

Minutes of a Meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY, on Friday, 21 July 2023 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Tony Lock (Chair)

Cllr Andy Soughton (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Steve Ashton

Cllr Michael Dunk

Cllr John Hunt

Cllr Wes Read

Cllr Henry Hobhouse

Cllr Mike Caswell

Cllr Edric Hobbs

Cllr Matthew Martin

Cllr Martin Wale

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Norman Cavill

Cllr Dave Mansell

Cllr Bob Filmer

Cllr Ros Wyke

9 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillors Simon Coles, Philip Ham and Andy Kendall.

It was noted that Councillor Henry Hobhouse was attending as substitute for Councillor Coles. Councillor Sue Osborne had been due to attend as substitute for Councillor Philip Ham but she had also sent her apologies.

10 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on 22 June 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

11 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

Councillor Andy Soughton declared a personal interest in Agenda item 5: Application to modify footpath WN 27/4 and part of footpath WN 23/11 to bridleways from the A303, Queen Camel to Sparkford Hill, Sparkford as the landowner was known to him. He confirmed that he would retain an open mind during determination of the application.

Councillor Henry Hobhouse advised that he was the Division Member for Castle Cary and knew many people within the area of Agenda items 5, 6 and 7 relating to footpaths in the Queen Camel and Sparkford areas.

12 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were no questions from members of the public.

13 Application to upgrade footpath WN 27/4 and part of footpath WN 23/11 to bridleways from the A303, Queen Camel to Sparkford Hill, Sparkford - Agenda Item 5

The Senior Rights of Way Officer advised that additional evidence had been presented to officers that morning regarding the three footpath applications before the committee. He said that officers had not had the opportunity to consider the new evidence and were therefore unable to provide the Committee with any view on the evidence that day.

The Chairman regretted the late submission of the new evidence. He proposed that the three reports (agenda items, 5, 6 and 7) relating to footpaths within the Queen Camel and Sparkford area be deferred to a future meeting of the Committee to allow officers the opportunity to read and consider the documents submitted and ascertain if the evidence was significant to the officer recommendation.

It was noted that Councillor Matt Martin abstained from voting as he arrived whilst the item was being discussed and did not hear the full discussion.

RESOLVED:

That the application to upgrade footpath WN 27/4 and part of footpath WN 23/11 to bridleways from the A303, Queen Camel to Sparkford Hill, Sparkford be DEFERRED to a future meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee.

(Voting: 9 in favour, 0 against, 2 abstentions)

14 Applications to upgrade parts of footpaths WN 23/40, WN 23/38 and WN 23/12 to bridleways and add sections of bridleway, from Babcary Road to the A303, Queen Camel - Agenda Item 6

Please see Minute 13 (item 5 on this agenda), which also applies to this item.

RESOLVED:

That the applications to upgrade parts of footpaths WN 23/40, WN 23/38 and WN 23/12 to bridleways and add sections of bridleway, from Babcary Road to the A303, Queen Camel be DEFERRED to a future meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee.

(Voting: 9 in favour, 0 against, 2 abstentions)

15 Application to add a bridleway, from WN 23/38 to High Street, Sparkford - Agenda Item 7

Please see Minute 13 (item 5 on this agenda) which also applies to this item.

RESOLVED:

That the application to add a bridleway, from WN 23/38 to High Street, Sparkford be DEFERRED to a future meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee.

(Voting: 9 in favour, 0 against, 2 abstentions)

16 Progress Report: Phosphates and work undertaken to achieve nutrient neutral development - Agenda Item 8

The Principal Planning Policy Officer presented the report, and provided a comprehensive presentation to update members on the work undertaken to achieve nutrient neutral development whilst also supporting housing growth. Some of the key elements of the presentation included information and updates about:

- A brief overview as a reminder of the situation regarding levels of phosphates present in the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site.
- Nutrient neutrality in Somerset and a reminder of the river catchments and geographical area affected.
- Updating of the Phosphates Budget Calculator was nearing completion.
- Regular meetings with key stakeholders were continuing.

- Reference to a national test case in the High Court (Jurston Farm, Wellington).
- Creation of phosphate (P) credits.
- Specific updates regarding each of the river catchment areas – Tone, Brue and Parrett, which included information about the number of planning applications held in abeyance seeking a phosphate solution, and the progress to date.
- The Council's recent funding bid to the Government's Nutrient Mitigation Fund
- Detail about an Initial Pilot Trial (Salinity Solutions) being installed at Fivehead.

During discussion the Principal Planning Policy Officer, the Assistant Director Strategic Place & Planning, and the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning & Assets responded to points of detail raised by members, and some of the replies included information about:

- The P credits and how more standardising across rural and urban areas may be possible in the future. Also approximately how much a credit equated to in financial terms.
- The possible alternative land uses for large farms if taken out of production.
- Data used was from a variety of sources and different agencies.
- Scrutiny (Climate and Place) were also considering/monitoring the phosphates situation.
- Wessex Water adding phosphates to the water supply as a treatment.
- The stage in the planning process when phosphate calculations are done.
- The Salinity Solutions trial and how scalable it might be as a phosphates solution.

The Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning & Assets acknowledged many members and different committees were interested in the progress with the phosphates situation and wished to discuss in further technical detail. She noted from comments that there were concerns about apparent contradictions in data and information systems. She advised she would discuss the matter outside of the meeting with officers to ascertain a way forward where as many members as possible could be involved in a discussion or briefing about the matter.

Councillor Henry Hobhouse noted that he had been promised briefings with the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets but the briefing had not yet taken place.

At the end of discussion, the Chairman proposed that the recommendations as detailed in the report be noted, and this was agreed by 7 in favour, 1 against with 3

abstentions.

RESOLVED:

That the Strategic Planning Committee noted:-

- a. The content of the report.
- b. The activity across the 3 affected river catchments which was starting to unlock the delivery of housing and affected development which had been on hold due to the need to ensure nutrient neutrality.
- c. The Council's recent funding bid to the Government's Nutrient Mitigation Fund.

(Voting: 7 in favour, 1 against, 3 abstentions)

17 Quarterly report on planning service performance - Agenda Item 9

The Assistant Director Strategic Place & Planning introduced the quarterly officer report from the planning committees to monitor decision making and workload levels. She provided a presentation and some of the key points included information about:

- Planning service performance information including:
 - Number of planning applications received since 2019/20
 - Applications determined within the national targets for Q4 of 2022/23
 - Pre-application enquiries
 - Appeal decisions
 - Enforcement cases on hand and resolved/closed
 - 5 Year Housing Land Supply and Housing Delivery Test position

During a short discussion the Assistant Director Strategic Place & Planning responded to some points of detail raised, and provided some further information regarding staff resourcing for planning enforcement and also clarity about some of the enforcement case figures.

There being no further debate, members were content to note the quarterly report on the Planning Service Performance.

RESOLVED:

That the Strategic Planning Committee noted the content of Quarterly report on the Planning Service Performance.

(Unanimous in favour)

(The meeting ended at 11.50 am)

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CHAIR