

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLACE SERVICES & ECONOMIC GROWTH  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON 18  
DECEMBER 2014**

**Present:**

Councillor S Walsh (Chairman)	Councillor I Henderson
Councillor G Butland	Councillor D Kendall
Councillor T Cutmore	Councillor V Metcalfe
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor C Pond
Councillor Guglielmi	Councillor S Robinson
Councillor D Harris	Councillor K Twitchen
Councillor T Hedley	

**1. Apologies and Substitution Notices**

Apologies were received from Councillor Wood.

**2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 27 November 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**3. Membership**

The Committee endorsed report PSEG/36/14 concerning Councillor Twitchen's continued membership of the Committee.

**4. Declarations of Interest**

With reference to Minute 7, Councillor Butland declared a personal interest in that he is a representative of Braintree District Council on Great Notley Joint Venture Partnership Board. Councillor Walsh also declared a personal interest in the same item, as he is an County Council representative on the same Board as well as being a Fellow of The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity, Member of the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management, and as a Chartered Environmentalist of the Society for the Environment.

With reference to Minute 6, Councillor Kendall declared a personal interest in the Bus and Passenger Transport Strategy in that he is Secretary of the Brentwood Bus and Rail Users Association, and a Trustee of Brentwood Community Transport in his capacity as a Brentwood Borough Councillor.

## 5. Questions from the Public

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

## 6. Bus And Passenger Transport Strategy

The Committee considered report PSEG/37/14 concerning consultation on the proposed Bus and Passenger Transport Strategy: 'Getting around in Essex'. Members confirmed that they had found the workshop on the afternoon of 27 November both useful and informative.

During discussion the Committee requested further information on the following matters:

- Confirmation of the revised consultation timetable.
- Clarification of the way that strategy will be developed in terms of the decision making process in order that the Scrutiny Committee may identify its own role in that process.
- Some Members requested that they be provided with hard copies of the Consultation documentation.
- Press coverage for the launch of the Consultation.
- The Committee reaffirmed its wish that the County Council actively engage with service user groups as part of the Consultation including:
  - Passenger Focus
  - Campaign For Better Transport
  - Essex Association of Local Authorities
  - Rural Community Council of Essex
  - Hospitals and day centres

In conclusion the Committee **endorsed** the scrutiny report summarising the information exchanged at the workshop on 27 November and its conclusions would be forwarded to the Cabinet Member for his consideration as part of the forthcoming consultation on the proposed Bus and Passenger Transport Strategy. In addition the Chairman undertook to seek the information requested by the Committee as set out above.

## 7. Country Parks Car Parking Charges

Councillor Twitchen left the meeting at this point and took no part in discussion of this item, as she is deputy to the Cabinet Member under whose portfolio this matter falls under.

The Committee considered report PSEG/38/14 concerning consultation on proposed changes to Country Car Parking Charges as Councillor Roger Hirst, Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Libraries, Planning and the Environment had invited its views.

At the meeting Councillor Hirst explained his proposals to the Committee and answered Members' questions. He was supported by Anna Lambert (Head of Delivery Transition) and Tim Dixon (Head of Country Parks).

The Country Parks Service aim is to improve the experience of customers and drive towards becoming cost neutral. Charging for car parking is the country parks' main source of income. Car parking is being reviewed with the aim of offering better value

charges that will improve convenience and flexibility for visitors. The variable charging model will be based on the length of stay, and is proposed to be introduced in February 2015.

The proposal is to replace the current flat rate charge at the parks and remove the reduced flat rate winter charge that is currently in place at Great Notley and Thorndon, to reflect the shorter time visitors stay and respond to customer feedback.

The current charging levels for 2014/15 were agreed by Cabinet Member Action in February 2014 (Forward Plan reference KD04 FP/442/12/13) following a review of car parking charges across the County Council's Country Parks. They were the first changes made in three years, and were effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014.

Great Notley Country Park is not included as part of this consultation, as the proposals are to be taken to the Great Notley Country Park Joint Venture Partnership Board with Braintree District Council first. Once approved at the Board consultation will commence in the same way. Hadleigh Farm and Country Park Olympic Mountain Bike Venue has also not been included within this consideration as it is under construction until March 2015, when it will be fully operational. It is anticipated that Hadleigh will take into account the results of this consultation in setting its pricing structure

The proposed charges would deliver an additional annual income of circa. £119,178 net cost and excluding VAT.

Councillor Hirst explained that the aim of the proposed changes was to increase the use of Country Parks and for them to become price competitive. By introducing hourly charging rates it is hoped that this will encourage both short and longer stays within the Parks. He advised the Committee that the new charging proposals had been benchmarked against other attractions in the County and that all profits would be reinvested in the County Parks. Furthermore he referred to the strategic plan and the aim of encouraging people to visit Country Parks given that they can promote a positive effect on health, relaxation and physical and mental wellbeing.

The Committee sought clarification upon the following issues:

- Enforcement of new parking proposals
  - Clarification was given by Tim Dixon that no additional costs would be incurred in this respect. There would be increased use of technology in this regard, with "Pay on exit" in some parks. It is not envisaged that any extra resources would be needed at this stage.
- Running costs of Country Parks within the County
  - Clarification was given by Tim Dixon that costs vary according to the size of each Park, but the net running costs for Country Parks in the County is £500,000. The intention is to reduce running costs over the next 4 year period.
- Methods of payment
  - Clarification was given that new technology will be used which will enable visitors to pay by credit/debit card, contactless payment and payment by mobile phone. This would result in less cash being held in ticketing machines.
- Season ticket usage within the Parks across the County

- Clarification was given that as is presently the case; Season tickets will continue to be used across all Country Parks in the County.
- Impact upon local residents
  - Clarification was given by Tim Dixon that he had met with Parish Councils and it is hoped that the new hourly charging tariffs would in fact help encourage visitors to use the car parks rather than parking in residential streets.
- Consistency of charging across County Parks in the County
  - Tim Dixon explained that there is varying usage across the different parks with Great Notley and Thorndon CPs attracting the highest visitors and offering the widest range of facilities and activities. Therefore the charges in these parks would be higher to reflect this. While some Members suggested that there should be consistency of charges across the whole county, there was not general consensus across the whole Committee.

In conclusion the Committee supported the content of the Consultation for changes to Country Park car park charges, and recognised that there is a gap between expenditure and revenue which needs to be closed.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman expressed his thanks for Councillor Hirst for the opportunity to be involved in the consultation process.

## **8. Work Programme**

The Committee noted report PSEG/39/14 by the Scrutiny Officer updating Members on the work programme. The Chairman confirmed that Parking Partnerships are being considered for inclusion within the Work Programme.

## **9 Future Meeting Dates**

The Committee agreed report PSEG/40/14 setting out the following future meeting dates:

- Thursday 25 June 2015
- Thursday 23 July 2015
- Thursday 24 September 2015
- Thursday 22 October 2015
- Thursday 26 November 2015
- Thursday 17 December 2015
- Thursday 21 January 2016
- Thursday 25 February 2016
- Thursday 24 March 2016
- Thursday 21 April 2016
- Thursday 26 May 2016

**10. Date of Next Meeting**

The Committee noted that the next activity day was scheduled for 22 January 2014. However, the Chairman confirmed that it was not intended to hold a formal meeting on that date.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at Noon.

Chairman