



Somerset Strategic Planning Conference

Newsletter January 2008



Notes of the SSPC held on November 15th 2007, Luttrell Room, County Hall

- 1.0 Welcome and Apologies for Absence**
Martin Wilsher (WSDC)
Cllr Christopher Wolverson (SCC)
- 1.1** Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey welcomed everybody to the Conference.
Nichola Woodward (SCC)
Cllr Nigel Woolcombe-Adams (MDC)
- 1.2 Members present:-**
Dave Baxter (SSHOG)
Ian Bright – Guest
Paul Browning (SCC)
Cllr Tim Carroll (SSDC)
Cllr Simon Coles (TDBC)
Cllr Mike Downes (WSDC)
Cllr John Edwards (ENPA)
Cllr Anne Fraser (SDC)
Cllr Jon Freeman (WSDC)
Cllr Andrew Gilling (SDC)
Philip Higginbottom (SSDC)
Stuart Houlet (SDC)
Peter Lacey (SALC)
John Meeker (MDC)
Mark Newey (SWRA)
Mike O'Dowd-Jones (SCC)
Cllr David Pipes (MDC)
Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey (SCC)
Cllr Peter Seib (SSDC)
Cllr Tony Shire (SCC)
David Vaughan (SCC)
Cllr Roger Webber (ENPA)
Ralph Willoughby-Foster (TDBC)
- 1.3 Apologies received:-**
Doug Bamsey (SDC)
Carl Budden (SWRA)
Rupert Cox (Somerset Chamber)
Simon Eames (MDC)
Patrick Flaherty (SCC)
Cllr Jefferson Horsley (TDBC)
Mark Leeman (TDBC)
Ruth McArthur (ENPA)
Nick Tait (SDC)
Keith Woodhead (SWRA)
- 2.0 Notes of SSPC on 18th September 2007**
- 2.1** Cllr Wolverson asked what was happening with the barrage meeting mentioned in 2.1. Mike O'Dowd-Jones replied that instead of this meeting, a paper was being taken to Somerset County

Council's Executive Board and SSP was being used as the venue for the airing of wider views on the subject because the Severn Barrage was very much linked in with the Climate Change Forum. Cllr Wolverson asked that there be some kind of system for updating any actions that arise from SSPC in between the sessions. This was agreed.

2.2 Cllr Tim Carroll pointed out that in 3.5 he had said "no value aggregates" and not "low level aggregates". This was noted.

3.0 **Presentation - Climate Change Strategy - Ian Bright**

3.1 Ian Bright presented Somerset County Council's Climate Change Strategy. The presentation considered:

- The role of SCC in dealing with climate change
- The three principal elements of the Climate Change Strategy:
 - o Community Leadership
 - o Adaptation, and
 - o Mitigation
- The Strategy Timetable

Prior to the meeting Members had received a copy of the Climate Change Consultation document together with a questionnaire. Ian reminded everyone that the consultation

closes in January 2008. It will then proceed to Full Council for adoption in February 2008. Ian summed up the presentation by advising that the biggest effect that any local authority could have on reducing carbon effect was by leading through example and then helping others to follow.

3.2 Ralph Willoughby-Foster of TDBC opened up the discussion and talked about Project Taunton with regard to Climate Change. He said that through joint working between TDBC, the Environment Agency (EA), the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and SCC, a Sustainable Protocol had been developed for the town centre regeneration. Due to the fact that TDBC owns much of the land being developed it can impose much higher standards. Project Taunton was working at the leading edge of Sustainable Development in the UK with the use of sustainable energy creation and also the standards for the design of the buildings as well as the materials to be used. Paul Browning added that by bringing forward government advice by two years and including mixed uses; Project Taunton was aiming for a 35% reduction in carbon emissions as opposed to the RSS guidelines of 3%.

3.3 Cllr Peter Seib asked whether the carbon emissions' reduction for Project Taunton was for new building only and he was advised this was the case. Cllr Roger Webber then asked a question about the relation of the Severn Barrage to SCC's Climate Change Strategy. Ian Bright replied that it could not be part of SCC's strategy because Somerset will not have the only voice on this matter. Cllr Roger Webber said that there was a need to confer with SCC's partners and it seemed that it was being adopted before the outcome of the barrage was known or other parties' strategies had been considered. Ian Bright replied that the strategy had been released for comment as a starting point for discussion. While Somerset recognised ENPA's efforts for climate change and supported them, Somerset was not in a position to ask others to manage their carbon if it did not manage its own. He hoped that the strategy would not constrain other parties and would instead be a reference point for information on climate change. Mike O'Dowd-Jones added that while the strategy is about climate change, it is also about the County Council's leadership, and its role to educate and raise the awareness of those outside.

3.4 Cllr Tim Carroll spoke about the problems of granting planning permission for wind turbine sites in SSDC due to the M.O.D's objections about the radar print they created and asked whether there was any way around this. Ian Bright replied that the military were looking at the effect of turbines on radar due to the importance of alternative energy sources nowadays and have been testing some promising systems, however, he advised that sustainable energy sites would always be constrained due to other factors such as proximity to housing and topography. Cllr Peter Seib said that SSDC could only house a maximum of 6 wind farms whereas to meet energy needs it would require 25 -30 wind farms. It was more important to look at other areas such as commuting and ways of doing business. He then used the conference as an example and asked how many people at the Conference had shared lifts or come by low carbon vehicles? Ian Bright replied that the strategy looked at the main areas of carbon emission first before getting into individual outputs, however, he did acknowledge that carbon created by staff commuting to SCC was likely to be more than the amount created by the lighting and heating at County

Hall.

3.5 Cllr Christopher Wolverson said that while new buildings would greatly reduce our carbon footprint, what would happen with regard to the vast majority of houses which are older - would there be a relaxation of something like the restrictions on putting double glazing into listed buildings in order to help. Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey responded by saying that there were already initiatives to help, like insulation and solar power grants from TDBC, and that these could make a difference.

3.6 Cllr Andrew Gilling asked where the County Council stood with regard to "Managed Retreat". Ian Bright acknowledged that SCC were looking at this as the EA had advised that they cannot maintain current flood defences with the budgets they currently have. Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey referred to Stert and said that they had prepared a managed retreat as at Porlock Marsh. While it was desirable to defend all areas, it was not practical and what was at stake had to be taken into consideration. Ian Bright added that there still needed to be a flood defence debate concerning the Severn Barrage, the Welsh Assembly was supportive of the Minehead alignment because it would

defend Cardiff. Cllr Roger Webber said that recognition was needed over the loss of land which did not have houses on it, it was just as traumatic losing this type of land. Ian Bright responded by agreeing that the EA were nervous about telling farming communities that their land would not be saved, however, more information will be available when the 2008 climate change meteorological data becomes available.

Presentation - SCC's Regeneration Overview and Delivery Plan - David Vaughan

4.1 David Vaughan presented SCC's Regeneration Overview and Regeneration Delivery Plan. In the presentation he explained that it had changed form since it was last reported to SSPC in July 2006 - it was now two separate documents rather than the single leaflet originally proposed. The presentation included a discussion of why the documents were needed - regional partners such as Government Office for the South West (GOSW) and the Regional Development Agency felt that there was a lack of clarity of objectives and priorities - what they contained and where they were going next. He emphasised the overall aim which was a synthesis of existing

plans and strategies within Somerset and to present them in a clearer fashion.

4.2 After the presentation there was an opportunity to ask questions. Cllr Mike Downes asked if the Regeneration Documents had been taken to the Economic and Environment Leaders Groups yet or to the Districts. David Vaughan replied that they had been sent to planning colleagues in the District in the Summer for consultation, and would be going to Environment Leaders Group on 6th December, but a date for the Economic Leaders Group was awaited.

5.0 Election of the SSPC Vice Chairman

5.1 Cllr Jon Freeman of WSDC was elected as Vice-Chairman.

6.0 Presentation - New Directions for Transport Policy - Mike O'Dowd-Jones

6.1 Mike O'Dowd-Jones presented a basic outline of the Department of Transport (DfT) discussion paper: 'Towards a Sustainable Transport System', which was released in October 2007. This included:

- The timetable for the paper's progress from discussion document to long term transport

plan

- Key issues from the Eddington & Stern reports
- New Goals for Transport including
 - Competitiveness & Productivity
 - Addressing Climate Change
 - Safety, Security & Health
 - Quality of Life
 - Equality of Opportunity
- Plans to 2014 including:
 - The focus of investment
 - Urban regional and local networks
 - National networks
 - International networks
- Local Area Agreements and Transport
- Local Transport Plan Performance Reporting 2008

Mike O'Dowd-Jones highlighted that investment seems to miss Somerset except for Taunton (which is a Growth Point) and this is something which SCC wishes to challenge in their response to the discussion paper. Also there is little consideration on rural accessibility which is very disappointing. Again this will be challenged in the response. It also appears that National Road Pricing has been 'parked' for the

time being.

6.2 After the presentation there was an opportunity for questions. Cllr Peter Seib said that he noticed that the new national indicators did not include footway condition which was disappointing when trying to encourage people to walk; he asked if it would be possible to carry forward previous indicators. Mike O'Dowd-Jones replied that the government was trying to reduce the burden of indicator reporting on strategic authorities, however, it would be possible to keep indicators in if there was strong desire to do so.

6.3 Cllr Tim Carroll asked about the strategic route improvements concerning the A303 and the A358. Mike O'Dowd-Jones replied that nothing had been named specifically but an announcement on Stonehenge was due imminently. The congestion maps in the document showed sections of the A303 as congested. Mark Newey added that the report on the Second Strategic Route would be out in December or January and it could go either way, so there was a need to think about Somerset's response to this sooner rather than later.

6.4 Cllr Tim Carroll then asked with regard to bus usage whether it

would be possible for the DfT to include the local community buses in the DRT schemes. Mike O'Dowd-Jones replied that he was not sure, but that he could come back with the information at a later date as the figures had only just been published.

6.5 Cllr Mike Downes said that he felt that Somerset had been left out and that there was nothing to encourage rural regeneration. He asked how much influence Somerset could have on government thinking and whether it was possible to encourage specific things to help rural areas, e.g. the West Somerset Railway and having scheduled passenger services between Minehead and Taunton. He added that there was a need for rural to town services, not just town to town ones; Minehead had quite severe parking issues due to rural access to the town requiring car usage. Mike O'Dowd-Jones replied that SCC have pushed for access to rail stations in the past and have a role to facilitate community railway. LTP3 will review the role with these railways in the future. With public transport, the focus will be on routes to Market Towns, however, he warned that there was a finite budget for these things. A new Traffic Manager for parking had been appointed

(Brian Cole), and so there should be more effort in this area in the future. Cllr Andrew Gilling asked whether the Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) process would be accelerated as a result of the new Traffic Manager and Mike O'Dowd-Jones said he would speak to him and get back with this information at a later date.

6.6 Martin Wilsher asked about where the investment was coming from and where it would go to. The Planning Gain Supplement had been 'parked' but an 'alternative' was already on the horizon. He voiced concern about the one way process of regional funding for areas like WSDC. Mike O'Dowd-Jones replied that funding for major schemes will be linked into regional priorities, and they would look again at funding for major road schemes next year. A case will have to be made at a regional level before even approaching government.

7.0 SSHOG Update—Dave Baxter

7.1 Dave Baxter advised Members that due to time constraints within the meeting he would be circulating the response to the Housing Green Paper electronically via Nichola Woodward. He then went on to

give an oral update of the last SSHOG meeting which was held on October 26th.

The main points from the update were as follows:

- A new housing agency has been formed by the merging of the Housing Corporation and English partnerships, it will be known as the Homes and Communities Agency.
- Following the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review the CLG have allocated a £789m Regional Housing Pot fund for the South West. It will be administered by the SWRA. Much of this funding will go towards meeting housing targets (including affordable housing) outlined in the Housing Green Paper, and this could lead to some difficult decisions concerning funding of other projects, perhaps leading to cuts.
- Funding for Gypsy & Traveller allocations will be separate and the 2008-2011 grants should be announced within the month.
- GOSW has circulated the new National Performance Framework for local authorities and local authority partnerships. There are 5 to 6 of these around enabling. Of interest

to SSPC was the 154-net additional homes provided, 155-number of affordable homes delivered and 159-supply of ready to develop housing sites, the latter having direct links to LDFs.

- Work to create a strategy for sub-regional housing is moving forward with a project team being put together in early 2008. A housing strategy day is timetabled for September 2008 and this will be open to all.

8.0 Any Other Business

8.1 Handouts. Cllr Roger Webber said that there had been a great deal of information presented at the Conference and he would like to have presentation handouts supplied to help him absorb more of it. This was agreed for future conferences and Nichola Woodward said that she would email copies of that day's presentations out to Members shortly.

8.2 Mark Newey. Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey advised Members that Mark Newey of the SWRA was moving to a position with the Welsh Assembly in the New Year. On behalf of all the Members she wished him all the best in his new post.

8.3 Keith Woodhead. Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey informed Members that Keith Woodhead of the SWRA had had a mild heart attack and asked that SSPC's best wishes were passed on to him for a speedy recovery.

8.4 There was no further business.

CLOSE.

Next Conference

Tuesday, 11th March

09.00 - 11.30

Luttrell Room, County Hall

For Information or Apologies please contact:

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