CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 8 December 2014 at 9.00 am.

Members Present:

Cabinet: Councillors  J Fuller (Chairman)
Y Bendle, D Bills, K Kiddie, G Wheatley, M Wilby

Non-Appointed: Councillors Edney, Ellis, Legg, Lewis, McClennning, R Savage

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive (S Dinneen), the Director of Environment and Housing (A Jarvis), the Director of Growth of Localism (T Horspole), the Acting Director of Business Improvement (D Lorimer), the Corporate Customer Services Manager (A Adams), the Development Manager (H Mellors), the Conservation Officer (S Beckett), the Policy Officer (P Chapman), and the Market Towns Coordinator (David Disney)

2337 UPDATE ON AFFORDABLE HOMES IN SOUTH NORFOLK

Cllr Y Bendle drew attention to recent figures published which indicated that 304 houses had been built and sold through the Help to Buy Scheme, in South Norfolk, during the last 18 months. She was proud to announce that this figure was higher than total figures for the rest of Norfolk, and those reported for the whole of Suffolk.

Cllr Bendle also made reference to the Lyons Housing Review, which had commended South Norfolk Council for its use of National Homes Bonus monies, to enable the building of affordable homes on exception sites throughout the District. Cllr Bendle was proud that the review had identified this work as an example of good practice.

2338 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.


2339 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT CHARGING FOR PRE-APPLICATIONS

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Development Manager, which considered charging for pre-application advice and recommended a schedule of charges for commercial and housing applications.

Cllr K Kiddie introduced the report, explaining that the Environment, Regulation and Planning Committee had endorsed the proposals, although it had recommended that the impact on charitable organisations be considered as part of the review process.

The Development Manager stressed the key benefits of the proposals, referring to a speedier planning process, guaranteed response times, and a detailed, enhanced level of service. Members noted Norfolk County Council would not be giving any priority to those applications where pre-application advice had been sought, and therefore, it might be necessary on some occasions to forward advice on matters such as highways, after the desired response times.

Discussion followed concerning the need to charge VAT for the pre-application service. The Chairman drew attention to the fact that most commercial customers would be VAT registered and would be able to claim back any costs relating to VAT charges. With this in mind, and noting that the first six months of the trial was for commercial development only, members concluded that the charge for VAT should be in addition to the charges proposed at Appendix 2 of the report.

Officers responded to a number of queries on points of detail. The Development Manager explained that any pre-application advice given, would include a caveat, stipulating that all advice was informal and would not in any way prejudice or bear any weight on the final decision made.

Members’ attention was drawn to a letter received from Wacton Parish Council, expressing their opposition to the proposals. Members sympathised with the concerns expressed, but felt that they related more to domestic applications; the proposed trial would involve commercial development only.

The Development Manager confirmed that her service was looking to formalise its relationship with CNC Building Control and would be looking at ways to help promote the services available to customers.

The Decision

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<th>RESOLVED:</th>
<th>1. To agree to the introduction of charging for pre-applications for commercial development from 1 January 2015, as outlined in the proposed schedule attached at Appendix 2 of the report, (noting that a charge for VAT will be added to the proposed charges);</th>
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2. That these arrangements be reviewed six months after implementation, and consideration be given to charging for all application types.

The Reasons for the Decision

To produce key benefits for customers and the Council, whilst providing the Council with an additional revenue stream.

Other Options Considered

- Do nothing

OLD COSTESSEY CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Subject of the Decision

Members considered the report of the Conservation Officer, regarding revisions to the conservation area boundary and character appraisal for Old Costessey.

The Conservation Officer outlined the background to the report, advising members that during the second consultation concerns had been expressed by residents in West End, regarding the proposed change in boundary. He explained that officers had concurred that this area should not be included within the boundary and this view was confirmed by members of the Environment Regulation and Planning Policy Committee, at its meeting held 24 November 2014.

With regard to concerns raised regarding highways issues, the Conservation Officer acknowledged that there had been problems with traffic using the Street as a link to Taverham, however Norfolk County Highways had not been receptive to residents’ proposals for a Home Zone with a 10 mph limit. Members noted that traffic works previously put forward for West End were still awaiting funding.

Members agreed the proposals to be a sensible way forward and a positive enhancement to the existing conservation boundary.

The Decision

RESOLVED: TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL that the Old Costessey Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan, as set out in Appendix C of the report, be adopted.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area and so that the document can be used as a material consideration for development proposals
Other Options Considered

Not to adopt the appraisal

2341 MARKET TOWNS INITIATIVE

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Director of Growth and Localism, which reviewed the progress of the Council’s Market Towns Initiative and made proposals on how to develop the next phase of the initiative.

Cllr M Wilby introduced the report, and welcomed David Disney, the Council’s new Market Towns Co-ordinator to the meeting. Cllr Wilby was proud of what had already been achieved through the initiative, but stressed the need to move on to a second phase, where stronger and self-sustaining town teams were developed.

The Director of Growth and Localism agreed that strong and self-sustaining town teams were key to ensuring that the towns were fit for the future. He referred to the market towns as major engines of growth and explained that the second phase of the project, whilst retaining its focus on retail, would look to expand its emphasis towards economic development and would look to further strengthen the communities within the towns.

The Chairman made reference to several achievements, including the creation of new branding, signage and improved public toilets. He referred in particular to the good practice demonstrated by the Harleston Town Team, and hoped the appointment of the Market Towns Co-ordinator would help to strengthen this good practice across other teams.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To endorse the approach to developing the Market Towns Initiative, as set out in section 3 of the report.

The Reasons for the Decision

The refreshed strategy will continue to support the initial objectives of the initiative, whilst ensuring that towns maximise their potential, benefitting residents and the rural areas surrounding the towns.

Other Options Considered

- Not to continue with the initiative
- To continue with its initial objectives only

2342 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The subject of the decision

Cab Min 08/12/14 CLW 4
Members considered the report of the Corporate Customer Services Manager, which presented Cabinet with a revised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2015/16.

The Corporate Customer Services Manager presented the report, explaining that the proposed scheme would retain all its existing features, but would also provide greater support for working age people with disabilities. Officers were also asking for discretion to backdate Council Tax Support on occasions where it was felt that circumstances would merit that action.

The Chairman referred to correspondence recently received from Gingerbread, a national charity which worked to promote the rights of single parents, which raised concerns regarding the Council’s current Council Tax Support Policy, and the decision to include child maintenance when calculating help with council tax bills for single parents.

Referring to the Council’s existing Council Tax Support Policy, the Corporate Customer Services Manager explained that although child maintenance was taken into account for some, for those lone parents with children under 5 years of age, it was disregarded. This group are treated as if they were under ‘old’ Council Tax Benefit rules, resulting in lone parents with young children being treated more favourably than any other working age group. During a recent consultation exercise, nearly 80% of respondents had indicated that they agreed with the measures introduced for the local council tax scheme in December 2013 of which this was one. Members felt the South Norfolk scheme to be generous when compared to others, noting that child benefit was disregarded for all claimants, and that a discretionary support scheme was in place to help those most in need. With regard to the discretionary scheme, the Chief Executive explained that officers would always look to signpost residents to other sources of funding when appropriate to do so, and that each case was carefully considered on a case by case basis.

The Chairman reminded members that providing support for claimants was about much more than financial support and the Council had adopted a much more holistic approach in looking for solutions. The Corporate Customer Services Manager confirmed that her team were working closely with the Early Help Hub, which was resulting in a more inclusive and seamless service for claimants.

Members noted that the amount of benefit awarded in the first eight months of the year had been less than estimated. The Chief Executive explained that this was in parallel with the general direction of travel, with less people out of work and less people claiming benefit.

The Decision

| RESOLVED: | TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL that the features of the 2014/15 scheme are retained other than the changes outlined in section 3, to further support the disabled. |

The Reasons for the Decision

- To ensure that the scheme supports the Council’s priorities, supports families, incentivises work and is efficient to manage
- That greater support is provided to more vulnerable residents.
Other Options Considered

- To introduce a child maintenance disregard
- Not to make changes to the scheme.

2343 CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the latest version of the Cabinet Core Agenda.

The Chairman informed members that the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 12 January 2015 was to be postponed and held instead on the morning of 26 January. This would allow officers more time to report back on the progress made by developers on the milestones set regarding the Long Stratton Area Action Plan.

(The meeting concluded at 10.04 am)

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Chairman