

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON
25 FEBRUARY 2009**

MEMBERS

* Cllr R Rowe - Chairman

* Cllr R J Carter - Vice-Chairman

* Cllr P Coulson

∅ Cllr S L Rankin

* Cllr G Date

* Cllr R J Vint

* Cllr D W May

∅ Cllr A Ward

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance and participating:

Cllrs B E Carson, M J Hicks and J W Squire

Officers in attendance:

All agenda items: Member Support Officer

Item 5 (minute EPDG.15/08 below refers) Head of Environmental Health and
Divisional Environmental Health Officer

Item 6: (Minute EPDG.16/08 below refers) Head of Landscape and Leisure and
AONB Manager

EPDG.13/08 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment Policy Development Group (EPDG) held on 16 December 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EPDG.14/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting, but none were made.

EPDG.15/08 REVIEW OF FOOD SAFETY PLAN

The Divisional Environmental Health Officer gave a presentation to the Group which outlined some general methods of Food Law Enforcement as overseen by the Foods Standards Agency (FSA) on the 'Farm to Fork' principle. The Officer outlined the food scoring system which determined the frequency of inspections that would be undertaken at any particular business. He further outlined the 'Scores on the Doors' scheme, which was a food hygiene star rating system that business owners could display. The Group then considered the review of the Food Safety Service Plan.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) A Member enquired what the process was, if, when inspecting a premise, an Inspector had suspicions that illegal immigrants may be working at the site. In reply, the Officer advised that the Inspector would contact the immigration service to report any concerns, and that whilst these matters were not the responsibility of the Council, inspections were an opportunity to be an extra source of monitoring for the immigration service;
- b) A Member asked if the service shared information across boundaries, for example, if there were concerns about a product that was manufactured in one district but sold in another. In reply, it was confirmed that there was cross boundary liaison with all other Local Authorities;
- c) The comment was expressed that some National food safety regulations had a disproportionate impact on small businesses, for example, the requirement for steel lined kitchens and the transportation of animals to designated abattoirs that could be 50 miles away. A Member further noted that FSA meetings were dominated by representatives of the big supermarkets who had the capacity to implement regulations. In reply, the Officer stated that Inspectors enforced all regulations in an even handed manner to ensure that local businesses were not disadvantaged. He further asked Members to contact the department if they became aware of any business that was experiencing problems due to the enforcement of regulations;
- d) Concern was raised regarding the time delay for the National 'Scores on the Doors' scheme, noting that if a restaurant undertook measures to raise its hygiene star rating, it might be another year before they were awarded the extra star. A Member felt that the delay undermined the use of the scheme as an incentive tool and questioned whether it was possible to sub contract non scheduled inspections in order that the Council could have confidence in the scheme to deliver. In reply, the Officer advised that they would consider the matter of 'approved contractors', however it was noted that there were issues with sub contracting, namely compromising the continuity benefits of repeat site visits per premises by one Inspector;
- e) A Member reported that some calls for advice on the 'Scores on the Doors' scheme did not appear to be getting logged on the Council's database. In reply, the Group were advised that many of these queries were dealt with at routine inspections.

It was then:-

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** to approve the Food Safety Service Plan.

EPDG.16/08 **SOUTH DEVON AND TAMAR VALLEY AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB) MANAGEMENT PLANS**

The Group considered a report which outlined two AONB management plans, one for South Devon (98% of the designated area lying within the South Hams District) and one for the Tamar Valley. The plans had been revised and finalised as a result of discussions and consultation from the draft plans submitted at the July 2008 Group meeting (Minute EPDG.03/08 refers).

It was noted that the production costs of the plans would be met via grant support from Natural England and the costs to implement the plans would involve contributions from a wide range of organisations and funding bodies. Moreover, the plans were not just the Council's work programme but involved a diverse range of stakeholders and partners and the finalised plans were cross referenced with a number of other plans and strategies in line with National Guidance. In particular, both plans had to undergo an Environment Assessment, a Sustainability Assessment and a Habitat Regulation Assessment.

During discussion, the following points were made:

- a) A Member asked if the key changes from the previous draft document could be outlined. In reply, officers advised that, as an example, a new chapter on climate change had been introduced to raise the profile of the subject e.g. in relation to coastal management. Another new element had been the introduction of environment education and the celebration in 2010 of the 50th anniversary of the South Devon AONB which would provide an excellent opportunity to work with primary schools to explore and improve the links between farms and schools. Another addition to the plan, was the opportunity to promote local produce by working with food producers, processors and a range of local organisations and initiatives;
- b) A Member commented that the presented report was a very interesting paper but that it did have some inherent contradictions with other policies and strategies. The Member highlighted that the scale of proposed new developments in the area would have an impact on the AONBs and that new development, conservation and protection policies did not typically integrate well.

In agreement, another Member felt that there were conflicting demands that needed to be resolved at policy level in terms of what took precedence. The Member went on to say that currently the Development Control Committee made decisions on an individual case by case basis;

- c) A Member raised concerns regarding the amount of light pollution in the designated AONB from street lighting and modern housing designs that incorporated large windows. The Member also agreed that there was scope for more integrated working to resolve these conflicts, and that AONB Management should be at the heart of planning and that the AONB plans should be taken into account at the Development Control Committee in a policy way. In reply, the Group was advised that the plan focused on highlighting features that were important and attempted to provide data that could inform decisions;
- d) A Member referred to a particular site where there was an issue of a large amount of building waste that was dumped within the AONB and queried how much the Development Control Committee took account of the AONB plans. In reply, Members noted that the AONB plans were not statutory planning documents, but were a 'material consideration' and could help shape planning policy. Furthermore, officers did get involved in some planning issues in an advisory capacity, but the planning department received approx 1000 planning applications per year for sites located within an AONB, so there was a limit to the level of involvement;
- e) Concerns were raised in respect of the increasing use of green lanes and bridleways by 4 x 4 vehicles and motorcyclists for the purposes of off road recreation which posed a hazard to pedestrians. In addition, some such lanes were being reduced to a slushy morass and were being seriously eroded. In reply, officers stated that the motorised use of the lanes was a tricky subject, as many of these lanes were a public right of way for motor vehicles and that the best way to resolve the issues would be to work more closely with the user groups. Officers further advised that the use of traffic regulation orders was an option available to highway authorities but that they would be reluctant to use them, as this merely moved the problems on to new areas. However, Members were given assurances that officers were fully aware of the problem;

- f) A Member enquired what future plans were in place to secure public access to beaches, e.g. to protect against new landowners that installed gates and other obstructions that restricted public access. In reply, officers advised that the Marine and Coastal Access Bill was currently before Parliament and if enacted, would provide for new public rights of access to the coast and beaches. However, the impact would be less in the South Hams because of the existence of the South West Coastal Path and large areas of open access land owned by the National Trust and others. The legislation was aimed at areas in the UK where access was more restricted and was designed to raise access levels to those enjoyed in the South West;
- g) A Member informed that the 'Green Infrastructure' project recently launched for the Plymouth rural-urban fringe was in the process of trying to develop other recreational areas for the population of Plymouth to visit. The reason for this was to redistribute the load on existing popular sites and to decrease the pressure on AONB sites and enhance future sustainability. Another Member re-iterated that it was extremely important to protect the district's natural assets and that the threats of population growth should be highlighted in all future plans. The comment was also expressed that the AONBs in the South Hams were a huge and lucrative asset that should be vigorously protected, as many livelihoods depended on it.

An Executive Member added his comments that National Parks and AONBs were different in terms of legislative frameworks and that the Council should invite changes nationally on that basis. The Member went on to advise that the Council must not lose sight of protecting the AONBs on behalf of people, but equally it could not stop people visiting AONBs and it was therefore a question of management. In reply, the Head of Landscape & Leisure advised that the AONB management plans were concerned with managing the forces of change and emphasising the need for protection in planning terms to ensure preservation as far as was practically possible;

- h) Members expressed their appreciation for the work of the AONB staff and for the revised Management Plans.

It was then:

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** to approve and adopt the Management Plans for both the South Devon and Tamar Valley Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 11.45 am).

Chairman