Growth & Localism Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Growth & Localism Committee of South Norfolk Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Thursday 22 January 2015 at 2.00 pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors F Ellis (Chairman), P Allen, D Bills, M Edney, J Overton and B Riches

Apologies: Councillor B Spratt

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Y Bendle, M Gray and M Wilby

Also in Attendance: One member of the public

Officers in Attendance: The Communities and Democratic Services Manager (L Mickleborough), the Head of Growth and Economic Development (J Munson), the Housing and Public Health Manager (M Swann), the Funding Manager (N Cunningham), the Economic Development and Tourism Officer (E Moate) and the Market Towns Coordinator (D Disney)

27 **CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed the Head of Growth and Economic Development and the Economic Development and Tourism Officer, who had both recently joined the Council, and invited them to introduce themselves to the Committee.

28 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Localism Committee held on 23 September 2014 were agreed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Arising from minute number 22, the Housing and Public Health Manager advised the Committee that the Council had been awarded £90,000 from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to enable its participation in the Delivering Differently in Neighbourhoods programme. Members were pleased with this achievement and the inward investment it would bring to the authority.
ECONOMIC STRATEGY UPDATE

The Funding Manager provided members with a verbal update on the South Norfolk Economic Strategy and its alignment to the Norfolk Growth Prospectus. She informed the Committee that there had been some delays with the production of the Norfolk Growth Prospectus as the Norfolk Growth Group wished to align this with ‘World Class Norfolk’ (which, she advised, was being rebranded as ‘Locate Norfolk’). This had resulted in a knock on effect on the development of the South Norfolk Economic Strategy.

Members heard how World Class Norfolk (Locate Norfolk) would provide a single place where inward investors could obtain all the relevant information to enable them to set up a business in Norfolk.

Members were advised that Bruton Knowles had been appointed as consultants for the A11 project and that a report should be available to the Growth & Localism Committee in April 2015.

The Committee was advised that work was continuing on the Norwich Research Park to help ensure that research was commercialised and that all investment opportunities were followed up.

Officers advised the Committee of the next steps, explaining that it was important to have a clear strategy and a holistic approach to economic development, which would include a focus on tourism.

In response to a member’s query, the Funding Manager stated that it was important that the Strategy included ways of working in partnership with key stakeholders to facilitate and develop good skills provision to retain local expertise and attract talent to the district.

COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME 2015/16

The Communities and Democratic Services Manager summarised the salient points in her report which detailed the current position of the Community Grant Scheme and sought the views of members on how best to manage the Scheme for 2015/16. The report also detailed three options for distribution of the available budget, which members were asked to consider for recommendation to Cabinet.

Members discussed their experiences of scheme so far, agreeing in the main that the Community Grant Scheme had worked well and that the flexibility of the Scheme had been welcomed. In addition, officers advised that much positive feedback had been received regarding the speed in which grants had been processed. However, it was noted that in a few cases, there had been variances in the relationship between Neighbourhood Chairmen and Local Members when determining the distribution of the Community Action Fund. After considerable discussion, the Compliance and Risk Manager agreed that an addition should be made to the ground rules of the Scheme, in that Neighbourhood Board Chairmen would be expected to consult with Local Members.

The majority of the Committee agreed to recommend that funding for the 2015/16 Scheme should be distributed as detailed in Option 2 of the report; the “universal increase to the Community Action Fund” where the Member Ward Budget would remain as £1,000 per member and the Community Action Fund would increase to £30,000 per area. Two members favoured alternative options and it was agreed that the Compliance and Risk Manager would reflect this within the report to Cabinet.
It was RESOLVED:

TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET

1. that there should be a universal increase to the Community Action Fund, as detailed above, noting that one member of the Committee supported the increase to the local ward member budget and one member of the Committee supported a mixed increase between the member ward budget and Community Action Fund

2. that the proposed amendments to the Ground Rules for community funding outlined in paragraph 2.5 of the report be made, with the addition that there would be an expectation for Neighbourhood Board Chairmen to consult with Local Members when determining the distribution of the Community Action Fund.

31 CAPITAL GRANTS UPDATE

The Communities and Democratic Services Manager provided members with a verbal update, regarding the progress of projects which had been awarded funding from the Capital Grant Fund in 2014. The Committee was pleased to note that work on the Poringland and Earsham projects was progressing well. Members were also informed that, following the resolution of an issue with the mezzanine floor, work was now moving forward with the Redenhall with Harleston project.

Members were concerned that very little progress had been made with the project for a new village hall and cricket pitch for Tharston & Hapton. Officers stated that Tharston & Hapton Parish Council had approached the Council within the last week to request that the project be split into two phases. Officers had requested that formal proposals be developed by the Parish Council to demonstrate how the phasing of work would be undertaken. The Communities and Democratic Services Manager advised the Committee that the importance of ensuring the overall outcome of the project did not differ from that originally agreed had been emphasised to the Parish Council.

32 UPDATE ON MARKET TOWNS INITIATIVE

The Market Towns Coordinator presented his report which provided members with an update on phase two of the Market Towns Initiative (MTI), and informed them of the progress made in each of the market towns.

After a brief discussion, the Committee agreed that it was pleased with the Council’s work, so far, with the Town Teams and looked forward to future developments.

Cllr Bendle addressed the Committee regarding the possibility of Hingham, which was not currently within the MTI programme, receiving some assistance due to the recent closure of its post office and the loss of its largest employer, Caterham Cars. During discussions, members suggested different ways in which Hingham could raise its profile such as farmers’ markets, hosting concerts in the church, and developing as a centre for the arts which could attract funding from alternative streams.
DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee acknowledged the date of the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 3.35 pm

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Chairman