slough would have been involved in diseases such as foot and mouth, the recent outbreak had shown the importance of being prepared for such eventualities and this plan set out the roles of the authority and of its officers to control and eradicate the disease.

Members welcomed the report and it was –

Resolved – That the report be noted and welcomed.

58. **Highway Engineering Programme Of Works**

The Assistant Director, Transport and Planning introduced a report setting out the proposed programme of works to be carried out by the Council’s highway engineering team in the 2008/09 financial year. The report included details of the carriageway surfacing programme, the footway priority list and the programme of street lighting schemes as well as information about the provision for drainage works.

A Member asked when work to improve the roadway in Concorde Way and Griffin Close would be undertaken and he was advised that these roads would be reviewed for the 2009/10 programme.

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Specific reference was made to a lighting scheme recently undertaken in Common Road, Langley and the barriers and other equipment which appeared to have left in an untidy manner in the roadway. The officer undertook to ensure that this situation was checked and rectified. Members asked a number of questions of detail on the proposed programme and it was

Resolved - That the report be noted.

59. Road Safety Profile of Slough 2007- A report from the Thames Valley Safer Roads Partnership

The Head of Transport introduced a report arising from the collaboration taking place between local authorities and the Thames Valley region and the Thames Valley Safer Roads Partnership. The work undertaken included a road safety profile for Slough which highlighted some of the key information and trends in Slough, allowing comparisons to be made with other areas in the Thames Valley. Such information could be used as a tool to highlight and help guide road safety activities in the Borough. He commented that whilst the final report was due to be published in about June, the report had highlighted a number of key areas where Slough's accident and other statistics were high compared with other towns, particularly in regard to speeding and violation of red traffic signals, amongst others. The report also highlighted a higher than average incidents of collisions involving certain categories of resident in Slough and this was extremely significant as it could help the Borough to target education and training on these particular groups. He confirmed that, when the final report had been published, it would be made available to all interested parties.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

60. Transport Scheme Priority List

The Head of Transport reminded the Panel that the principle of scheme prioritisation was discussed at previous meetings and Members had endorsed the approach being taken by officers to assess the relative priority of all transport-related schemes. Because Slough did not have sufficient resources to carry out all of the essential traffic and safety schemes, it was essential that schemes were assessed and prioritised upon agreed selection criteria including casualty rates, Local Transport Plan objectives and targets together with achievement of corporate priorities. Based upon the agreed methodology, he circulated a schedule setting out the priority list for Members' consideration. He noted that the top priority scheme was for the A4 Bath Road from Dover Road to the town centre and, for comparison purposes, also circulated the assessment of the proposed Northborough Road scheme advising how the two priority rankings had been arrived at, given the issues raised by the Panel at an earlier meeting.

Members raised the following issues in the subsequent discussion –

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- Clarification was sought as to why it was proposed to close the subways at the Co-op roundabout and elsewhere. Officers responded that there had been well documented community safety issues with a number of subways including these over a number of years and it was now proposed to proceed to close those particular ones as there were adequate surface level crossings available. Similarly, it was proposed to close the Tuns Lane subway at a future date although this was more problematical as there was no suitable surface level crossing available at the present time.
- A Ward Member asked why the scheme for Langley High Street - Rat Running had such a low priority. The criteria for drawing up the priority were explained, particularly the fact that there were other areas in the Borough with a worse accident record than this one. The Member expressed her concern that, given that this was a "safe route to school", it should have a higher priority.
- Further clarification was sought as to the work to be undertaken at Northborough Road. Officers commented that a full appraisal would take place during 2008/09 which would take into account all relevant issues including street lighting, etc. The issue of large vehicles using the area would also be investigated as part of this work.

Resolved - That the Transport Scheme Priority List be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 8.43 p.m.)