

## **SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES, ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies, Environment Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Wednesday 28 September 2022 at 10.00 am

**Present:** Cllr S Ashton, Cllr A Boyden (Vice-Chair), Cllr M Dimery (Chair), Cllr H Hobhouse, Cllr H Munt, Cllr T Power and Cllr J Roundell Greene

**Other Members present:**

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr A Bradford, Cllr B Clarke, Cllr M Kravis, Cllr M Martin and Cllr A Wiltshire

**1 Apologies for absence - Agenda Item 1**

Cllr Barrie Clarke, Cllr Marcus Kravis, Cllr Matt Martin, Cllr Alan Bradford and Cllr Alex Wiltshire

**2 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2**

Cllr Henry Hobhouse informed the committee that he often undertakes paid work on mending railways.

**3 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 3**

There were no members of the public registered to speak at the meeting

**4 Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee work programme - Agenda Item 4**

The Governance Manager, Scrutiny presented the Scrutiny for Policies, Environment work programme, alongside the Scrutiny for Policies, Place work programme and The Executive Forward Plan. He explained that, although the work programme is quite full, there is scope for members to feed in any items of business that they wish the Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee to consider. The following items were suggested by members.

- The recent lifting of the Fracking ban by Government and the impacts of this.
- Renewable energy costs and the real differences between nuclear and renewable energy in Somerset.
- This committee should prompt The Executive on issues that they should be thinking about.
- More information regarding the Climate Implementation Board.
- For the work programme to include Task and Finish groups to focus on areas of interest.

The Governance Manager, Scrutiny advised that the Connecting Devon and Somerset progress updates will be taken under the Scrutiny for Policies, Place committee going forward.

Under this item the Governance Manager, Scrutiny explained that this committee would require representation on the Somerset Waste Board Joint Scrutiny Panel. He invited members to volunteer to represent the committee, the following expression of interest was received:

- SWP Joint Scrutiny – Cllr Roundell-Greene.

## 5 **Local Aggregates Assessment Consultation Update - Agenda Item 5**

Colin Arnold, Service Manager Development and Planning and Ellie Maxwell Planning Policy Officer shared a brief slideshow to summarise the Local Aggregate assessment (LLA) as part of the evidence base for the forthcoming Minerals Plan. The officer explained that this LLA is late but the team are catching up, and the 2020-2022 LLA will begin soon. Members were asked to note that this update report is part of a wider piece of work on the Somerset Local Aggregate Assessment.

The following questions and comments were from received from members.

- Request for a copy of the slides to be shared with the committee.
- Can the officer give any comment on the re-opening of Bartletts Quarry, Westdown in regards to the report that has been presented? We understand this quarry was closed for environmental reasons. Why is it being re-opened? The Service Manager for Development and Planning explained that this proposal was still under consideration and that he was unable to comment until such times as a report goes forward to the Regulation committee.
- Has there been any work done on carbon emissions from the aggregates industry in Somerset? The Service Manager for Development and Planning agreed that this was something that team could take away to investigate further.
- Will this committee be looking at solid rock and building stone as well as aggregate? The Planning Policy Officer advised that the report on building stone will be included in the next Annual Monitoring Statement.
- Two rail heads in Somerset – on the 15-Year Plan what are we doing to either, increase rail heads or ensure that the 15-year stone supply is tied into the rail heads? The Service Manager Development and Planning advised that this would be dealt with on an individual planning application basis.
- Can we have more information on the environmental benefits of aggregates? We need to remember the importance of a balance between the environment and the economy here. The Service Manager for Development and Planning advised that any future reports on this will include an Environmental Impact report.
- Should we be seeing an Environmental Impact Assessment on every report that is taken through The Council? The Chair requested that the democratic services officer look into this.
- A request for this committee to have sight of other similar reports such as the Local Plan Review and Minerals Plan Review to consider and comment further in terms of environmental and planning implications. The Service Manager

Development and Planning advised members that these reports usually go to the Regulation committee, but that they could be put forward to Scrutiny Environment committee if required.

The Chair thanked all members and officers for their participation and the committee noted the report.

## 6 **Economic Futures- The Local Economic Assessment for Somerset - Agenda Item 6**

Paul Hickson, Strategic Manager Economy and Planning and Julie Wooler, Senior Economic Development Officer provided an overview of the report illustrated with a slideshow to highlight the key points. Members were asked to note that this is not a full report, or a strategy, but that it is a building block towards a new Economic Strategy for Somerset.

The Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider and comment on the Somerset Economic Futures Summary Update Report and work undertaken to date with specific reference to:

- Issues identified by the SWOT analysis
- The proposed four economic scenarios

The following comments and questions were received from members.

- Energy: There are two main utility industries that have a major impact on Somerset's economic future, water, and electricity. How can we lobby these companies to do more in terms of meeting higher demand for electricity and for more sustainability in the energy sector? The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning acknowledged that the points raised are very valid and these can be incorporated into the SWOT analysis.
- Agriculture: The solution is not about just planting trees. This is about how you produce food. Ploughing through land results in high carbon output. Farming in a different way can maintain more carbon in the soil. Slow farming i.e The Newt is tying in a lot of carbon on the land. What's written on the slides does not currently meet climate change. The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning advised that he will look to discuss with consultants and experts to incorporate this detail into the SWOT analysis.
- Agriculture: A 'Farm Carbon Toolkit' is being used at Mendip District Council, it is a good resource and may be useful here.
- Agriculture: How can we work with farmers to drive carbon neutrality across the industry? I.e., working with NFU to put more pressures on farmers unions? The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning advised that they would be looking to involve those stakeholders in all focus sessions.
- Agriculture: Could we use 'County Farms' as case studies for more sustainable farming? The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning confirmed that he would take this away for further investigation.

- Agriculture: Food supply issues due to the war in Ukraine and diversification in food supply. Can we ensure that we can grow the core produce, before diversifying into alternative produce.
- This work emphasises the importance of working in partnership with stakeholders to meet climate objectives – we can't do this on our own.
- Hinkley point: 'Anchor for clean growth' What does this mean? The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning advised that this is about the development of supply chains and maximising their local and regional strength. The supply chain strengths that come from this project can be applied to future renewable projects. i.e., offshore wind farms.
- Covid 19: Will the Economic Strategy include impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, in terms of its social and economic impacts on the Economic Future for Somerset? The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning advised that this has been raised within the team and that in terms of economic development, Covid-19 recovery is still in its early days and very difficult to assess and plan for in the longer term.
- Non-committee member online: There are some gaps in this economic futures work in terms, how can we move forward and fill some of these gaps? How do we do more work with stakeholders to put this research into action. i.e. business networking, innovation forums, opening up new markets in Somerset to make it a great place to live and work. The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning reassured members that this is piece of work looking at the longer term to inform the Economic Strategy. Alongside that the economic development team are commissioning support services, driving innovation, and procuring a business support service to enable growth in our business communities, particularly SME's. The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning suggested that the team could bring a more detailed report on this in the future.
- Non-committee member online: Economic Growth is very unpredictable. How can we support businesses to achieve carbon neutrality in such difficult economic circumstances. i.e., more permitted developments rights for solar projects. Can we make sure this is considered in the forthcoming Local Plan for the new unitary authority. The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning advised that elements of this would be reported back to the committee within a report on the outcomes of the Climate Business Summit next month.
- Discovery sessions: What are these, how have they been advertised, and what are the main objectives of these sessions? The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning advised that these sessions are looking to involve all wider stakeholders.
- Will this piece of work feed into the work of the Heart of the Southwest LEP and is this work being undertaken by other councils across the region? A joined-up approach is important here. The Strategic Manager Economy and Planning confirmed that this was the case and that the LEP is a part of the steering group on this work.

The Chair thanked all members and officers for their participation and the committee noted the report.

## 7 **CDS Progress Update - Agenda Item 7**

Katriona Lovelock, Service Manager Economy, talked members through the progress update report as published.

The following questions and comments were received from members:

- It was noted by the committee that there is not a requirement for officers to read the entirety of their report. The committee agreed that there is an expectation that all members will have read the report before the meeting.
- When is fast 5G coming to Somerset? The Service Manager Economy advised that 5G networks are managed by the commercial sector.
- Non-committee member online: The Airband contract with Somerset West and Taunton District Council – what reassurance can be given that the premises under the contract will be connected? Are there issues that need to be addressed here? The Service Manager Economy advised that this was difficult to answer until a detailed design process had been done.
- Non-committee member online: Delays in roll out phasing of fibre broadband – The published timetable shows that completion is expected in Q4 2024. Are these targets realistic? The Service Manager Economy confirmed that there are delays, and this does lead to backloading in the programme, but CDS are looking to bring in extra resource to catch up and prevent further delays in completion of the programme by Q4 2024.
- Non-committee member online: Voucher scheme and looking after those customers. There have been delays and poor communication with customers who have been awarded vouchers. How is this being managed? The Service Manager Economy advised that the voucher schemes are not managed by CDS and therefore it was difficult to comment on this.
- Non-committee member online: How are we managing Openreach in terms of reaching the most isolated properties i.e., far rural areas.
- Non-committee member online: History of the CDS contracts and failure of Gigaclear which left a hiatus whilst new contracts were awarded. This has resulted in some gaps in coverage and areas not being covered. How are we managing this?

The Service Manager Economy acknowledged that the detail on the above two questions was complex and that it would be beneficial to discuss the specifics of these with the Councillor after the meeting.

The Chair thanked all members and officers for their participation and the committee noted the report.

## 8 **Any other business - Agenda Item 8**

The Chair did not raise any other urgent items of business.

**(The meeting ended at 12.17 pm)**

**CHAIRMAN**