

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PROSPERITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON
WEDNESDAY 29 APRIL 2009**

MEMBERS

* Cllr R F Croad – Chairman

∅ Cllr J I G Blackler – Vice-Chairman

* Cllr J Brazil

∅ Cllr I Longrigg

* Cllr F J Hawke

* Cllr J T Pennington

∅ Cllr R M Lawrence

* Cllr M Stone

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance and participating:

Cllrs B E Carson, P W Hitchins, M J Howarth and R J Tucker

Officers in attendance:

All Agenda Items: Strategic Director (Community) and Member Support Officer;

Item 5: (Minute PPDG.24/08 below refers) Head of Landscape and Leisure

Items 5 & 6: (Minutes PPDG.24/08 and PPDG.25/08 below refers) Head of
Environment Services

Item 7: (Minute PPDG.26/08 below refers) Economic Development Officer

PPDG.22/08 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Prosperity Policy Development Group held on 3 February 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPDG.23/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting. These were recorded as follows:-

Cllr F J Hawke declared a personal interest in item 5 'Dartmouth Regatta – Park and Ride (minute PPDG.24/08 below refers) by virtue of his involvement with the Devon County Football Association as a licensed referee and remained in the meeting and took part in the debate and vote thereon. He further declared a personal interest in item 6 'Lower Ferry Monitoring Report' (minute PPDG.25/08 below refers) by virtue of his occasional use of the Dartmouth Lower Ferry for both personal and business use and remained in the meeting and took part in the debate and vote thereon.

PPDG.24/08 DARTMOUTH REGATTA – PARK AND RIDE

The Head of Environment Services presented a report to Members that informed them of the progress of the management plans put in place to support the Dartmouth Regatta and the associated issues. In relation to the location of the Park and Ride scheme, Members were asked to consider the various implications of using either the Venn Lane or Norton Fields sites from a traffic management perspective, and also from a health & safety perspective. They were further asked to consider the new charging scheme proposals of £2.00 per person (as opposed to a charge per car), for the Park and Ride facility.

Members noted the extensive management issues that had arisen from the regatta in 2008. The event had attracted record numbers and had overstretched the infrastructure. As it was not realistically possible to stop people attending the event, effective management had to be put in place. Whilst the Council was not itself obligated to provide Park and Ride schemes, it did so to support the residents and community at large.

The Regatta Committee was ultimately responsible for the management plans which had to be signed off by the Police and Highways Authority by 31 May 2009. The Council also required the plans to be fit for purpose as a condition of the license issued for the use of some Council land at the Dartmouth Embankment and Coronation Avenue.

The location of the Park and Ride site had become an issue due to the loss of previously used locations which had been developed for retail and leisure purposes. The Officer gave an additional presentation to Members of the aerial views of the proposed sites and the surrounding location, highlighting the areas that posed traffic management issues.

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- a) The majority of the Group agreed that the use of the Norton site was not a long term sustainable solution and that consideration of its use, bearing in mind the timescale before the regatta, should be for this year only as a last resort. A Member stated that they were opposed to the use of the Norton site, especially during wet weather, because of the potential damage that could be caused to the field, rendering it unusable for some length of time. The field was currently a sports facility that was well used by local youth teams, a rugby team and the local neighbouring school. The Member further added that any damage would incur huge repair costs to the Council. This view was supported by several other Members.

The Head of Landscape and Leisure further advised that the Council had engaged in a three year programme to improve the condition of the Norton Field in terms of drainage and surface quality at a cost of £15,000 per year and the position now was that the field was in an acceptable condition to the satisfaction of all the user groups. Furthermore, there was a real danger that damage to the field, in terms of drainage, could revert the programme of works back to its original state and would cost at least £20,000 to repair. The Officer also emphasised that this was a high risk option for the Council, particularly if the weather was inclement, and urged initial consideration of other options. It was suggested that the cost and viability of the use of protection for the playing surface could be investigated by Officers to limit damage to the Norton site;

- b) A Member suggested that logistical support could be sought from Devon County Council Highways, to source other venues further afield, and in addition, that the use of Follaton House Car Park could be considered. He further expressed the view that the proposed new charging scheme sent the wrong message and that the Council should aim to discourage cars by imposing a charge per vehicle and also impose a higher charge for parking in sites nearer to Dartmouth with cheaper charges for those who used park and ride schemes further away. Moreover, the Council should, in the long term, be aiming to transport all visitors to the event by bus and promote the use of public transport. However, the Member further reiterated the point that the Council was not under any obligation to provide the facility of the park and ride scheme.

In response to the above suggestions, the Officer advised that the Regatta Committee had undertaken some analysis of the event and ascertained that many visitors arrived by train and boat, and that cars were not the only means of travel to the event. The Strategic Director (Community) also advised that park and ride schemes tended to be less successful the further they were from the desired location. It was also noted that the cost of running buses throughout the event would be considerable and it was also questionable whether local operators could resource the facility with their current fleet. However, it was accepted that this could be investigated for the future with the use of additional operators;

- c) The Leader of the Council expressed the view that the Council had struggled with the logistical issues of the regatta for some years though it was hoped that the scheduling of the Red Arrows on the Friday would help to ease some of the traffic congestion problems. He was opposed to the use of the Norton Site on the grounds that it was unacceptable to undo three years of works and all the associated costs to partway resolve some of the issues of an event that lasted only a few days.

The Leader also informed the Group that he had been in discussion with the landowner of Venn Lane to open up some extra gateways into neighbouring fields and create a hard standing for buses to use as a turning point (which would require planning consent). This alternative option could provide capacity for up to 4000 vehicles and was viable in the long term. In response, a Member raised a number of health and safety issues associated with the use of Venn Lane Field in terms of the public having to use a road that was not best suited for large scale pedestrian use, in order to reach the site of bus provision. The suggestion was then made by an Executive Member that a footpath be created along the edge of the field for the public to use as an alternative to walking along the road.

The Head of Landscape and Leisure made a suggestion to encourage the neighbouring school to allow the use of its field and car park in return for the income generated. He was aware that it was no longer used, as the school predominantly used the Norton Sports Field. However, in suggesting the option, he highlighted that no such preliminary discussions had taken place. The additional health and safety matter of the security and welfare of lone workers (such as provision of a Portacabin and Portaloos) was discussed and Officers agreed that this issue should be addressed and the Regatta Committee should be approached to fund these necessary facilities.

The Chairman then thanked the staff for the excellent work undertaken at the event last year.

It was then:-

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that:-

- 1) a condition of the Council issuing a license to the Regatta Committee to operate on Council controlled land, be that a suitable management plan must be in place by 31 May 2009, which has been developed in consultation with the Police and Highways Authority;
- 2) Council be **RECOMMENDED** that the charge for operating the park and ride scheme on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the regatta week (26-29 August 2009) be £2.00 per person; and
- 3) the use of the school field and car park be investigated as a first option for the park and ride scheme; that the Venn Field site with improved access works to neighbouring sites and with appropriate resolution of the health and safety issues be identified in the report as the second option and that the Norton Field site be considered only when no other option is viable.

PPDG.25/08 LOWER FERRY MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Environment Services presented a report that set out the performance of the Lower Ferry for the three month period from January to March 2009. The Officer highlighted the increase in passenger and vehicles income due to the period that the Higher Ferry was not in operation and the Lower Ferry revised pricing strategy.

The Group were shown illustrations of new signage for the historic Lower Ferry, which, it was hoped, would encourage visitors to use the ferry.

It was then:-

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the Group has noted the report and found its contents to be satisfactory.

PPDG.26/08 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Economic Development Officer presented a report to Members that updated them on the activity of the Economic Development Unit (EDU), particularly in light of the current economic climate. The Officer informed that the downturn had derailed the unit's objectives and was now principally focused on reactive support to businesses and residents in crisis. This reactive support had been recognised by the Government Office (South West) in reports issued in February 2009 that clearly demonstrated that South Hams District Council (SHDC) had been amongst the first authorities to react to the needs of its residents. The Officer also advised that Job Centre Plus had also written to the Council to note its timely response to the economic crisis. The department was also working together with West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) to reduce duplication of effort. A booklet had been produced by SHDC entitled 'Your Guide to Help in Difficult Times' which was being distributed widely in libraries, surgeries, business, employment estates and town and parish councils.

With regard to Employment Estates, the Officer advised that there was recent evidence that some businesses were retreating to home working particularly when lease renewals were due, and there was further evidence that businesses were experiencing financial strain. However, it was noted that there were some positive enquiries coming through that were encouraging.

Other avenues of help that provided support to business and individuals, was the Council's support for bids for external funding.

Tourism was viewed as one of the areas where local businesses could benefit from adverse exchange rates that would both encourage overseas visitors and motivate British-based residents to spend their holidays at home. Therefore, it was noted that 'Visit South Devon' would focus its efforts on destination marketing to maximise the opportunity to attract new visitors.

In conclusion, the Officer advised that there was a possibility that the South Hams could become the focus of a pilot project to install the next generation broadband, seen as critical to ensure future competitiveness and economic growth. The initiative was currently in the early stages, and the Officer advised that he would be engaging with WDBC and the project's promoters in the near future to progress the idea. If feasibility was ensured, there were further proposals for central government funding and from EU sources intended to support the delivery of next generation broadband infrastructure in both urban and rural areas. The EDU would actively pursue any opportunity to secure such funding.

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- a) A Member felt that this area of work was now the most important priority for the Council. The situation in the country had changed dramatically and he felt the Council needed to review its corporate priorities. He went further, citing that commitments in budgets like the £1.9 million capital programme for open space should be revisited. Other Members expressed some sympathy with this view. In response, the Strategic Director (Community) advised that the Council did review the Capital Programme but that many of the commitments were well underway and it would be problematic to renege on those commitments at this late stage. However, Members felt that CP2 was of such importance to the Council that it warranted a review of it in relation to the Council's other Corporate Priorities. This was then **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote declared **CARRIED**;
- b) A Member enquired if Teignbridge District Council had been approached with regard to a shared EDU service. The Strategic Director (Community) informed the Group that WDBC faced many comparable rural issues and a useful alliance had developed. However, Teignbridge District Council was also welcome to join the approach;
- c) It was discussed that the refreshment of the Prosperity action plan should have a timescale attached and a deadline of 29 July 2009 was agreed for a report back on progress;
- d) A Member commended EDU and Officers for their efforts on the 'Your Guide to Help in Difficult Times' booklet.

It was then:-

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that:-

- 1) the Group acknowledge previous progress with actions that support the ongoing delivery of the Council's 'good jobs' priority CP2 and that circumstances have now changed dramatically;
- 2) the Group supports the development of a refreshed action plan to guide delivery over a two year period and develop linkages with the West Devon Borough Council action plan as part of a shared services approach and that a deadline of 29 July 2009 be imposed to report back on progress;
- 3) the comments of the Group (as outlined above) and the suggested review the priority CP2, in relation to the Council's other Corporate Priorities be considered.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.25 pm)

Chairman