

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 18 November 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **18 November 2003** when there were present:-

Cllr P K Savill (Chairman)
Cllr C A Hungate (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr C I Black
Cllr Mrs R Brown

Cllr T E Goodwin
Cllr P F A Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D A Weir.

SUBSTITUTES

Councillor C R Morgan.

VISITING

Councillors P A Capon, Mrs T J Capon, T G Cutmore, M G B Starke and Mrs M J Webster.

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts	-	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
S Scrutton	-	Head of Planning Services
G Woolhouse	-	Head of Housing, Health and Community Care
S Whitehead	-	Solicitor
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

REPRESENTING ANGLIAN WATER

J Mitchell and G Rondell.

REPRESENTING ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

K Bristow - District Manager, Transportation and Operational Services.

ALSO PRESENT

Ann-Marie Bates (Stambridge Parish Clerk), Stambridge Parish Councillors A Coulson and B Flynn and R Bailey and D Smith of Sludgewatch.

519 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

520 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors P A Capon and Mrs T J Capon each declared personal interests in the items on Anglian Water liaison issues and the assessment of odour emissions from the Stambridge Sewage Treatment Works by virtue of being Stambridge Parish Councillors.

521 ANGLIAN WATER LIAISON ISSUES

The Chairman welcomed Mr J Mitchell and Mr G Rondell of Anglian Water Services, who were in attendance to provide an update on odour controls at the Stambridge Sewage Treatment Works and surface water flooding problems.

Mr Mitchell referred to a recent meeting with Stambridge Parish Council during which County Councillor Mrs T Chapman had suggested that the formation of a working group would assist in moving matters forward. This had been a welcome suggestion and work on group formation was in hand. Membership would include appropriate Planning/Environmental Health Officers. Anglian Water was also currently making arrangements for a visit to a site in Lowestoft, Suffolk.

With regard to the Stambridge Sludge Treatment Centre, foundation work on building up an environmental impact assessment had been commissioned. The company was waiting to hear from Southend-on-Sea Borough Council on matters which that Authority would like included. From current indications it was now likely that Southend-on-Sea could not consider the planning application until July.

During debate the Committee endorsed the potential value which could be associated with the introduction of a working group. Responding to questions, Mr Mitchell advised that the working group's terms of reference would be finalised at its first meeting. It was observed that aspects of outcomes related to Southend-on-Sea Borough Council timeframes.

522 ASSESSMENT OF ODOUR EMISSIONS FROM THE STAMBRIDGE SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care on a request from Stambridge Parish Council for the monitoring of emissions from Stambridge Sewage Treatment Works.

During debate of the report, Members noted that a local ward representative had a number of concerns including:-

- The value of being mindful that a number of local businesses had complaints about odour issues and that these had an impact on customer trade.

- For those living in the vicinity of the site the term 'alleged' seemed inappropriate.
- The Parish Council had already been involved in trying to ascertain the medical position. A key difficulty was that residents often used doctors from various parts of Essex.
- Residents' experiences pointed to a need to undertake tests at evening/weekends.
- A voluntary code of practice for the industry for the industry being prepared by DEFRA could be ineffectual.
- Some residents had a perception that their observations on smells coming from the plant were not taken seriously. There was also some concern about the accuracy of concentrations mentioned in the report because they had been measured by Anglian Water.

In addressing the report, the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care referred to previous work undertaken by Members and officers on Stambridge issues and advised that:-

- Care had to be taken to ensure that terminology used in reports such as the one on this matter accorded with statutory definitions.
- Since the report had been drafted, a letter of concern had been received from the local Golf Club. The majority of contact from residents was via e-mail direct to Anglian Water and copied into the Council.
- Current resources did not enable Environmental Health Officers to provide a 24-hour service. Of eight site visits since April officers had been unable to confirm the existence of conditions which could be considered a statutory nuisance.
- Officers were not denying that the odours were as bad as residents indicated. However, legal action could not be pursued until there was a definitive court judgement as to whether sewage treatment works were 'premises' for the purposes of the Statutory Nuisance Provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.
- In terms of potential medical problems, the Castle Point and Rochford Primary Care Trust had been requested to assist in providing specialist medical advice. They would be able to make enquiries in confidence of various medical practitioners, subject to the agreement of individual residents.

Responding to Member questions Mr Mitchell advised that, whilst the core hours worked by staff at the site were 7.45am to 3.45pm Monday to Thursday and 7.45am to 3.15pm Friday, there were many occasions when demands would require evening/weekend working.

It was noted that:-

- Callers to the Basildon Careline would be asked to refer odour problems to the Council on the next working day.

- The NHS could be approached on the possibility of their nominating an appointee to the working group being established by Anglian Water.
- Effective odour identification was technically complex and the equipment and resources needed to carry out a detailed site investigation were not available within the Council.
- Environmental Health Officers did undertake planned work outside core hours.

A Member referred to the length of time which could now be associated with the odour problem. It could be recognised that, for Stambridge residents, the matter impacted quality of life and, possibly, health.

It was noted that, should it be considered appropriate to engage a specialist contractor to undertake an odour survey, it would be possible for financial provision to be made available from virements within the 2003/04 estimates. It was also noted that, subject to tender outcomes, an effective independent survey was likely to cost in the region of £10,000. Whilst the survey would be independent, the consultant would need to gain access to the Stambridge plant. They would be able to indicate whether time of year/weather conditions could impact survey results. The Head of Housing, Health and Community Care confirmed that survey outcomes should provide a useful way to identify the source of odours being reported by residents and what was required to reduce them.

The Committee agreed a motion, moved by Councillor P F A Webster and seconded by Councillor Mrs R Brown, relating to the commissioning of a survey and it was:-

Recommended to the Environmental Services Committee

- (1) That expenditure of up to £10,000 for the provision of an independent odour survey be made available from virements within the 2003/04 estimates.
- (2) That officers approach the NHS on the possibility of their nominating an appointee to the working group being established by Anglian Water.
(HHHCC)

523 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION SCHEMES

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on procedures in place to monitor Contract 2000 Works in respect of the Town Centre Regeneration Schemes.

During debate Members noted that:-

- The District Council's Principal Engineer had been appointed to project manage the Hullbridge scheme.

- The Hullbridge Sub-Committee had agreed that officers consult Hullbridge Parish Council and Essex County Council on whether they would be prepared to fund a specific amount towards meeting project shortfall and, in addition, the Community Association on whether they would be prepared to contribute a specific amount towards a Victorian lamppost.

Members recognised that the Council's concerns associated with Contract 2000 arrangements were well documented. The District Manager acknowledged that the application of Contract 2000 to Town Centre Schemes was an example of the poor nature of the Contract. He confirmed that the County Council had taken a number of actions to improve matters, including the appointment of a Clerk of Works and review of estimating/cost overrun problems.

Resolved

That the revised monitoring procedures introduced by Essex County Council and the District Council be noted. (CD(F&ES))

524 ROCHFORD TOWN MAP

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which provided an update on progress with regard to the provision of a Town Map for Rochford.

It was noted that map provision would be at nil cost to the Authority. Reference was made to the possibility that a map could soon be out of date if based on originally produced artwork. The Head of Planning Services advised that it may be possible to approach future planning applicant/s on the provision of up-to-date map details as part of their application.

The Committee endorsed proposals and it was:-

Resolved

That authority be delegated to the Head of Planning Services, in consultation with local Ward Members, to make arrangements for the provision of one Town Map in Rochford on the basis set out in the report. (HPS)

The meeting closed at 9.12pm.

Chairman

Date