

Runnymede Borough Council

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

15 April 2010 at 7.30pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors H W V Meares (Chairman), C J Chapman (Vice-Chairman), H A Butterfield, D A Cotty, P A Francis, Mrs E Gill, A M Moore, R N Jones and A P Tollett

Members of the Committee absent: None

713. FIRE PRECAUTIONS

The Vice-Chairman read out the Fire Precautions.

(The Vice-Chairman took the Chair for this item, in the absence of the Chairman)

714. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Group mentioned below had notified the Chief Executive of its wish that the change listed below be made to the membership of the Committee. The change was for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting and thereafter the Councillor removed would be reappointed to the Committee.

<b>Group Requesting Change</b>	<b>Remove from Membership</b>	<b>Appoint Instead</b>
Runnymede Independents	Councillor Mrs L M Gillham	Councillor Mrs E Gill

The Chief Executive had given effect to this wish in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

(The Vice-Chairman took the Chair for this item, in the absence of the Chairman. The Chairman took the Chair for the rest of the items on the Agenda).

715. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 February 2010 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

716. FORMER DERA SITE, LONGCROSS – GREEN BELT BOUNDARIES CONSULTATION

The Committee considered an item raised by Councillor Butterfield under paragraph 8 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, requesting that the decision of the Planning Committee on 27 January 2010 to approve the proposed DERA site boundary and to authorise the undertaking of consultation on that proposed boundary, be considered by the Committee to allow the Committee to examine and comment upon the matter.

The Committee noted that the South East Plan had identified the former DERA site in Longcross for mixed-use development and required a review of the Green Belt status of the site to accommodate this. Whilst there was an allocation of 2,500 dwellings at the site, the policies stated the precise housing contribution and the precise scale of development, mix of uses and provision of avoidance and mitigation measures to protect nearby environmental sites which would be tested through the Local Development Framework (LDF) process. The Core Strategy, which was the main document which would form part of the LDF, would need to identify the extent of the site that would be removed from the Green Belt and would need to set out the key elements that needed to be delivered on the site. A subsequent Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) would set out a masterplan for the site

identifying the distribution of uses and areas of access and open space. This would provide the detail that would then be translated into a planning application. As the site was being allocated for development in the Core Strategy it would be important for the boundaries of the site to be shown on the LDF Proposals Map, which would be updated as each new document in the LDF was completed. The proposals map would need to be made available for consultation along with the publication of the Core Strategy in Summer 2010. From a procedural point of view it was important to establish any public views on the suggested boundary ahead of this stage of consultation.

In preparing the Core Strategy, Officers in the Council's Policy and Implementation team had met an LDF Inspector to consider the various issues that needed to be addressed prior to the publication of the Core Strategy in 2010. In his note to the Council the Inspector had stated that a strategic allocation required the Proposals Map (PM) to be changed when the Core Strategy was adopted and this change had to be signalled by a submission Proposals Map (most often by small extracts of the map being included with the Development Plan Document (DPD) at publication/submission). At Longcross there appeared to be two important changes to the PM. Firstly, the removal of the Green Belt designation and secondly the specific allocation of land for the development proposed. Whilst the two boundaries were closely related, the Inspector had stated that they might not be the same, bearing in mind that Green Belt boundaries should endure for the long term. When Green Belt boundary reviews were undertaken, the South East Plan envisaged the boundary reflecting potential development needs to 2031. The new Green Belt boundary did not necessarily equate to the ownership of the intended developer of the allocation. Only a DPD could trigger these changes to the PM. The Inspector had suggested that further focussed stakeholder consultation would be required on the proposed boundaries. It was clear from the comments of the Inspector that a consultation was required so that the Council could keep on course to develop its Core Strategy, meeting the timeframe set out in the approved Local Development Scheme.

The Conservative and Liberal Democrat national political parties had suggested that if elected to power in the forthcoming General Election, they would abolish regional plans and their housing allocations to individual districts and empower those districts to set their own local housing targets. There had been suggestions therefore that Councils should not progress their LDFs in the light of this. However, Councils were not in a position to anticipate the likely outcome of elections, nor presume that pre-election policy aspirations would either be implemented at all, or if so, over what timescale. The implications of delay in the progress of LDFs gave cause for concern. Firstly, it would fundamentally delay the production and adoption of the Core Strategy and without this, the policy framework for determining planning applications would become more out of date. Secondly, failure to comply with the already agreed timetable would lead to a substantial loss of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant funding.

The Committee noted a map showing the proposed DERA site boundary and the consultation material on the proposed boundary that had been used. The suggested boundary had been devised using existing features to create a logical area to identify on the proposals map and to remove from the Green Belt. The boundary consisted of the Reading to Waterloo rail line, the Borough Boundary, Longcross Road and Kitsmead Lane. These were all defensible boundaries that could be justified and that treated the properties along the northern side of Longcross Road and the eastern edge of Kitsmead Lane in the same way, by including them within the area that would be removed from the Green Belt. The Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee noted that at its meeting on 27 January 2010, the Planning Committee had approved the proposed DERA site boundary for consultation and that the boundaries of the site were likely to be determined by the Planning Committee when it received a report on the outcome of the consultation.

As the Inspector had stated, the allocation of the boundary did not mean that all land within the site would be developed. 40 hectares of open space would have to be provided on or close to the site to avoid new residents walking on Chobham Common and disturbing protected birds there. Whilst some of this open land would be on the periphery of the site, much would be integrated with developed areas, providing recreation and landscaped areas which both served and broke up the built form. At this early stage it could not be predicted where such areas would be located.

The consultation on the proposed DERA site boundaries had taken place between 8 February and 5 March 2010 (but comments had been accepted beyond this point). The consultation was targeted to involve those who had a key interest in the site. All responses would be used in the formulation of the boundary which would be shown on the proposals map which would accompany the "Publication" Core Strategy. Currently there had been in the region of 140 responses. Most of these responses had not considered the question of where the Green Belt boundary should be, which was the

purpose of the consultation, but had either stated that the site should not be taken out of the Green Belt or should not be developed, or had made both of those comments.

The LDF would form the local elements of the Council's Development Plan. It was therefore important that the Core Strategy was founded on a sound and credible evidence base and that the appropriate level of consultation on the issues had taken place, so that it was likely to be approved following an Examination in Public by a Government appointed Inspector. In order to have a sound Core Strategy the document needed to be in general conformity with the existing national and regional development plan (Planning Policy Statements and the Regional Plan). It also needed to have been appropriately consulted upon so that procedurally the document could be found sound. The results from this single issue consultation would be used to inform the final version of the Core Strategy and proposals map which would be consulted upon in the summer of 2010.

The Committee noted that the South East Plan indicated that development on the site was not envisaged until 2016. If there were to be a new national Government elected in May 2010 there would effectively be a period of 18 months before the LDF Core Strategy was adopted. Members asked about how utilities would be provided for any new development and were advised that utility companies were aware of the development timescale. There had previously been a proposed allocation in the Council's Local Plan to build houses and a mixed use development on the northern part of the DERA site. This development had been opposed by Surrey County Council and the Local Plan Inspector on the grounds that it was not large enough and therefore was not sustainable. The allocation had therefore been deleted. The Committee noted that the site had been used as the Ministry of Defence's main vehicle research establishment. It had never been used for military manoeuvres or live firing and there was no evidence of radioactivity. A small section of the site in the western boundary lay within the Surrey Heath local authority area but the owners at this stage had no intention of proposing any development in this section of the site.

The Committee stressed that the role of the Council was to protect the Green Belt. The Committee noted that the South East Plan required the former DERA site, Longcross to be released for development and there was nothing that could be done at present to prevent this, due to legal requirements. However, the Committee also noted that if there were to be a change of national Government, regional plans and their housing allocations to individual districts might be abolished and districts might be empowered to set their own local housing targets. The Committee requested the Planning Committee to note its opposition to the removal of the DERA site from the Green Belt. The Committee considered that the Council should take a proactive approach in the event of a change of national Government and should seek a commitment from any new Government to empower districts to set local housing targets at the earliest possible time.

#### 717. ST PETER'S HOSPITAL, GUILDFORD ROAD, CHERTSEY – PLANNING APPLICATION

The Committee (as the former Review Board) had undertaken a review in October 2008 into car parking at St. Peter's Hospital, Guildford Road, Chertsey. A comprehensive master plan for the site had been sought from the Hospital that would set out the Hospital's development needs and allow the Council, as planning authority, to understand their long term aspirations and guide development for the short to medium term. Officers had continued to provide the Committee with updates as the planning application had moved forward.

A report on an outline planning application for St. Peter's Hospital had been submitted to the Planning Committee on 10 March 2010, which included a master plan for the site. The Committee noted an abbreviated version of that report, a site parameters plan and an illustrative site layout. The Planning Committee had decided to grant planning permission, subject to the prior signing of a Legal Agreement relating to a Travel Plan. This agreement had now been completed and the permission had been issued.

The proposed master plan envisaged a healthcare campus of 130,407 m<sup>2</sup> floor space which would result in an increase in floor space of 26,652m<sup>2</sup> over a period of 20 years. The site parameters plan divided the site into a series of six development zones. The proposed functions within each of these six zones were noted. The parameters plan showed the existing and proposed floor space, footprint and storeys for each zone. As the site was within the Metropolitan Green Belt various illustrative site layouts had been included to show existing and proposed built envelope, developed proportion of the site, undeveloped and ancillary open space and hard standing areas. The development proportion of the site fitted the Green Belt openness criteria. The Committee noted the existing and proposed car parking on site. Staff parking had been moved to more peripheral areas. There were 257 more

visitors spaces and less staff spaces. The master plan would form the basis of a series of detailed planning applications over the next few years.

The Committee considered that the Hospital management should be looking to explore ways of increasing public transport to the facility including increasing the frequency of the Peter Bus which ought to be linked more closely to local railway stations, particularly Chertsey station. As people visiting Hospitals were sometimes too ill to use public transport, adequate car parking was still a priority. The Committee was pleased to note that the Hospital management had taken heed of the points they had raised in their review in October 2008.

#### 718. ENFORCEMENT OF PLANNING CONTROL – PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee noted the progress report on enforcement of planning control as at 1 April 2010. It was reported that a senior Enforcement Officer would be leaving the authority shortly. It was noted that Members could play no role in the enforcement of planning issues, as they were elected and had no powers of enforcement, which were only vested in Officers of the authority. Members had a vital role to play in reporting breaches in their wards and in informing the public that, when reporting cases, actual evidence of contraventions rather than hearsay reports was necessary in order for matters to be progressed further. Enforcement cases were particularly prevalent in remote, rural areas. In the cases of Oak Farm, Thorpe Green, Egham, Mayflower Nurseries, Thorpe Lea Road, Egham, Land Off Western Side Of Chertsey Road and Asland, Pinewood Road, Virginia Water, the enforcement notices had now been complied with and these sites would therefore not appear on the next report.

On particular cases within the report, the Committee noted the following:-

- i) Greenacres, Hardwick Lane, Chertsey  
A criminal trial had started in April 2010.
- ii) Willow Farm, Chobham Road, Ottershaw  
A High Court date for the challenge on the appeal dismissal was awaited.
- iii) Wilmar, Hurst Lane, Egham  
The site was being monitored to ensure compliance.
- iv) Walnut Tree Farm, Almnors Road, Lyne  
Enforcement notices had been served on 1 April, the day after Planning Committee authorisation.
- v) Arcadia, Hamm Court, Weybridge  
The appeal against the requirement to remove the structure had been dismissed and injunctive proceedings could be commenced.
- vi) Glenfield, Hurst Lane, Egham  
The inquiry set for 12 April 2010 had been adjourned because the applicant required medical treatment. A reconvened inquiry had proceeded in her absence.
- vii) 18 -20 Riverside, Staines  
The unauthorised containers had been removed but the mobile home and decking remained.
- viii) Land Rear Of 4 Aymer Close, Chertsey Lane, Staines  
It was suggested by a Member of the Committee that the breach in this case, a gate which was too high, should not be accorded the same priority as some other enforcement cases. Officers would be seeking the agreement of the Planning Committee to not pursue the matter further.

- ix) Bellbourne Nurseries, Hurst Lane, Virginia Water

Many of the unauthorised storage containers had been removed.

- x) Land Formerly Known As Treetops, Knowle Grove, Virginia Water

Prosecution proceedings were anticipated shortly.

719. EXAMINATION OF MEMBERS' REMUNERATION IN OTHER SURREY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

In approving the new Scheme of Members' Allowances at its March 2010 meeting, on the recommendation of the Corporate Management Committee, the Council had resolved that the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee be asked to examine the reports of the Independent Remuneration Panels and subsequent Council decisions of other Surrey authorities on Members' Allowances to establish the reasoning behind them and whether any elements of common approach could be commended, and to make their report available to the Independent Remuneration Panel and the Runnymede Members before the commencement of the next review. The Chairman of the Committee had requested a report on the timing of this report to the Committee.

The next review of the Scheme would take place during the latter part of 2012 with a view to implementation in April 2013. In order that up to date information was available to the Independent Remuneration Panel (whose membership was to be considered before the next review) and subsequently to the Council, it was agreed that it would be appropriate to commence work on this report in April 2012, to take account of the latest reports of any authorities reviewing their Schemes that April.

Although Councillors did give their time to Council business on a largely voluntary basis, they were entitled to a certain amount of remuneration for their time. Other authorities calculated their hourly rate of remuneration in a different way to Runnymede. There were wide variations in levels of remuneration amongst authorities. In the last review of Runnymede Members' remuneration, Members had objected strongly to the Independent Remuneration Panel viewing the IT provision made to Councillors as an allowance, as they considered that the IT equipment they received was an essential part of a Councillor's duties and could not be compared with an allowance.

The Committee agreed that, in addition to the other report referred to above, a brief report should be prepared for their consideration on Members' Allowances decisions of other Surrey district local authorities (including also expenses if possible), with the report to form the basis of a press release pointing out the low level of Runnymede Members' remuneration.

720. IT ISSUES

The Chairman of the Committee had requested a report on broadband facilities being provided to Councillors, details of IT department support provided to Councillors and a preliminary report on the benefits and disadvantages of the Windows 7 operating system.

The Council provided a basic level of computing facilities for all Councillors consisting of a laptop computer, a wireless ADSL router, a broadband connection and a laser printer. Usually the telephone line used to deliver the broadband connection remained the one already connected to the Councillor's home. The Council arranged for the broadband upgrade and all the costs associated with the broadband connection to be billed directly to the Council unless the Councillor already had a broadband line in place and was content for that to be used for Council business. If a Councillor had a broadband connection in place for another purpose, e.g. for business requirements, a separate line was installed by the Council. As far as was practical this configuration matched the facilities provided for staff in their working environment both in the Civic Centre and remote sites such as the leisure centres, the depot, the museum and staff working from home. This meant a standardisation of operating systems and the use of corporate software for email, word processing, spread sheets etc (Microsoft Office), financial systems, GIS (Geographical Information Systems) and DMS (Document Management – Vignette IDM). A laptop computer was made available when the Councillor was elected and as a general rule was expected to last the whole of the four year term of office without a hardware upgrade. At present the Windows XP operating system was loaded running Internet Explorer 7, Microsoft Office 2003, Aventail VPN (Virtual Private Network) and Trend Neatsuite (protecting against viruses, spyware and spam).

Broadband connections for each of the Councillors were purchased from a supplier who held the contract for a twelve month period and the individual contracts were renewable after 12 months. As bandwidth prices reduced, each new contract had for the past 4 years involved a better specification line. In the recent past the marketplace for broadband provision had been very volatile. There had been considerable consolidation among providers with the early suppliers being bought up by the competition or larger companies. The distribution of the different broadband connections to Councillors between suppliers was noted by the Committee. Pipex had been the original supplier selected to provide the broadband links for Councillors, on grounds of price and quality. However, the level of support and the value for money had deteriorated, so the decision was made to switch to BT. However the migration to BT had been halted as their level of service deteriorated and a new supplier was sought. This supplier was Multidata, a company that specialised in the local government market sector with 70% of their revenue coming from that source. There were thus three suppliers currently for Councillor broadband – Pipex, BT and Multidata and Officers would be moving all Councillors on to Multidata. The first half a dozen accounts that had been transferred to Multidata had proved to be far more satisfactory than Pipex or BT and they were offering a better bandwidth and contention ratio than had been used up to now. The plan was to now transfer the Councillor accounts over to Multidata at the rate of two per week. Experience had taught Officers that when the new line was installed there may be a short period of intense support required.

Regarding IT department support provided to Councillors, calls that were resolved almost immediately on the phone had not previously been recorded on the Help Desk system as this had been largely used to manage ongoing work. The procedures had been altered and as from 1 April 2010 all calls would be logged so that a comprehensive picture could be obtained. Time spent on each activity was not allocated to specific calls so there was no record of the time spent on each call in detail. The Committee noted a table listing the Help Desk calls logged for Councillors, showing the problem that was recorded at the time the call was logged. The table showed that 50% of Councillors had not asked for Officer support or had only asked for support once. The same Councillors tended to ask for repeated support. As a result of an earlier version of this listing, the IT Member Working Group had commissioned the production of a Councillors Handbook aimed at answering some of the basic questions that might make the user more self sufficient and cut down calls to the Help Desk. A copy of the latest draft of this document was noted by Committee. The document would incorporate the comments of the IT Member Working Group Members before being issued to all Councillors immediately after the May 6 elections. In connection with the draft Handbook, it was also agreed that the appropriate Working Group should look at the Council's policy of blocking access to social networking sites for Members, (e.g. Face book, Twitter) on the grounds that these were non-productive. It was suggested that Councillors should have access to these sites, in order to keep in touch in particular with younger members of the community and to engage with them on those issues which were of concern to this section of the population. Training had also been identified as a key element in improving Councillor use of the supplied facilities. The training programme for Councillors for 2010 was noted. This was to be considered by the May meeting of the IT Member Working Group and would be finalised after their wishes had been incorporated.

The Committee suggested that the IT Member Working Group should look at asking Councillors to meet the cost of their own broadband connection, noting that the cost of each broadband line to the Council was £30 a month or £360 a year for each Councillor that did not meet the cost. It was, however, noted that the level and cost of IT support provided to Councillors in Runnymede was not unusual and some other authorities provided more. Difficulties with accessing emails were reported by Members, including problems with redirection and forwarding. It was agreed that the IT Member Working Group should consider writing to all Councillors to ask if they were prepared to pay for their Council broadband line, should consider changes to the way in which Councillor email accounts operated, and should also look at drawing up an Outlook contact list for Members.

In common with the public in general, the level of Council computer literacy had increased greatly in recent years. For this reason it was agreed that the IT Member Working Group should review the facilities offered to Councillors with a view to ensuring that the provision matched the requirements of all Members enabling them to carry out their Councillor duties as effectively and efficiently as possible. This would address questions such as whether the Council still needed to provide a minimum standard of equipment and connectivity, and if so, whether a different mix of hardware, software and connectivity would be more appropriate to achieve this ambition most economically, whether the Council should be offering enhanced facilities to match emerging Councillor working practices and lifestyles and the business case for such enhanced facilities.

The Committee also considered an analysis of the Windows 7 operating system. Microsoft licensing

was treated as a revenue item since the Council had moved to an Enterprise Volume licence with Microsoft. Under the terms of that agreement the Council was entitled to use the latest or any previous version of any registered product. This licence, purchased at the best possible rate through Buying Solutions (formerly the Organisation of Government Commerce (OGC)) who negotiated discounts based on the buying power of the whole public sector, was for three years and had started in September 2008. At the end of the agreement the Council could continue paying maintenance of approximately one third of the purchase price of the licenses which would entitle the Council to continue using the latest versions of all registered products, or continue using the registered products with a version up to the one that was current when the agreement ended, (in Runnymede's case September 2011), but pay no further maintenance, or migrate to Open Source software.

Based on the fact that the Council's strategy was only to adopt new products when they had been fully tried and tested, and that the suppliers of software to the Council tended to be slow in approving new versions of operating systems, browsers and databases for all of the Microsoft products in use at any one time had been released for more than three years. If this speed of takeup remained then the Council would not have to refresh its Microsoft portfolio until 2014, at which stage a complete review of the place of Microsoft at the centre of much of the delivery of computer services would be reviewed. If the Microsoft licensing model had not changed at that date then the Council could enter a new 3 year agreement and then again start using the latest versions of Microsoft products. For instance, Windows 8 was scheduled for release in 2011 and so should be tried and tested by 2014 and would be an option for upgrade at that date. Alternatively the Council could switch to Open Source software which had not at this stage made any substantial inroads into the public sector but might be a more viable option at that time. It was within this framework that the adoption of the next version of the operating system both on the desktop, laptops and servers ought to be viewed. Early evaluation of Windows 7 on a desktop and a laptop confirmed that it should be the successor to Windows XP for Runnymede and that Vista should not be adopted at all. This matched the results reported in the computer and general press from early adopters who had also found that Windows 7 was much more stable than Vista.

Three issues had been identified that would need resolving in terms of upgrading existing equipment and running the site with two desktop operating systems, Windows XP and Windows 7. The first of these was that roaming profiles for the two operating systems were not compatible. This would need to be resolved. The second issue was that operating systems running under Windows 7 had at present compatibility issues with some of the key corporate systems not being supported. The third issue was that some of the Council's systems that depended on browser based client access did not yet support IE8 which was an integral part of the version of Windows 7 that the Council would use. These last two issues would be resolved in time as the Council's suppliers upgraded their products.

The Microsoft recommended way of upgrading Windows XP to Windows 7 was to perform a "clean install". This involved running routines to save all the settings in XP to an external storage device, clearing the operating system down by reformatting the disk, installing Windows 7, importing all of the settings and then reinstalling the applications. The preferred way forward was to synchronise the upgrading of the desktop hardware to new machines with Windows 7 pre-installed with a Runnymede configuration. This opportunity would not arise until the summer of 2011 at the earliest when most desktop PCs would be 3 years old. At that point in time the Council should reassess the possible life of the PCs and decide whether upgrading them to Windows 7 would give them sufficient extension to their life to make this worthwhile (the year 2014 would be significant as this would be when the Microsoft maintenance 'holiday' would probably end) and also look again at virtualising the desktop, which when reviewed in 2006 had been too expensive. If virtualisation was the preferred way forward there should then be an assessment of whether this should be implemented in 2011 or 2014.

At present no crucial application or facility had been identified that would tempt Officers to abandon this timetable and move swiftly to Windows 7 implementation. Currently Microsoft had committed to providing security patches for XP until April 2014, although XP was now no longer being developed. From a functionality point of view, XP still provided all the facilities required by most Runnymede staff and Councillors in terms of performing their Council functions. This position should be constantly reviewed and if an essential Windows 7 application came to light then the possibility of bringing forward the adoption of this version of Windows ought to be considered in terms of the time and cost involved balanced against the financial benefits. Thus from a security and functionality point of view Officers could see no compelling case for moving to Windows 7 at this stage. The Committee noted this analysis and agreed that the issue should be kept under review by the Working Group.

**RESOLVED that –**

- i) **in order to ensure that the desktop hardware replacements scheduled for 2011 are carried out using the most appropriate hardware and operating systems, the IT Member Working Group prepare a report before the end of 2010 recommending to Corporate Management Committee:**
- **the desktop hardware that should be replaced in 2011 and the specification of any new equipment**
  - **the operating system and any virtualization technologies to be used**
  - **the staff training implications of any changes both for IT staff and computer users**
- ii) **the computing and telephony facilities provided for Councillors be reviewed by the IT Member Working Group in the light of Members'**
- **changing computer literacy levels**
  - **working patterns**
  - **information requirements.**

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 9.25pm)