

# Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

## Scrutiny Committee

HELD AT 6.30 PM ON TUESDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2016

MEETING ROOM 1, 135 MILTON PARK

### Present:

Richard Pullen (chairman)

Steve Connel, Margaret Davies, Paul Harrison, Jeannette Matelot, Sue Lawson, Toby Newman and John Walsh

### Apologies:

Elaine Hornsby, David Turner and Ian White tendered apologies.

### Officers:

Gerry Brough, John Dobson, Simon Hewings and Nicola Meurer

### Also present:

John Cotton, Jane Murphy and Elizabeth Gillespie

### 21 Minutes and actions arising and referral

The committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2016 were an accurate record of the meeting and the chairman signed them. There were no outstanding matters arising or referrals.

### 22 Declarations of interest

None.

### 23 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None.

### 24 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the scrutiny committee

None.



Listening Learning Leading

## 25 Berinsfield improvement programme

John Cotton, leader of the Council and ward councillor for Berinsfield, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions was Elizabeth Gillespie, cabinet member for development/building control, housing and grants and John Dobson, Science Vale development manager.

Chris Wheaton, the consultant team project lead from QUOD provided an overview of the project. He explained that the first stage of the programme; scoping and options, would take one month longer than planned to spend more time on community engagement. He set out the programme and explained the methodology for analysing the issues and opportunities and explained how the project would be evaluated to reach a final proposal.

Dan Knight, the communications lead representing Carmargue, updated the committee on community engagement. He explained that the project had involved an initial desktop study of existing information within the neighbourhood plan and community plan to determine priorities. The consultants have also worked with local community groups and local businesses and employers. The recent consultation event happened over three days using various activities to attract different types of people from across the community. About 180 people attended and the feedback, including over 300 comments at the events, is being analysed.

The headline feedback that came back from the community consultation was as follows:

- priority of having a new crossing to A4074 to access the bus stop;
- improving the shops at Fane Drive;
- car parking around the village;
- education provision;
- avoiding building in the central green area; and
- preventing the loss of community services.

The next step of community engagement will be to follow up the consultation with a letter to remind residents of the web presence to allow them to further contribute to the project. It is proposed that a range of options for investment and development of the villager will be presented to the public in early November 2016.

In response to questions and issues raised by the committee, the following was discussed:

- Although December 2017 is estimated to be the conclusion of the planning application process of the project, the consultants believe that there are earlier delivery options; to bring forward elements of community benefit such as the A4074 crossing.
- Current risks of the project are very local: previous use of the site; archaeological digs; utilities; and road capacity.
- Berinsfield parish council have been engaged with the project so far and have met with the consultants with the following priorities:
  - A4074 crossing;
  - drainage/sewage issues; and
  - the bus service.

- There is a concern for a rise in house prices; the consultants have identified the need for intermediate tenure housing and ensuring local people are able to stay in the area. Another option is to promote self-build opportunities.

## **26 Revenue and Capital Outturn**

Simon Hewings, chief accountant introduced this item. Also present to answer questions was Jane Murphy, deputy leader and cabinet member for finance, legal and democratic services.

The committee considered the head of finance's report on the financial outturn 2015/16. The committee noted the underspend tied up in projects not yet taken forward and discussed the report in detail, asking questions of the cabinet members and officers. The following points were raised:

- It is very difficult to predict planning income and there is a risk, in amending budgets upwards, should the amounts not be achieved.
- Recruitment and retention is still a problem within the planning service.
- The Didcot leisure centre hold-up is due to a lack of space to build, not financial reasons.
- The cabinet members will now take more responsibility for the budgets in their portfolios and will be available for questioning at scrutiny in the future.

## **27 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings**

The work schedule was noted. Committee was advised that the meeting on 31 January 2017 now includes an item on broadband connectivity.

The meeting closed at 7:30pm

Chairman

Date