The minutes of the meetings of the Scrutiny Committee held on 18 February and 5 March 2015, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1140 UPDATE ON MARKET TOWNS INITIATIVE

Following a brief introduction by Cllr M Wilby, the Market Towns Initiative Coordinator introduced his report, which reviewed the progress of the Council’s Market Towns Initiative and outlined the strategy for continued development.

In response to a member’s comment that Loddon town centre appeared to be quiet compared to the other three market towns, officers advised that whilst Loddon had a smaller number of shops, it did have a more vibrant evening trade due to over 40 holiday boats which were sited overnight.

Members were informed that the relocation of the electronic tourist information point in Wymondham was being considered, and that the Council had been in discussion with the Highways Agency to request extra signage which could direct potential tourists to the town.

The Committee discussed the various funding streams available to assist with market town events and agreed that, although securing external funding was essential to the success of the project, the intention was for the four market towns covered by the Initiative to eventually become sustainable, so that the Council might concentrate its resources in other towns.
Members considered the need to attract new people into the market towns and the Head of Growth and Economic Development reassured the Committee that the Council had been building up relationships with organisations, including Visit Norwich and Visit Norfolk, to ensure that tourists to Norwich were also made aware of attractions in the market towns.

In response to a member’s query, the Market Towns Initiative Coordinator advised that a power supply was to be installed in the town centre of Harleston which could be used on market days, and to provide a simple and safe source of power for events. Members were informed that the Market Towns Initiative would fund the implementation of the power supply and that the Town Council would take on ownership and fund the supply.

The Committee discussed the need for the Council and members to build relationships with local companies and it was suggested that, where meetings were arranged for officers to meet local businesses, the local member could also be invited to attend.

Members considered methods for measuring the success of the Initiative. The Market Towns Initiative Coordinator advised that traditional methods such as measuring footfall or car parking, or assessing the number of empty units was not always an accurate indicator, but that a scheme was being developed which would measure the percentage increases in financial terms across local businesses.

There was a discussion regarding Poringland, Costessey and Hingham, and the Committee considered how tourism could be increased within towns and villages outside of the Initiative. Members were reminded that funding to aid this was available through the Community Action Fund.

Members discussed Diss and commented that two shops had recently closed down. The Market Towns Initiative Coordinator advised the Committee that retailers in Diss were awaiting the regeneration of the Heritage Triangle and would remain in an extraordinary situation until the effects of this were known. A member questioned the recent decision to change the market day in the town during the Easter week, and it was suggested that this issue should be raised with the Town Council.

The Committee discussed raising the profiles of the market towns by using social media, and by advertising both locally and on the train services which passed through the towns. Members were pleased to note that a proposition had been put to Norfolk Museums to enable artefacts, relevant to individual towns, to be displayed locally instead of being publically inaccessible in the archives.

The Chairman summed up the discussion and thanked officers for their work. It was suggested that, as all members were keen to take an active role in the Initiative, it might be useful for a conference or open day to be held for local members in the future.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. to note the progress of the initiative;

2. to endorse the next steps as contained in the report, together with the comments and ideas raised by the Scrutiny Committee.
1141 ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2014-15

Members were pleased to note the Annual Review of the Scrutiny Committee 2014-15. It was noted that all recommendations had been accepted by Cabinet, Council or outside organisations, which was a great achievement for the Committee.

Cllr Thomson provided members with an update on the car park issues at Whitlingham Park, and advised the Committee that Parking Eye had given notice to end their contract with the Trust, due to the vandalism of ticket machines at the park. Members heard that the Trust was currently in negotiation with a few other operators but that the issues would mean that the annual profits would be down by £20,000. It was suggested that the Committee review the matter again, but the Scrutiny Officer advised that this was not a matter for the Scrutiny Committee to consider.

1142 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME, TRACKER AND THE CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, Tracker and the Cabinet Core Agenda.

It was noted that the meeting of Cabinet, which had been scheduled for 20 April 2015, had been cancelled, and the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, scheduled for 6 May 2015, would also now not take place.

(The meeting concluded at 10.40 am)

Chairman