

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PROSPERITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON TUESDAY, 22 JULY 2008

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 K J Baldry, T J Hewitt and R J Tucker

Officers in attendance:

All Agenda Items: Strategic Director (Resources) and Economic Development Officer;

Items 5 and 6 (minutes PPDG.4/08 and PPDG.5/08 below refer): Head of Environment Services;

Item 7 (minute PPDG.6/08 below refers): Strategic Director (Community) and Principal Valuer

PPDG.1/08 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Prosperity Policy Development Group held on 15 April 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPDG.2/08 **URGENT ITEM**

The Chairman announced that there was one item of urgent business which required consideration. This item related to Business Support and was considered urgent due to the need to update Members on why a report which was due for consideration by the Group had been delayed.

This item would be considered as Item 8 (Minute PPDG.7/08 below refers).

PPDG.3/08 **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 6: 'Lower Ferry Monitoring Report' (minute PPDG.5/08 below refers) by virtue of his occasional use of the Lower Ferry for business purposes and remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and debate thereon.

PPDG.4/08 **RESIDENTS CAR PARKING**

Consideration was given to a report which explored the opportunities for introducing some form of discounted off street car parking to meet the needs of the residents of the South Hams, without placing a financial burden onto the council tax payer. Three options were identified in the presented report as follows:-

- Option 1 – concession parking before 10:00 and after 16:00 hours;
- Option 2 – concession parking at any other two hour periods during the day;
- Option 3 – concession parking after 18:00 hours.

The report also noted that only households where 100% council tax was paid would be eligible to participate in the scheme. However, the Head of Environment Services identified single occupancy households, where 75% of Council Tax was chargeable, as also qualifying. Furthermore, officers advised of the importance of permits displaying car registration details for enforcement reasons.

The report concluded in stating that the Council supported this initiative, although it had been difficult to put a value on the potential financial implications. For this reason, the report had a number of comments in relation to various assumptions made. Careful monitoring of income levels would be required so as to ensure the initiative did not become a financial burden to the Council.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- a) A Member expressed concern that due to the report being based on assumptions, which were hard to quantify because data was not available, it would be difficult for him to support what appeared to be a risky proposal with no sound financial evidence. In appreciating this view, officers highlighted the baseline data used in the presented report which demonstrated the annual number of tickets sold in the South Hams and the time when the tickets were purchased. The greatest number of tickets were purchased between 10:00 and 16:00 hours. However, there was no data available on the type of purchaser (i.e resident or visitor);

- b) A Member drew attention to the matrix in the presented report which demonstrated the income generated from applying a range of different fees for the permits and the potential take up of the scheme. Although not in support of charging for the scheme, the Member appreciated why this had been incorporated into the report for Members' consideration;
- c) A Member expressed the opinion that the scheme should commence at 1500 hours only, excluding the time from 0800 to 1000 hours. It was his opinion that the towns were already full of activity in the morning, and therefore it was the footfall in the afternoon which needed to be increased. However, in contrast to this, other Members felt that the period between 0800 and 1000 hours was essential for the scheme to be a success;
- d) Some Members expressed the opinion that there should be no up front charge for the permits. However, officers raised concern with offsetting the cost of the scheme, with increasing the car parking charges as tariffs would rise due to inflation. Furthermore, the Council did not want to deter visitors from utilising the car parks by over charging them. Although appreciating this, Members were still hesitant to apply a charge. However, a Member suggested that if more than one permit per household was required, then charging for a second could be considered;
- e) The majority of Members highlighted their support for combining and implementing Options 1 and 3 as presented;
- f) During discussion on whether to include car registrations on the permits or not, officers reiterated the importance of including them for enforcement reasons. However, in appreciating this, a Member felt that this would be a costly exercise and therefore suggested that permits be sent out to every household with space to fill in their own car registration, without which the permit would be deemed void;
- g) Members highlighted the importance of implementing the scheme as a trial for a twelve month period in the first instance, and closely monitoring its progress on a quarterly basis. Although, in agreement with this, a Member did highlight the risks of a trial were it not successful, and the impact it would have on the residents' attitudes towards the Council if the scheme were shelved;
- h) In order to ease the initial costs of the initiative, a Member suggested issuing the permits with the Council Tax bills during March 2009. This would also ensure they were only distributed to those households paying either 100% or 75% of their Council Tax;
- i) The purpose of this initiative was highlighted, noting the importance of increasing footfall in the district's towns;

- j) Members commented on the recent scheme which had been implemented in Ivybridge to offer free off-street car parking for a two hour period in an attempt to increase footfall in the town. The scheme, which had been funded through Tesco Section 106 monies, was still in its infancy and therefore it was difficult to ascertain its success at this stage;
- k) As an aside to this proposal, a Member suggested a residents' card scheme which would offer local people the opportunity to gain discounts to certain attractions during the off peak season.

In conclusion, Members highlighted the importance of introducing a residents' car parking scheme, noting Options 1 and 3 (as outlined in the presented report) as being the most practical and beneficial. Although the mechanics of how the scheme would be implemented were yet to be confirmed (as debated above), the Group hoped the Executive would also support the initiative, for a trial period, which the Group would intend to monitor on a quarterly basis.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive consider the various options and comments of the Prosperity Policy Development Group (as detailed above).

PPDG.5/08 LOWER FERRY MONITORING REPORT

Consideration was given to a report which set out the performance of the Lower Ferry for the 6 month period from January to June 2008. Further to the presented report, a paper was tabled which demonstrated comparative income figures between 2007 and 2008 for Members information.

During discussion, attention was drawn to the number of vehicles carried by the Lower Ferry during the April to June 2008 quarter. It was noted that although the price of a single vehicle crossing had been reduced to £3 (from its original £3.30), the number of vehicles had not increased. A Member felt that it could take a while for the ferry to rebuild its reputation for competitive pricing. Furthermore, it was felt that the increased petrol prices and the recent bad weather experienced could be a deterrent to visitors.

Members also highlighted the importance of the Council developing a robust marketing strategy for the Lower Ferry and to also incorporate improved signage.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive **RESOLVE** to note that the Prosperity Policy Development Group have examined the overall performance of the Lower Ferry service and have found it to be satisfactory.

PPDG.6/08 EMPLOYMENT ESTATES REVIEW – PROPOSALS

Consideration was given to a report which informed the Group that in 2006 criteria for the review of the Council's employment estates was approved. Based on these criteria, a review was undertaken and the action plan was approved by the Executive. The report set out the progress made to date in the implementation of the agreed actions. The fundamental principle of the report was, therefore, that disposal of existing estates should only take place where it could be demonstrated that this did not have a significantly negative effect on the Council's revenue budget and that neither Corporate Priority 1 (Secure a Supply of Housing for Local People at Affordable Levels) or Corporate Priority 2 (Create the Conditions for the Growth and Maintenance of Quality Economic Activity) could be met from the disposal.

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- a) the variable rent charged per square footage. Following a query, it was noted that units were rented out at variable rates dependant upon their location and levels of demand;
- b) the Ermington Workshops. Officers confirmed that it had become evident that 50% of any proceeds of sale would have to be repaid to the South West Regional Development Agency and therefore disposal of the units was no longer viable;
- c) the Tesco Site at Lee Mill. Members were advised that the rental income was for the land only and was to be reviewed on a five yearly basis;
- d) Garden Mill, Kingsbridge and the Ermington Workshop. It was noted that the principle of disposal had been agreed for both estates but it was felt that with the current state of the economic climate, it was not the right time to sell.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive **RESOLVE** that the progress made on the implementation of the Employment Estate rationalisation plan be noted.

PPDG.7/08 **BUSINESS SUPPORT**

The Council's Economic Development Officer updated the Group on the current situation in relation to business support within the district. It was anticipated that a report would be presented to the Group in due course but that it had been delayed due to changes to the Business Link franchise, along with a National Business Support Simplification Programme which would be clearer in the autumn of 2008.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.00noon).

Chairman