

Planning & Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Minutes

Commencing 6pm

11 March 2003

Bourne Hill

Salisbury

Present

Councillor P D Edge (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs S M Thorpe (Vice Chairman)
Councillor K A Cardy
Councillor N S Gallop
Councillor Mrs J M Greville
Councillor J B Hooper
Councillor Mrs M A Peach
Councillor Mrs C A Spencer

Apologies

Councillor J Coundley
Councillor S J Howarth
Councillor Ms S C Mallory
Councillor I R Tomes

In Attendance

H Collar (SDC)
G Gould (SDC)
C Mills (SDC)
C Mawson (SDC)

SWEP Representative Invitees

Councillor Mrs S M Thorpe
Councillor I McLennan

Public/Observers

0

Public Questions/Statements

162. There were no public questions or statements.

Minutes

163. It was **agreed** that the minutes of the meeting of 11 February would be considered at the next Panel meeting owing to the fact that not all of the members of the Panel had received copies.

Declarations of Interest

164. Councillor Mrs Thorpe declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5 (Review of the Effectiveness of the South Wiltshire Economic Partnership (SWEP)) for the fact that she was a member of the SWEP Board. Councillor Mrs Thorpe remained in the room while the matter was being considered but did not take part in the interviewing or the discussion that followed.

Review of the Effectiveness of the South West Economic Partnership (SWEP) in Achieving its Objectives

165. The Chairman welcomed the SWEP Board Councillor Representatives to the meeting and accepted apologies tendered on the behalf of Councillor S G Sanders. The Chairman also welcomed Officers with responsibility for interacting with SWEP in pursuance of the District Council's Economic Development, Tourism and Marketing (and other appropriate) objectives to the meeting.

166. Panel Members then questioned the Representatives on a variety of matters relating to the Partnership. A note of the questions asked and the responses provided by the Board members is attached (see Annex A).

167. Following on from the above, Panel Members questioned Officers on a variety of matters relating to the Partnership. A note of the questions asked and the responses provided by the Board members is attached (see Annex B).

The key points to emerge from the above dialogues were **agreed** as being as follows:-

- Closer and more effective working arrangements between the District Council's Marketing, Economic Development and Tourism (MEDT) Unit and Development Services and Forward Planning and Transportation Units is required in order to ensure that the 'economic perspective' is taken into account when planning decisions are made and, most importantly, when planning proposals/the local plan are being developed. The involvement of SWEP in this working arrangement being important and the matter to be considered as a possible subject for scrutiny in the immediate future.
- The MEDT Unit, in liaison with the Forward Planning & Transportation Unit, should consider a mechanism whereby land allocated in the local plan for business use can be further designated. For example, for mixed/small business/industrial/craft/workshop/research and development use.
- Consideration should be given to altering the current, three Member, cross-party, Council representation on the SWEP Board. For example, consideration could, usefully, be given to reducing the number of representatives to two interested/committed Members (from any party) with the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder being required to attend Board (and Forum) meetings on a regular basis, perhaps as an 'observer' should attendance as a full member give rise to a perceived conflict of interest.
- Consideration should be given to increasing the number of Forum meetings held per year (say from two to four).
- Consideration should also be given to including update papers from public sector organisations/agencies (for example, from 'Job Centre Plus' and Business Link) as regular agenda items at Board meetings.
- The MOD and SWRDA should be actively encouraged to attend Forum meetings on a regular basis.

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- Further marketing, and PR activity on the behalf of SWEP should take place with consideration being given to utilising the annual District Council 'send out' of rates bills to inform all businesses of the activities of SWEP and benefits of membership. All Councillors should receive information (meeting dates and newsletters, for example) as a matter of course.
- SWEP comments on Planning applications should be passed to Development Services Unit (via the MEDT Unit) and, together with the comments of the MEDT Unit, be reproduced in full in planning reports placed before Area Committees (or the Planning & Regulatory Committee).
- Presentations detailing SWEP's aims, objectives, activities and relationship with the District Council should be given by SWEP members and relevant Officers to Area Committees on a regular basis. Businesses should be informed, in advance, of the presentations and invited to attend the relevant Area Committee meeting, where appropriate.
- A presentation, as above and including the Panel's Review recommendations, should be made at a full Council meeting after the 1 May 2003 election.
- A report, detailing the demand for, and availability of, office space in the city should be presented to the City Area (Planning & Licensing) Committee so as to further inform the Committee and facilitate its planning decision-making.

Panel Forward Work Programme 2003/04

168. Members **agreed** that the issues listed at Annex B of the Agenda be **recommended** to the incoming (following the 1 May 2003 election) P&ED O&S Panel as subjects for scrutiny in the forthcoming municipal year and **recommended** the following additional subject :-

- Investigation into people's perception of the Council's approach to Planning enforcement.

169. In addition, Members **agreed** that the Cabinet be requested to amend point six of the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Objectives to read :-

'The promotion of sustainable economic growth and economic opportunity for individuals and communities together with the promotion of economic development issues as part of the planning process.'

170. Members **agreed** that the Panel's forward work programme for 2003/04 would be agreed at the next Panel meeting and that the programme would be subject to confirmation by the members of Panel post 1 May 2003 elections.

Dates of Next Meetings

171. The forward meeting dates of the Panel were **agreed** as follows :-

- Tuesday 8 April 2003, commencing 1800hrs
- Tuesday 10 June 2003, commencing 1800hrs (provisional)

Panel Members: K A Cardy, J Coundley, P D Edge, N S Gallop, Mrs J M Greville, J B Hooper, S J Howarth, Mrs M M A Peach, Ms S C Mallory, Mrs C A Spencer, Mrs S M Thorpe, I R Tomes

- Tuesday 15 July 2003, commencing 1800hrs (provisional)

172. The Chairman informed Members that, should an early draft of the final version of the review of 'The Effectiveness of the South West Economic Partnership (SWEP) in Achieving its Objectives' become available for consideration by the Panel and should the situation allow, an additional Panel meeting would be arranged for the end of April 2003.

The meeting closed at 2000hrs.

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

MEETING OF 11 MARCH 2003

REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SOUTH WILTSHIRE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (SWEP)

QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION WITH SALISBURY DISTRICT COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE SWEP BOARD

Q1. What points about SWEP would the Representatives like to bring to the Panel's attention ? [PE]

A1. SWEP has become recognised, in business circles, as being a strong and representative voice of the business community in Salisbury and also, by other Councils, as being a 'good practice' example of business community/Council liaison. [ST]

The 'reputation' of the Partnership (including the fact that it has proved itself to be substantially more than a 'talking shop') together with the reputations and business 'standing' of those who give their time, voluntarily, to the Partnership (especially the business community electees to the Executive Board) have combined to good effect with the Partnership achieving measurable results. [ST]

The District Council representation on SWEP should be reconsidered in the light of changes to the political management structure (the introduction of a Cabinet and Leader model). For example, the current District Council representation on the SWEP Board consists of three Councillors, one from each representative party. However, the case for there being two Council representatives (possibly with one being a P&ED Overview and Scrutiny member) complemented by the attendance at meetings, possibly as an observer, of the relevant Portfolio Holder should be given serious consideration. The need for representation to be 'cross party' should also be reconsidered with preference being given to nominees expressing an interest in and a commitment to the subject. [ST & IMcL]

Representation, on SWEP, (possibly at Board level) by other public sector organisations/agencies might also be usefully considered. [ST]

The involvement in the Partnership by businesses in Salisbury is excellent, however, involvement by businesses elsewhere in the district is limited and measures aimed at encouraging their increased involvement should be considered. [ST]

The strengths of the Partnership include the following :-

- originated and driven by the business community but facilitated by the District Council;
- effective structure (since the introduction of the Executive Board and Members' Forum);

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- business community representatives of the Executive Board place the welfare and development (in the widest sense) of the District above all else. The advancement of personal business goals and/or strategies is not a feature of the SWEP Board;
- the adoption of a long term (to 2020) 'vision' in addition to medium and short term, practical goals;
- the collation and provision of local business information. For example, web-based information listing vacant business premises in the district and business marketing opportunities. [IMcL]

Q2. Should consideration be given to making it a requirement of the Board that one member be a non-city-based business representative ? [CS]

A2. Yes. A representative with a rural connection (for example, an NFU member) and/or from the north of the district would be a valuable addition. [ST]

Not necessarily. The strength of the current Board is its members' commitment to and interest in the economic development of the District as a whole. To stipulate that nominations for election to the Board should be representative of various interest groups/sectors might be to reduce the effectiveness of the Board (and, possibly, of the Partnership as a whole). Moreover, to increase the size of the Board to include a range of minority interest representatives in addition to the existing Board members, would make the Board 'unwieldy' as a decision-making entity. [IMcL]

Q3. What involvement does the MOD have with SWEP ? [JG]

A3. The MOD, although not present at every meeting, provides regular representation at Forum meetings. [ST]

Q4. What percentage of the SWEP mailing list contacts are Salisbury city area business representatives ? [NG]

A4. The mailing list reflects the business profile of the district; the majority of businesses being located in, or close to, the city. [GG (for ST & IMcL)]

Q5. How serious is the issue (raised by Board members at the P&ED O&S meeting of 14 January) of SWEP's apparent lack of opportunity to a) input into the local plan and b) contribute to increase the availability of business space (and particularly office space) in areas of the district where it is required by businesses ? [MP]

A5. Both issues are of great concern to SWEP and others (including Eric Teagle, Head of Forward Planning and Transportation, who has attended a SWEP meeting to speak on this matter) and have existed for some time. In addition, land that is allocated as appropriate for 'business use' in the local plan is not further classified as to the type of 'business use' suitable. This lack of provision for further classification results in land that might be suitable for a very specific type of business use not being allocated and land that has been allocated being open to development in a manner less suitable than had specific guidance (as to the type of development required) been given. [IMcL]

A facility that allows for SWEP input should be introduced into the new local plan process. [ST]

Q6. What changes (if any) would you make to SWEP ? [PE]

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A6. No changes recommended to the Board; its members are keen, committed, effective and meet and consult regularly. The Forum, however, could benefit from meeting more frequently (quarterly, as opposed to the current, twice yearly regime) and from the meetings being more dynamic 'information-sharing' (as opposed to 'information-receiving' by forum members) events. [IMcL]

The process by which the Partnership receives its funding allocation for the year ahead might usefully be improved, with the Partnership being invited by the Council (from which it receives 100 per cent of its funding) to place a bid for the required amount for the year. [IMcL]

Whilst on the subject of funding, it is worth noting that, historically, the Council's economic development budget was devolved to the Partnership to administer as it saw fit, within the Council's overall policy framework. The current system, by which the relevant Council Portfolio Holder informs the Partnership of its budget for the year ahead and the uses to which the funding is to be put, could be considered to be a retrograde step in the evolution of the Partnership and its relationship with the District Council. [ST]

Q7. Does the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) have direct input into SWEP ? What is SDC's position with regard to the WCC Brussels office ? What is the current position with regard to the redevelopment of the former RAF site at Chilmark ? [JH]

A7. The SWRDA policy is to deal only with seven sub-regional partnerships, one of which is the Wiltshire & Swindon Economic Partnership (W&SEP). It is, therefore, through the W&SEP that SWEP has links to the SWRDA and SWRDA-administered funding. [ST]

The District Council decided two years ago, for value for money reasons, not to continue with the arrangement with the County Council re its Brussels office. [ST]

The Chilmark Trust and the SWRDA are still in negotiations with the MOD re the purchase of the site. Should the purchase proceed, the SWRDA will put up the funding to service the site (in infrastructure terms) and the Trust will, over a prescribed time frame, re-imbursing the SWRDA. [ST]

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

MEETING OF 11 MARCH 2003

REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SOUTH WILTSHIRE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (SWEP)

QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION WITH SALISBURY DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICERS

Q1. SWEP Board members stated (when interviewed by Panel members at the Panel meeting of 14 January 2003) that the ‘business seminars’ offered by SWEP were to be discontinued from April 2003. However, a recent SWEP newsletter promoted such a seminar for July 2003 ?

A1. The last seminar of the series is to be held in May 2003 and this was arranged prior to the decision to discontinue seminars being made. No further seminars have been arranged beyond this date. The next bi-annual SWEP Forum (open to all partnership members) is to be held on 17 July 2003. [GG]

Q2. Should consideration be given to increasing the number of Forum meetings held each year ? [NG]

A2. From an Officer point of view, two Forum meetings per year are sufficient. The Executive Board, however, could benefit from receiving a regular ‘update report’ from the public sector agencies (for example, the Employment Service and Business Link) before the new organisational arrangements were introduced. [CM]

Q3. What amount of Officer time is dedicated to SWEP and what percentage of SWEP funding is provided by the District Council ? [JH]

A3. Approximately 2.2 fte Officers are deployed on SWEP activities (20 per cent of the time of the Head of Marketing, Economic Development and Tourism and 100 per cent of the time of both the Economic Development Manager and the Assistant Economic Development Manager.) SWEP receives all of its funding from the District Council [GG]

Q4. How appropriate is the Council’s present method of informing SWEP of its budget allocation for the year ahead ? [MP]

A5. Preliminary discussions between the Board members and MEDT Officers take place before the budget for the forthcoming year is announced at the relevant Board meeting. Attention needs to be paid at the Board meeting when the announcement is made to ensure that the budget decision is presented as not having been made by the District Council in isolation but with the agreement of SWEP. [GG]

Q5. What views do Officers have on the suggested need for more ‘joined up’ working’ between the Council’s MEDT Unit and Forward Planning and Transportation and Development Services Units ? [PE]

A5. The three Service Units now work far more closely together than used to be the case (although it should be noted that the Units have always had a good working relationship). The differing perspectives on development issues of each Unit result in differences of opinion occurring from time to time. The independence of SWEP in such instances can be advantageous in challenging views held by any one Unit. [GG]

With reference to the Unit’s input into the local plan process, the MEDT Unit has had difficulty in obtaining base information (for example, business statistics and local trends information) that could usefully be used to inform the development of the plan. It is hoped that this situation will be improved to enable the Unit to contribute more fully to the development of the new local planning process. [CM]

Q6. What methods (apart from ‘mailshots’ to existing members) are employed to raise the profile of SWEP, bring in new members and maintain the interest of existing members ? [NG]

A6. More opportunities exist for marketing SWEP and for PR than are currently being used. Newsletters are sent to existing members only and PR activity is carried out by SWEP members, particularly Board members, in an informal way. Newsletters and ‘mailshots’ could be sent to all businesses in the district (for example, by utilising the annual business rates letters mailing carried out by the Council) and methods of targeting various businesses and sectors could be introduced. [CM]

The Unit sends out frequent SWEP-related press releases and the Journal newspaper carries weekly business news stories. Business surveys carried out by the MEDT Unit indicate a high level of awareness of SWEP [GG]

Q7. What are the advantages, to businesses, of SWEP membership ? [PE]

A7. Membership of SWEP gives businesses a dedicated access route to the District Council, providing them with a ‘voice’ and an ability to contribute to the formulation of Council policy, thereby influencing the economic profile of the district. Networking opportunities also exist for businesses belonging to the partnership. [GG]

Q8. What changes would Officers make to SWEP and what other points (if any) would Officers like to raise ? [PE]

A8. Increased involvement in SWEP by the relevant Council Portfolio Holder would be welcomed as would Member involvement according to interest/commitment rather than according to party representational requirement. [CM & GG]

Promotion of the Council’s role in SWEP and work for the Partnership could, usefully and to the Council’s benefit, be increased. For example, by utilizing the ‘Citizen’ publication. [CM & GG]

SWEP’s recent action, to inform the Council that £16,000 - £17,000 of its 2003/04 budget would be likely to be unallocated and therefore was to be returned should be commended and noted should extra

funding be required by SWEP in future years, particularly to support work relating to the 'Economic Vision'. [CM]

Winchester City Council, who are undertaking a 'Best Value' Review of their Economic Development and Tourism Unit and who recently visited the District Council's MEDT Unit, were most interested to learn of and impressed with the arrangement that exists between the Council and SWEP. [GG]