
Minutes of the meeting of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held digitally on Thursday, 25 June 2020

Present:

Councillor I Grundy (Chairman)	Councillor S Lissimore
Councillor A Wood	Councillor C Pond
Councillor R Moore	Councillor R Pratt
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor W Schmitt
Councillor S Hillier	Councillor C Weston
Councillor P Honeywood	Councillor I Henderson
Councillor D Kendall	

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report of the Membership, Apologies and Declarations was received, and it was noted that

- Cllr Grundy welcomed Cllr Sue Lissimore and Cllr Andy Wood to the committee. It was also noted that the Chairman had agreed to facilitate a request to join the meeting from Cllr Patricia Reid for item 6 on the agenda.
- There were no apologies received.
- A Code interest was declared by Councillor P Honeywood as a local district representative on ECTU

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 23 April 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Questions from the Public

There were five public questions received:

1. Liz Miles:

What will you do to ensure those without Wifi or tablets etc can access print books as soon as possible in July, e.g. can't you allow one user in and one user out in even the smallest libraries (then for example parents can borrow books for their children for the Summer Reading Challenge, & the lonely and impoverished can access print books), and can't you offer click-and-collect and phone-and-collect services like the majority of other library services in England?

2. Andy Abbott: (Absent)

Of the libraries currently without a reopening date, is the problem down to a lack of volunteers? And what would this say about the viability of so called 'community libraries'?

3. Victoria Gilmore/Sherrie Smith

What consultations have been carried out with site residents with regards to the sale of council sites across Essex?

4. Amanda Jacobs (absent)

I understand that there are a number of smaller libraries across the County that are being kept 'under review'. In Harlow this applies specifically to Mark Hall Library. The ECC information suggests that this is due to concerns about spaces being COVID safe. I know this space well and I am sure the space coupled with adequate staffing could meet requirements. Over the coming months and years it is going to be a very much needed service in helping to rebuild our community. Could you please reassure me that ECC is committed to reopening this library (along with others on the ' to be reviewed list') . When will there be a review and what will be it's terms of reference?

5. Georgia Buckingham (Absent)

Do we get the chance of RIGHT TO BUY plots and we sort out our own maintenance on site or we pay a monthly fee for you to still attend'.

All questions received related to Cllr Barker's portfolio. As she was unavailable for the first portion of the meeting it was agreed that officers would respond to questions during their respective presentations.

4 Update on Proposals to Construct a Nuclear Power Station in Bradwell on Sea, Essex

Members received and noted report **(PSEG/05/20)**.

A [presentation](#) was delivered by Cllr Mark Durham, deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Mark Woodger, Principal Planning Officer.

- Bradwell is shown in National Planning Policy as being one of few sites capable of accepting a new nuclear, low carbon, generating station.
- Other sites in the UK are allocated, for example Hinkley Point and Sizewell.

- The development is funded by Chinese Group Nuclear (CGN) at 66.5%, with the remainder from EDF.
- Up to 12,000 people will be working on site at peak
- It is anticipated the project will take 12 year to build.
- Sustainable transport strategy key to construct the site
- Significant socio-economic impact, as well as landscape, ecology, archaeology, cultural and amenity.
- Will operate for a period of 60 years, providing enough low carbon electricity to light 4 million homes.
- Essex County Council are a statutory consultee in this process, with a corporate submission to government considered material to the eventual decision
- Development of such a National Strategic Infrastructure Project (NSIP) will be by way of a Development Consent Order (DCO) application.
- A decision on the submission will be made by Government following a hearing conducted by the Planning Inspectorate.

Following the presentation, members were invited to ask questions and the key areas raised included:

- The ecological impact of proposals – Members were assured that ECC and a number of other well-informed ecological groups have fed into the consultation process.
- The aggressive/expedited consultation process – Members were advised that the application process doesn't set a timescale for proposals to be properly formed, public sector bodies are largely beholden to the developers' timescales and will take a view accordingly as to how thorough the consultation has been. The authority to inspect in future is reserved by ECC and other public bodies to ensure adherence to promises and guidance issued during the consultation process.
- Marine access - Large marine vehicles are unable to access the site, so they will have to be taken to muster points (possibly Harwich) and taken on to BrB from there in smaller vehicles.
- The pre-consultation process – Officers expressed concerns with the process to date, but assured members that this was not unusual for a significant development such as this.
- Economic growth and opportunities – Huge job creator, not only in terms of technical/construction, but huge for catering, security, admin etc.
- Technical specification of reactor – unable to provide technical expertise as to whether these are burner/breeder reactors. These are, however, reproductions of existing reactor blueprints.
- Decommissioning strategy – there is no national strategy, this is a constantly evolving field of development. We have assurances that this will be factored into plans though.

- Potential infrastructure gains for Essex - ECC need to look at how we can look to the industry to extend existing highways/rail infrastructure and not funnel them through existing sites.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked all those involved in the presentation.

5 **Phased Reopening of Essex Libraries**

The Committee received report PSEG/06/20 alongside a [presentation](#) and update from Councillor Susan Barker, Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities, Corporate and Culture, Suzanna Shaw, Director of Customer & Technology Operations and Juliet Pirez, Head of Libraries.

The presentation outlined the manner and order in which Essex libraries would reopen. The presentation can be found [here](#). Key points included:

- Changing government guidance – it was acknowledged that guidance is constantly evolving, so all plans are subject to change.
- Availability of staff – it was noted that some staff are still shielding, so to ensure the safety of staff and visitors, some sessions (rhymetime etc.) have been placed on hold. There are currently 78% of staff available to work. Some staff have been redeployed elsewhere and will be recalled where appropriate and necessary.
- This will be a phased approach – the focus will initially be on the 16 libraries that operate a registration service. Unions have been consulted to ensure that staff are well looked after. There has been mixed feeling from staff to proposed reopening plans. Some are understandably quite anxious, some are keen to get back to work.
- Shared sites – Some library facilities share premises with schools. ECC is working with partners to ensure that these sites can open safely.
- Leased sites - Where ECC leases areas to partners, we've been working with them to ensure that they adhere to the same standards that we do. (Social distancing, PPE. Etc.).
- Self-service machines – ECC will continue to use self service machines. Work is taking place to adapt these to ensure that they can take contact-free payments.

Following the presentation, members of the committee were invited to ask questions. Key points raised included:

- Reassurances that all libraries will reopen – Members were assured that all libraries will reopen with exactly the same opening hours as before. As in the original future libraries strategy it was made clear that ECC is always open to reconsider opening times in consultation with each library.
- Essex online reference library – This will continue after lockdown. This has been a welcome innovation brought into place to allow resources to be accessed throughout the pandemic.

- Communication strategy – the strategy will be robust, beginning with library staff and volunteers.
- Volunteers - No staff are being replaced with volunteers. Volunteers are adding an additional service. In their absence, ECC has utilised paid staff to deliver home library services during lockdown.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked all those involved in the presentation.

6 Proposals on ECC's future role in relation to services provided by ECC to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in Essex.

The Committee received report **PSEG/07/20** alongside a verbal update from Cllr Susan Barker, Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities, Corporate and Culture and Adrian Coggins, Head of Public Health and Wellbeing.

Cllr Grundy invited Assistant Chief Constable Rachel Nolan to provide evidence to the committee.

ACC Nolan was keen to highlight the potential implications on crime and disorder and policing in the county, including public safety, of the council adopting recommendation 2 as outlined in **PSEG/07/20**. It was noted that the Essex Police Plan reflects the following core policing duties:

- Help People
- Keep People Safe
- Catch Criminals

To this end, the efforts of the police force in Essex focus around 'the '4Vs':

- Victims
- Vulnerability
- Violence
- Visibility

With this in mind, it was noted by ACC Nolan that Essex police has serious concerns over the proposed divestment of the 12 County owned GRT sites. These concerns were broken down into four categories:

- Operating context (i.e. incidents attended, crimes investigated and arrests made).
- Volume of enforcement
- Partnership working (data sharing etc.)
- Community Engagement
- Rights to intervene
- Public Safety and safety of public and social care visitors to sites.
- Consultation with site residents

Ownership was highlighted as one of the primary concerns for law enforcement officials. ACC Nolan outlined a significant pattern of enforcement and community engagement. Issues will arise if the sites are no longer in public ownership. The potential for impact on residents is huge. It was acknowledged that there is room for improvement under proposals to divest, but there is also the greater potential for a fall in standards. Access is needed to ensure adequate prevention, escorting of other agencies, and safeguarding and welfare. With any change in landlord, there will be tension, which could potentially spill out into community tensions.

A change in landlord also risks undermining and harming the good work that's taken place over the course of decades to build relationships with members of the GRT community living on these sites.

The weighting of the procurement exercise (70% towards price, 30% towards quality) is problematic. The police need adequate assurances that any landlord selected by this process will be socially responsible. Essex Police are happy to assist in the selection process.

Cllr Grundy thanked ACC Nolan for her contribution and put her comments and concerns to the panel for comment. Members were assured that the police are an integral part of this system and that they would form a central part of any consultation and decision-making process moving forward. ECC would ensure that a joint management plan is in place moving forward. ECC are taking part in an ongoing conversation with police partners and will work to enshrine standards to improve in future, rather than sliding backwards.

Cllr Grundy invited Cllr Reid to make a statement as requested. Points raised by Cllr Reid included:

- The need for a robust covenant to ensure that sites could not be subsequently designated as residential.
- The protection of rights for existing and future residents.
- Concerns over suggestions in the paper that wellbeing and education outcomes could be improved by proposals.
- The undermining of successful engagement work that's taken place in the past.
- The potential for displacement and rejection on the part of GRT communities.

Members of the committee were invited to ask questions and provide scrutiny to the content of the paper. Key points raised included:

- Right to buy – Members were assured that, as no decision had yet been made, all options were on the table.
- Commercial designation of land following 25 year covenant outlined in the paper – ECC doesn't want to tie the hands of districts and boroughs. Districts should be empowered, not constrained. All sites

need to be looked at in the context of local planning work currently taking place. ECC's preference is that the sites remain as designated GRT accommodation.

- The use of consultants - any local authority with assets often takes on the input of consultants, ECC have done the same and this is their advice.
- The sourcing strategy for potential landlords – the 70% cost/30% quality formula is standard with ECC commissioning exercises. EC will make sure that it divests responsibly, engaging with local residents. This proposal is not driven by the potential for financial gain, but by the desire to improve outcomes for local residents.
- Uncertainty in plans – this is understood. Communication have now begun with local residents to provide assurances over plans.
- The costs of physical and social wellbeing – It's impossible to tell at this stage who will pick up the cost of this.
- The benefits to a social landlord for taking on these sites – This is obviously not a particularly enticing investment opportunity, but we officers are certain that responsible landlords will welcome the opportunity to improve outcomes for residents. This isn't a mature market, but there is interest. ECC needs to ensure that potential investors are interested for the right reasons.
- Timeline for divestment – it would be irresponsible to provide a timeline at this stage. Each site would need to be looked at individually.

Following the question and answer session, Cllr Kendall Proposed the following motion:

This committee asks the cabinet member to reject option 2 (ECC divests itself of the sites based on current use), opting instead to accept option 1 (Do nothing and continue with current operations for both ECTU and ECC owned/leased sites).

The motion was seconded by Cllr Wood.

Following a vote the motion was defeated by 3 votes to 8.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked all those involved in the presentation.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that the next activity day was scheduled for Thursday, 16 July 2020.

There being no urgent business the public meeting closed at 13.20 pm

Chairman