

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 20 September 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **20 September 2005** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr P A Capon
Vice-Chairman: Cllr J M Pullen

Cllr J E Grey
Cllr Mrs S A Harper
Cllr R A Oatham

Cllr P K Savill
Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr P F A Webster

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr M G B Starke

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn.

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Scrutton - Head of Planning Services
S Worthington - Committee Administrator

ALSO ATTENDING

B Campbell - London Southend Airport
M Baker - London Southend Airport
P Le Blond - London Southend Airport

346 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the inclusion of an apology for absence from Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn.

347 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr M G B Starke declared a personal interest in the item on the London Southend Airport Master Plan virtue of membership of the London Southend Airport Consultative Committee. He also declared a prejudicial interest in the item on Review of the Planning Services Committee by virtue of membership of the Environmental Services Committee and left the Chamber during discussion of that item.

348 LONDON SOUTHEND AIRPORT MASTER PLAN

The Committee welcomed Mr Mark Baker and Mr Paul Le Blond, from London Southend Airport, who were in attendance to give a presentation to Members on proposals relating to the future development of London Southend Airport.

It was noted that the Government White Paper “The Future of Air Transport”, published in December 2003, set out a strategic framework for the development of airport capacity nationally over the next thirty years, set against the wider context of the air transport sector. It proposed that airports should prepare master plans. After a period of consultation following publication of a draft master plan in March, the final version of London Southend Airport’s master plan was published in July. There had been a very good response to the consultation.

The following main points were noted in the master plan:-

- It was foreseen that in future the airport would meet local demand and serve the Thames Gateway.
- The aspiration was to attain 1 million passengers in 2015, 1500 each way per day, 20 arriving and 20 departing flights.
- The majority of the airport’s land was within the Rochford District Council area, with the remainder lying within the Southend on Sea Borough Council boundary.
- It was anticipated that the existing terminal would continue to be used to accommodate traffic for one year or so, with some necessary alterations. Planning permission had, however, been granted for a new passenger terminal building and railway station; this would become an integrated transport facility.
- Laing had been appointed Project Managers for the integrated transport facility.
- The start of the development would trigger a number of planning conditions, including noise and air quality studies.
- Further planning applications would be lodged with the Council for a hotel within the new terminal and for commuter car parking for the new railway station.
- An airport Transport Forum had been set up and it was hoped that this would prove successful in developing a series of initiatives to improve facilities at the airport.
- It was hoped that the airport would obtain better recognition within the East of England Plan.
- Go-East had agreed to conduct an economic impact study for the airport.
- The N.W. maintenance area was within the Green Belt, had a stream running through it and backed onto farmland. The airport would need to explore diverting a footpath within this part of the site, as it crossed a live taxi way.

- The existing road access was satisfactory, and access for the airport would focus very much on the new railway.
- The airport had been identified within the Local Development Framework as an area suitable for an area action plan.

In response to Member questions, the following points were noted:-

- The existing runway would not accommodate anything larger than 100 - 120 seat aircraft.
- There were no plans to extend the runway.
- Although the airport was open 24 hours, under its lease there were restrictions on the numbers and types of aircraft that could operate at night, thus no flights were allowed between midnight and 6.00 am. There was an additional restriction which related to the planning permission granted for the new passenger terminal by this Authority, namely that there should be no flights between 11.30 pm and 6.30 am.
- The Airport Transport Forum had a proven track record in obtaining infrastructure improvements. However, the Airport recognised that there was still much work to be done on infrastructure.
- Flying clubs and light aircraft currently stationed within airport grounds would need to be relocated to the other side of the runway.
- The new terminal would need further expansion, beyond 2015, in order to accommodate further increases in passengers. However, the largest aircraft to use the airport would remain at 120 seats.
- Transport assessments would be conducted as part of the railway car park planning application; this would include the impact of the new terminal on car parking in surrounding residential streets.
- A charging policy would be introduced for those using airport car parks.
- The planning application for the integrated airport terminal included a commitment that the new railway station would not significantly impact on the existing Rochford railway station and businesses within Rochford town. The Government would need to be satisfied, in order to grant the necessary licences for the new railway station, that any impact would be marginal.
- It was difficult to assess what the likely pattern of flights to and from the airport would be until it was known what airlines would be using the airport. However, it was likely that the airport would be used for short haul, domestic and European flights. This would indicate waves of flights early in the morning and in the evening, with some in the middle of the day.

- There were areas marked out within the master plan for future car parking which would give a capacity of 2,000 spaces. The new terminal had space allocated for around 350 car parking spaces.

349 REVIEW OF PLANNING SERVICES COMMITTEE – PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services outlining the findings of a questionnaire survey sent to Local Authorities, requesting information about the operation of their Development Control Committees.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to requests to change the structure of the Planning Services Committee, officers confirmed that the Audit Commission's best value review of development control conducted 3 years ago and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of this Authority in February both recommended that the structure be reviewed. There had, however, been no requests from local organisations or residents for such a review.

Officers further advised that the Town and Parish Councils had not yet been consulted on whether the Planning Services Committee should be changed.

It was noted that the next meeting of this Committee should be provided with details of savings that could be achieved, should the size of the Planning Services Committee be reduced. Members also felt that there would be merit in undertaking analysis of the number of planning applications considered by individual meetings of the Planning Services Committee, of numbers of Members attending Planning Services Committee meetings and planning site visits.

It was further noted that analysis illustrated that instances of planning applications being granted on appeal were rare in relation to Rochford District applications.

During debate there was a general consensus that the current system worked well. The vast majority of letters and telephone calls received by Members from local residents related to planning. If the Committee was reduced in size, membership was likely to be determined according to the pro-rata rules, which could lead to minority parties not being able to represent their residents on the Committee. Members also envisaged that Members of a smaller Planning Committee could be lobbied by fellow Councillors. Members furthermore perceived that the pressure for change came solely from Central Government.

Some Members did, however, believe that there could be merit in reducing the size of the Committee to 19, so that each ward could be represented. Training in planning could be made mandatory for those 19 Members. The majority of Members did, however, believe that it would be difficult to determine which Member should sit on the Committee to represent a ward, particularly in the case of wards represented by 3 Members.

Members generally concurred that public speaking at Planning Services Committee meetings would be difficult to manage. Members believed that the current arrangement, whereby Parish Councils could nominate a representative to speak at District Planning Services Committee meetings on behalf of local residents, was one that worked well. Members considered that, in cases such as the Ashingdon Hall planning application involving multiple objectors, it would be unrealistic to expect residents to organise themselves sufficiently to elect one representative to speak on their behalf. It was likely that residents would not be acquainted with each other and would often all want to be able to speak on their own behalf.

Resolved

- (1) That detail on the following be brought to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration:-
 - An analysis of savings that could be achieved by reducing the size of the Planning Services Committee.
 - The number of planning applications considered by individual meetings of the Planning Services Committee.
 - The number of Members attending Planning Services Committee meetings and planning site visits.
 - Details of how long other local authorities have had the current competition of their planning committees.
- (2) That Town and Parish Councils be consulted on whether the composition of the Planning Services Committee should be changed. (HPS)

The meeting closed at 9.26 pm.

Chairman

Date