

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY, 18 MARCH
2004**

MEMBERS

* Cllr R W Hallett - Chairman

* Cllr A R Vale - Vice-Chairman

* Cllr J Brazil

∅ Cllr M Stone

* Cllr R J Carter

* Cllr A Ward

* Cllr S L Rankin

* Cllr J A Westacott

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman:
Cllrs B J Boughton and B E Carson

Also in attendance but not participating:
Cllr P W Hitchins

EPDG.18/03 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment Policy Development Group held on 15 January 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EPDG.19/03 URGENT BUSINESS

The Chairman informed the meeting that he had agreed for one urgent item to be raised at this meeting, which related to a verbal update by a Member of the Genetically Modified (GM) Crops Working Group on recent developments. This was considered urgent due to both recent Government announcements and progression made by the Working Group and would be taken as item 6 (Minute EPDG.22/03 below refers).

EPDG.20/03 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 was made.

EPDG.21/03 ENVIRONMENT POLICY – SCOPING REPORT

The Group considered a report to identify the scope of a revised Environment Policy, taking into account the Council's priorities and the range of existing environmental policies and strategies, which were already in place. The role of the Environment Policy was to provide an overarching link between emerging and existing policies and strategies and the corporate priorities.

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- (a) the need for an environment policy document to be attainable. A Member questioned whether a policy document would have the weighting to be able to defend the environment against planning and other policies, which appear to overlook the environment. In response, the Group was advised that although defending the environment was still important, Members had deemed the Council's highest priorities to be affordable housing and contributions towards prosperity. This had resulted in a slight shift in emphasis away from defending the environment in favour of planning policies;
- (b) re-directing the focus back to the local communities. A Member believed that local community strategies should be linked into an overarching policy;
- (c) opportunities for the Council to become more environmentally friendly. Although accepting that there were examples in place, a Member requested that the Council consider its energy efficiency levels, which would not only be environmentally friendly but could potentially reduce costs;
- (d) the Group recommending the short overarching policy document option. Members concluded that there was no value in re-writing an environment policy but the policy document should be robust and emphasise the importance of the environment and its link to the Corporate Priorities of the Council. Further, the document should be brisk, with a clear definition and linkages to defend specific environmental policies and not duplicate existing policies. A Member requested that the South Hams Sustainability Forum be consulted upon this policy document.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive:-

That the Environment Policy Development Group has considered the scope of a possible revised Environment Policy, and makes the following recommendation to the Executive:

That the scope comprises of a short, overarching policy document that sets out the Council's key priorities,

explains why they have been established and links the priorities with established or emerging environmental policies and strategies. As existing environmental policies and Service Plans are reviewed, they would need to demonstrate a link to this overarching document.

EPDG.22/03 **GENETICALLY MODIFIED (GM) CROPS – VERBAL UPDATE**

A Member advised that the Working Group had been looking at the environmental impact on the area of oil seed rape, as it was likely that this would be the next commercially marketed GM Crop. A letter had been sent in support of Belgium's decision to reject oil seed rape being marketed as a GM Crop. To evaluate the environmental impact, the Working Group had created a questionnaire, which was to be distributed during March and April 2004. It was anticipated that for the foreseeable future, the Working Group would be focusing upon the findings of the questionnaire.

EPDG.23/03 **WASTE STRATEGY – SCOPING REPORT**

A report was considered to present Members with a position statement on the Council's waste management strategy and the progress in relation to Devon County Council's Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Devon.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) the need to consider alternative ways of dealing with waste. Members believed it was essential to separate waste in order to meet national targets. Further, in order to convert waste into a resource, Members believed that the opportunity to treat waste by the use of heat to create energy should be explored;
- (b) the Group believed that education needed to be undertaken as the amount of waste per head of population could be reduced through areas whereby residents had some influence such as lifestyles and attitudes;
- (c) Members wished to highlight the problem of holiday home owners and tourists putting out their rubbish days in advance of the collection day, which was causing major litter implications as sacks were becoming damaged and litter was being dispersed onto the street. A Member suggested that the viability of creating a central area where tourists could dispose of their refuse be investigated. As holiday home owners were running a business, a Member believed that a charge should be implemented for the collection of their rubbish. Further, a Member believed that emphasis should be placed upon the use of 'seagull proof' sacks to prevent the dispersion of litter;

- (d) the need for action to be conducted quickly. The Group was advised that a condition of the £1.1 million Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Grant was that the money be spent by March 2005, which meant that potentially difficult decisions would have to be taken swiftly;
- (e) Members were advised that the waste strategy could not be finalised until the Advisors' findings were known and the Devon County Council waste strategy was finalised. The Group requested that once the Advisors' findings were published, another meeting be arranged prior to the findings being considered by the Executive.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that:

1. The Environment Policy Development Group has considered and commented, as detailed above, on the scope of a possible revised Waste Strategy document;
2. A further meeting of the Environment Policy Development Group be arranged prior to the Advisors' findings being reported to the Executive on 6 May 2004.

EPDG.24/03 SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE: THE ADAPTATION AND RE-USE OF TRADITIONAL FARM BUILDINGS

The Group considered a report which sought Members' consideration of the re-drafted version of the Guide on the Adaptation and Re-use of Traditional Farm Buildings for adoption as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) following the conclusion of the consultation exercise undertaken in April/May 2003.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Members felt the Guide was vastly improved from its draft format and was both interesting and user friendly. The Group believed that the staff responsible for the production of the Guide should be congratulated;
- (b) officers accepted the Group suggestion that the statement on the final page should be either emboldened or given greater prominence in the Guide, to emphasise its importance. Further, it was believed that the context of the Policy should be established in a preface in the Guide;

- (c) the Group also believed that to make the Guide more user friendly, the words: 'illustrated description of the building' at the bottom of Page 39 should be replaced with the word: 'photographs';
- (d) due to the desirable nature of the document, a Member felt that the opportunity to charge for the Guide should be explored.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive **RECOMMEND** that Council **APPROVES** the:-

1. Guide on the Adaptation and Re-use of Traditional Farm Buildings, as amended following public consultation and as detailed above, be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance;
2. Document be published and made available to a wide range of customers.

EPDG.25/03 FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Consideration was given to future agenda items. A Member believed that there was a need to consider the environmental sustainability of new housing stock built in the district and to explore methods of promoting and encouraging best environmental practice. The Chairman agreed to raise this issue at the next meeting of the Programming Panel.

(Meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.35 pm).

Chairman