

STRATEGY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6.00pm –9.02pm

PRESENT: Councillors Adigun-Harris (Vice Chair), Barrett-Payton, Boyce, Bradnack, Cantrill, Durrant, Hymans, Phillips, Ward (Chair).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Ian Nimmo-Smith, The Leader. *Councillor Downham attended for item 05/STR/45.*

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

05/STR/41 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on 5 September were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

05/STR/42 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

05/STR/43 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Boyce declared a personal interest re. 05/STR/45 as his employer would be moving in December to rented accommodation near to the proposed location of the Emergency Stopping Place.

Councillor Durrant declared a personal interest re. 05/STR/47 as a member of the East Barnwell Community Centre (an applicant for grant)

Councillor Bradnack declared a personal interest re. 05/STR/47 as a Governor of St Matthew's School which had applied for a grant but which was yet to be processed by officers for the Leader's consideration.

05/STR/44 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**05/STR/45 CREATING AN EMERGENCY STOPPING PLACE (ESP) FOR TRAVELLERS** *(See also Record of Decision 05/28)*

Members of the public were present for item minuted 05/STR/45. The Chair proposed to Committee that the procedure rules for public speaking be suspended to allow Committee members to ask questions of the public. The Chair would allow three minutes per speaker with up to five minutes thereafter for questions. The Committee agreed to the Chair's proposal.

The Committee had copies of letters from Stagecoach, Coulson Building Group and the owners of Atis House, Cowley Road.

Mr Starkey, Cowley Rd Golf Range

He would be unable to trade if the proposals went ahead. Takings at the Range had reduced by 40% since the publicity in the press. The Range was already too small, to allow them to use full power golf balls, safety therefore was a concern. His premises had been the subject of vandalism (a picture on his laptop was circulated for the Committee to see) whilst an illegal encampment was on the Park and Ride site (although it could not be proven that the damage was done by the travellers). If the Range closed, what would the travellers make of the vacated site? Eight jobs would be lost if the Range closed. The Range was used by schools as well as being a leisure facility for Cambridge residents. He had gathered signatures in support of the Range from customers and Park and Ride users.

The Leader stated that practical issues of safety and security would need to be looked at as part of the next stage in the process e.g. could the layout of the Range be altered? Concerns about behaviour were a matter for the management of the facility.

Councillor Barrett-Payton asked if alternative sites had been looked at, bearing in mind that the Range was already too small.

Mr Starkey stated that land in Cambridge was at a premium, discussions with the Council had so far been unproductive.

Mr Francis

He knew travellers in the Fen Road. He was concerned for any length of stay beyond 7 days on the Emergency Stopping Place (ESP). Why had the Council not looked at sites outside of the city? Had the Council properly considered the implications for businesses? Vindis Skoda had experienced actions of anti-social behaviour. There were 12 sites in Cambridgeshire (made up of 135 plots) of which 3 used to be ESPs, but were now permanent. The Council should go for options in paragraph 4 and await the outcomes of the County Council research (3.22 of report).

The Leader stated that initially, the Council had considered 7 days, but having looked at the pattern of recent years' illegal encampments from the same groups for family reasons, it was deemed impractical. In addition, section 62A powers which the police would be prepared to use if there was an illegal encampment, could only be used if a suitable site was available. The Office of Deputy Prime Minister's Guidance refers to a suitable term of up to three months. Although ODPM funding was available, the Council would not rush into a decision until it was satisfied all the components for a well-managed facility were in place.

In response to a question from Councillor Bradnack, Mr Francis stated that he believed the length of stay should be 7 days or moved to a permanent site. He also asked what the Council would do if the ESP was full?

Mr Terrell, Coulson Building Group

He could not understand why the ESP should be located on a business park. Why could the site not be located near the current facility north of the A14? Located near to the proposed site was his building company, a plant hire company, a waste disposal company that had chemicals on site, a major drainage system to the side of the site and sewage works. What could happen to the children, where would they end up playing? What sort of control measures and management be in place? He would wish to increase security at his company. A full debate should take place with the users of the surrounding site.

The Leader replied that the site to the north of the A14 had been discounted on the advice of the police, South Cambridgeshire District Council and County Council traveller liaison officer (see 3.6 of the report). There would be further consultation with nearby users. A planning application would be necessary. Security would be an issue for further debate, advice and support had already been provided by the police and would be on-going.

Mr Terrell replied that he believed that it would be very difficult to locate an ESP on the business park.

Mr Campbell, Stagecoach Cambridge

He had grave concerns for the safety of his staff who walk to and from the bus depot. He has experienced damaged property, illegal parking whilst illegal encampments had been on the Park & Ride site (although it could not be proven to be connected to those on the encampments). He was concerned for the impact on use of Park & Ride services at Cowley Road (there were 50% less vehicles on the site earlier today). He wanted to know whether the Council would provide financial assistance for increased security.

The Leader stated that there would be a full appraisal during the next stage of the proposal and he had noted what all the representatives of businesses had said at the meeting. Regarding security of staff, the Council would take further advice on this although the location of an ESP itself wouldn't present the dangers suggested. He re-iterated that there would be further opportunity for consultation and discussion. The Council would need to be satisfied that any site was managed properly. Discussions would need to take place with those that currently run such sites, planning permission would be needed and adequate funding provided. Regarding financial assistance to companies in the light of these proposals, this was not something that the Council had included in its proposals, but the Leader would discuss with officers this and the other concerns of businesses.

In response to a question from Councillor Barrett-Payton, Mr Campbell explained that Stagecoach had experience of travellers damaging fencing and theft of fuel and similar experiences had been found by Stagecoach in York with a nearby traveller site.

Ms Miller, County Council Traveller Liaison Officer

It was envisaged that a core group, known to the agencies, would be using the ESP. Many of the concerns expressed would be allayed if all interested parties were involved in the development of the site and signed up to the management proposals.

PC Perceval, East Chesterton Community Beat Officer

Illegal encampments were not acceptable. An ESP in East Chesterton would be supported and the police have been involved already in the planning of the scheme. The suggestion of locating near to existing traveller sites was not recommended because of the risk of disorder. He had spoken to members of the traveller community who had in the past camped illegally within the city, to visit family members who were permanently housed within the city. The view of these travellers was an ESP would be acceptable on balance. The management of the site was key, as had been mentioned by the Leader, with local on-site management. A clause on any tenancy should be included to take action if there was anti-social behaviour or criminal action.

The Leader agreed that any users of the site would be required to adhere to a range of terms and conditions including removal if there were actions of anti-social behaviour or criminal activity.

At the conclusion of the public question time, Members of the Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Downham (who had been permitted to speak by the Chair) discussed the officer's report.

Officer's Report

The Head of Community Services Strategy stated that the Cowley Road Site was the only site available in the short term set against criteria provided by the planning department. She stated that it was the beginning of the process and that businesses around the area would be written to, the Council wanted the process to be open and transparent.

Councillor Bradnack made the following points:

Had the traveller community been consulted and if not how and when would they?

Clarify between an ESP and a transit site.

Where were the alternative sites? *(At this point in the proceedings, these were circulated to the Committee and the press and public present)*

Would the Council undertake the management of the facility? The Labour Group's view was that it should be.

The Head of Community Services Strategy stated that the Council had not yet consulted the traveller community, but was working in partnership with the police and County Council, which had had discussions with the traveller families. Full consultation would take place following any decision taken. Re definitions - a transit site was part of a travelling network and could be booked ahead, whereas an ESP was for 'an emergency' and might not be in constant use as a site. Regarding the management of the site, a range of options would need to be considered however, the site would not be in constant use and would not warrant a full time post, but any arrangements would need to ensure management is always available.

Councillor Boyce asked for a member workshop on how the management of the site may work, the Chair agreed that this would be a good idea before the matter came before the Committee again. He thought that a maximum stay of 28 days was preferable to 3 months and wondered if some negotiation with ODPM was possible. The Leader agreed that the Council would make representations for increased flexibility over the length of stay.

Action by Head of Community Services Strategy

Councillor Barrett-Payton asked about the certainty of getting grant funding from ODPM and how detailed the bid had to be by the ODPM deadline of 31 January 2006. The Head of Community Services Strategy advised that although she did not have the ODPM Guidance to hand, there was no certainty of grant funding although her understanding was that the ODPM would welcome a bid being made by the City Council. Although the bid had to be submitted by 1 January, with a site identified and an explanation of the process explained, the Council could withdraw at any time.

Councillor Downham referred to residential properties in the area. She also suggested that the police and Streetscene be included in the list of stakeholders in para 3.11. She also referred to the impact on business of illegal encampments in her ward over the previous years, one firm having to move in the end. She also wanted clarity on the use of the site. The Head of Community Services Strategy believed that the residential properties were sufficient distance from the site not to be written to initially. As far as the list of stakeholders were concerned in 3.11, all interested parties would be included, the list in 3.11 was not meant to be comprehensive.

The Leader said that members should not get too tied up in the terminology. What the Council was trying to achieve was a gate-kept facility to avoid illegal encampment elsewhere. It would be for emergencies and it would not be for long-term stays. Concerns had been expressed during the debate by a number of speakers that the ESP may fill up and then there would still be illegal encampments, however with the proper management regime in place the proposal should be adequate, given the recent pattern of illegal encampments.

Councillor Durrant asked what would happen if the Council was not successful in getting ODPM funding. The Leader stated that the project would compete with other priority schemes for capital funding. Councillor Durrant stated that the Council needed to be aware of the sensitivities at the Park & Ride and any impact an ESP may have on its usage.

Councillor Barrett-Payton stated that he could not support the proposal, as he did not believe it was value for money, nor would solve the problem, the length of stay needed to be restricted. He believed that the options in part 4.1 and 4.3 of the report should be pursued.

The Leader concluded by stating that the problem of illegal encampments couldn't be ignored, that the traveller families should have decent and acceptable provision at an ESP and that the Council will work with the local businesses and police to work through the issues raised. The Council would also have responsibilities arising from the County Council survey and the future network of provision county-wide.

The Chair stated that although there was no specific reference to the matter coming back to the Committee he requested that it did, at the appropriate time.

The Scrutiny Committee agreed the recommendations for the Leader by 6 votes to 1.

05/STR/46 REVIEW OF AREA COMMITTEES *(See also Record of Decision 05/29)*

The Leader introduced the report by requesting that the Committee focus on two elements of the report alone 1) where was the correct location for local planning applications and 2) a decision on the boundaries of the area committees. Beyond that he wanted to see more work on how Area Committees could be developed. He believed that public access and the involvement of the public was best served by local planning being considered at Area Committees. The report suggested that more work would be required to inform members of their role in performing this decision making function. Officers would also be asked to investigate further how the main Planning Committee could improve on its public accessibility based on the Area Committee experience. On boundaries, there was no evidence that the current set-up was not working and therefore the boundaries should remain.

Councillor Barrett-Payton stated that the current Area Committees can be too long with planning applications included (and there was no control on the number of applications) and if planning remained in, other elements of the meeting ie. the open forum or other reports from officers, would inevitably be curtailed. Although the boundaries were satisfactory, there would be merit in looking at seven Area Committees based on two wards each. He believed that the Area Committees had been good for public engagement and seeing how decisions are made.

Councillor Boyce was of the view that the objective evidence on planning at area committees was patchy. He thought that best practice across the area committees should be developed further in dealing with planning applications and in other areas, whilst maintaining each area committee's individuality. He gave examples of Stockport, Leeds and Newcastle who all were determining planning applications at area committee level. He agreed that public access was an issue for main Planning Committee.

Councillor Bradnack stated that the Leader's proposals were disappointing. He did not think area committees improved public access. He believed area committees will continue to be dead whilst planning applications are considered. He supported Cllr Barrett-Payton's suggestion of smaller area committees.

Councillors Ward and Hymans gave examples of how the North Area Committee was working well with planning applications as part of its business.

Councillor Durrant requested that consideration be given by Area Committees to major planning applications (as consultees) e.g Station Area development. He supported smaller area committees.

There was general agreement that the number of meetings should not increase for members and officers. Members noted the Chief Executive's comments about the scale of

resources going in to all the Council's decision making processes and the need to reduce, not increase this. He was concerned at the increased number of evening meetings and the anti-social hours.

The Director of Environment & Planning stated that the development control service was performing very well under huge pressures and it was important that members did not propose any ad-hoc arrangements. He would investigate what could be done with the main Planning Committee regarding improved public access, but there would be a cost for evening working.

The Leader concluded by stating that he believed area committees should retain planning and the boundaries should remain the same. He would wish to meet with Area Committee Chairs and Champions (Directors) to see how Area Committees could develop further using the officer report as a starting point for discussion.

Re. decision 7, the Chair clarified that it should already be the case that Executive Councillors attend Area Committees as requested by the Chair and so no formal decision needed to be made on this.

The Scrutiny Committee agreed the recommendation¹ (re planning applications) for the Leader by 4 votes to 1 and recommendation 2 (on boundaries) by 5 votes to 0.

05/STR/47 SAFER CITY GRANTS
(See also Record of Decision 05/30)

The Scrutiny Committee agreed the recommendations for the Leader by 5 votes to 0.

The Leader approved the recommendations.

05/STR/48 APPLICATION FOR A DISPERSAL ORDER IN PARTS OF PETERSFIELD AND ROMSEY

Councillor Bradnack asked whether the Leader was pursuing other approaches as the s30 dispersals could not be renewed indefinitely.

The Leader advised that a s30 working group led by the police was due to report in December with options for moving forward. One of the issues will be to establish whether the police will have sufficient resources to commit.

05/STR/49 DECISIONS BY THE LEADER - The following Records of Decision taken since 5 September were noted:

Approval for car park lift repairs (decision 23 September)

05/STR/50 FORWARD PLAN - JANUARY MEETING

The Committee agreed to pre-scrutinise the scheduled decisions on Safer City Grants.

The meeting ended at 9.02pm

CHAIR