

COUNCIL – 24 November 2011

Questions in pursuance of Council Procedure Rule No 8 (2) of the Constitution

1. Question by Councillor Marian Andrews

"Can the Cabinet Member for the Environment tell me what consultations were carried out with local communities before changes were instituted in waste collection days?"

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Green Environment, Councillor Andrew Nunn:

On 7 May 2010, an email was sent to all Town and Parish Councils which read:

Note to Town and Parish Councils

"Following the successful implementation of the alternate week collection refuse and recycling service, Suffolk Coastal Services will be carrying out a review of the collection rounds over the next 12 months. The roll-out over the past four years has been implemented smoothly, and many thanks go to the Parish and Town Councils, who have supported the Suffolk Coastal Services' team.

The primary aim of the review will be to maximise efficiency by reorganising and rationalising the rounds to reduce fuel usage, hence reducing costs and improving Suffolk Coastal District Council's carbon footprint.

In order to achieve these efficiencies, it may be necessary to make changes to the day of collection in some areas. These will be notified to you well in advance of any implementation, and individual residents will be notified in writing of any changes.

The review will be starting soon with an anticipated implementation date in mid 2011. If your Council has any thoughts or suggestions, which you think the review team may want to take into consideration during their review, then please let them know by contacting Ed Ringwood by email on Ed.Ringwood@Suffolkcoastal.gov.uk or by telephone on 01394 444013 or 07899 957043."

2. Question by Councillor Marian Andrews

"Is it in our community's best interest for SCDC's Well-being Board to be joined with that of Waveney when their ideas for health provision are so very different?"

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health, Councillor Mary Neale:

Suffolk Coastal DC and Waveney DC do not have a Wellbeing Board as this is a County wide health partnership co-ordinated by Suffolk CC.

The Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board has 4 places allocated for District representation based on the existing partnership in East Suffolk (SCDC and WDC) and Central Suffolk (Babergh DC and Mid Suffolk DC) plus the emerging partnership in West Suffolk (St Eds and Forest Heath DC) along with Ipswich. As Portfolio Holder for Community Health and in the spirit of partnership working I have been asked by the Leaders of SCDC and WDC to represent the interests of both Councils on the Suffolk Health & Wellbeing Board. As representative for both Councils I intend to focus particularly on the community wellbeing aspect given the role of District Councils in terms of housing; planning; licensing; regeneration; leisure & culture plus environmental health etc.

In terms of the clinical health management issues SCDC and WDC both have member representation on the County Health Scrutiny Committee (for SCDC the rep is Cllr Colin Walker).

I also accept that there are some differing health needs in Waveney and that there are different PCT arrangements. This is why my opposite number on the WDC Cabinet (Cllr Mary Rudd) sits on the Great Yarmouth & Waveney Health Systems Leadership Partnership which focus specifically on health & wellbeing matters in that area.

3. Question by Councillor Barry Slater

“At the recent liaison meeting with towns and parishes at the Riverside Centre, the Leader of the Council expressed support for a reduction in the number of elected members. What sort of reduction and what time scale does he have in mind and what procedures would have to be followed?”

Response by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ray Herring:

A number of Town and Parish Councillors, and residents, have questioned whether we intend to reduce the number of Suffolk Coastal District Councillors. I'm sure that this reflects the need to ensure that our democratic representation is both cost effective and commensurate with our roles and duties. They will also have noted Parliament's intention to reduce the number of Members of Parliament at Westminster.

We have also attracted the attention of the Local Government Boundary Commission in that our ratio of Councillors to electors, across our wards as a whole, is no longer sufficiently consistent. This in itself is likely to give rise to a boundary review which would need to be completed in time for the May 2015 District Elections. This provides an opportunity to review the number of Councillors that are necessary to deliver the effective representation across the District.

I can foresee a case for reducing the number of Suffolk Coastal District Councillors by up to 30% which, in addition to securing a significant reduction of the cost of allowances and Officer support to the benefit of the Council Tax Payer, would still provide a good level of capacity for the effective democratic governance of a District such as Suffolk Coastal.

I have asked the Assistant Chief Executive to bring a report to the January Full Council which will provide further detail and explanation on this matter.

4. Question by Councillor Barry Slater

“Given the absence of information in the last two quarterly performance reports on the provision of affordable housing, what is the Council’s affordable housing target for the current financial year and how many units have so far been completed?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing, Councillor T-J Haworth:

The last two Quarterly reports have indeed contained information relating to the much changed Affordable Housing environment. In Quarter 1, the national picture, in respect of the Homes and Communities Agency grant funding programme through to 2015 was reported. This highlighted the fact that the Council’s biggest partner, Flagship, had declined to make a bid for funding.

The net result of this decision has been to make the delivery of new Affordable Housing into the District much more difficult and uncertain in the coming years. In Quarter 2 the report shows the annual number of new homes built in the District at 216 and the number of Affordable Homes within this total is 47.

The setting of a target for Affordable Housing for the current year is not appropriate as the Council has no control whatsoever over how many homes are actually delivered. Members will be reassured to note that officers are working very hard to secure as many homes as possible from Developers and Housing Associations alike.

5. Question from Councillor Barry Slater

“On the rare occasions when it might be necessary to accept a commuted sum in lieu of the required affordable housing element of a development in the District, what is the calculation by which an appropriate figure is arrived at?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning, Councillor Andy Smith:

Policy AP38A of the saved Local Plan and Policy DM2 of the Revised Core Strategy set out the policy principles we will take into account relating to the delivery of affordable housing on housing sites. Both policies make it clear that the preferred solution is units on site, but that in exceptional circumstances the council will be prepared to accept financial contributions in lieu of units on a particular development site.

The concept that the norm should be a mixed development on site is an important one to which we are committed. Accordingly there have been very few such instances where commuted sums have been accepted. However, current circumstances, including challenging viability issues on all sites, the funding issues facing Housing Associations, and a change of approach by our main provider, Flagship, mean that such issues are arising more frequently.

This issue and others concerning Flagship Housing Association have been and remain under discussion with them, previously addressed by Cllr Neal and currently by Cllr Haworth.

A recent example was a case in Westleton considered by the North Development Control Sub-Committee. In that instance, the circumstances of the site in the Conservation Area meant that the proposed units were smaller than the current standards for affordable housing by the Homes and Communities Agency. The report set out that after long protracted discussions the Council have now accepted a commuted sum in lieu of two units of affordable housing on site. This council has no formal arrangement for calculating a commuted sum in such circumstances. In the Westleton case the sum proposed was based on the adopted approach by Waveney DC whereby a figure of £155k was agreed as a commuted sum for two dwellings, 1 x 2 bedrooms and 1 x 3 bedrooms.

This policy approach at WDC is based on a number of factors. The actual value of the Commuted Sum is set to a formula and is determined annually by the District Valuer. I believe in this case that this was a good solution all round.

The monies paid over by the Developer play a vital role in assisting the provision of Affordable Housing on other sites or by bringing Empty Homes back into use. As mentioned previously, the climate for Affordable Housing has never been more challenging and we do need to consider all the options open to us and be more creative in our commitment to delivering more Homes for the Community we serve.

6. Question from Councillor Diana Ball

“What is the status of the Felixstowe Master Plan? Is there any possibility that any other settlement may have a Master Plan to inform its LDF “Area Action Plan?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning, Councillor Andy Smith:

The 'Felixstowe Seafront and Town Centre Masterplan' was produced in November 2007 by David Lock Associates following on from the 'Local Strategy for Felixstowe (April 2006) and the creation of the Felixstowe and Trimleys Future Partnership (now known as Felixstowe Futures). This Master plan, covering the sea front strip and town centre only, was seen as one part of a continuing process to achieve a Vision of the Peninsular. The document itself sets down a strategy with accompanying delivery plan to achieve the vision and focuses on a number of key projects and initiatives, which are for the most part site specific. A number of these key projects, such as the Hamilton Road improvements have been completed and others such as the sea front gardens are well on the way through the work of the Felixstowe Futures group.

The Master Plan does form part of the evidence base to the Local Development Framework and will be an important document which sits contributing to the Area Action Plan for the Felixstowe peninsular, when work commences on it next year subject to final formal adoption of the LDF Core Strategy. The Partnership promoted this plan in advance of the LDF and AAP as it was felt that not all of the issues could wait until the publication of a LDF and the issues contained within were not entirely influenced by the level of future growth of the peninsular. The Masterplan has not however been formally adopted by the Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance and therefore is not one of the documents used by the Development

Management team when considering planning applications. It is however used as a tool to instigate discussions with developers/agents as it sets out the Partnerships vision for the area as a whole and key sites.

Given that work will commence on the Area Action Plans for Felixstowe and Martlesham in 2012 followed by Saxmundham and Leiston, it is not considered prudent to promote master plans in advance. That said, opportunities will exist within the AAP areas for the preparation of design briefs and design codes for certain key sites, yet to be identified, which in effect what the Felixstowe Master Plan is.

7. Question from Councillor Diana Ball

“What is the situation with N.P.S. and are they still responsible for our property and asset register management?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, Councillor Robert Whiting

The contract with N.P.S. terminated at the end of October 2011. As of 1 November 2011 the Estates Management Function returned to be provided in-house. The Facilities Management and Property Services functions transferred into our joint venture company, Suffolk Coastal Services Limited.

8. Question from Councillor Diana Ball

“I understand that the Three Dragons model (toolkit) is now rendered largely academic by the reality of the current difficult market place for Affordable Housing. What is now used in its place?”

Response by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing, Councillor T-J Haworth

The Three Dragons Toolkit, provides one method of determining the viability of certain housing development sites, and therefore, what is a reasonable amount of Affordable Housing that should be provided, given the land conditions etc.

This model and others have been crucial in the past in determining what percentage of Affordable Housing might be delivered on a specific site. The reality of the market now, is such that the debate is not about how many Affordable units should be built, but whether there is a demand for them at all from Housing Associations, given their limited financial capacity and the competing demands for their business.

Viability studies will continue whether they are derived from the Three Dragons model, the Homes and Communities Agency model or an independent study. However, the important work now is centred around identifying sources of finance to allow Housing Associations to take the completed homes from house builders.

As ever, if any Members wish to learn more about the detail behind these issues, then I will be pleased to arrange this with my officers.