

Environment and Green Investment Committee

Date: 28 April 2022

Time: 10.00am – 12:30pm

Venue: New Shire Hall

Present: Councillors L Dupré (Chair), N Gay (Vice Chair), A Bradnam, S Corney, P Coutts, S Ferguson, I Gardener, M Goldsack, R Hathorn, A Hay (substituting for Cllr Gowing) J King, B Milnes, C Rae and M Smith

62. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gowing (Cllr Hay substituting) and Tierney.

63. Minutes of the Environment & Green Investment Committee 3 March 2022 and Action log

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

The following points were raised on the Action Log:

Item 60 – a Member commented that it would be helpful if the piechart on the website, breaking down Council expenditure for Place and Economy, could provide further detail on Waste. Officers agreed to review this.

Item 49 - Construction materials under the Finance Monitoring Report – the Chair asked if an update could be provided at the next meeting as this was blank.

Item 45 – a Member asked why the figures for streetlighting energy consumption reduced year on year, but costs increased according to the text, as suggested by the notes below the table for this item. Was this an error? Officers agreed to follow this up and report back.

64. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

65. March Household Waste Recycling Centre Redevelopment

The Committee considered a report on the proposed relocation of the March Household Recycling Centre (HRC), from the current temporary location on Hundred Road, to a site adjacent to the existing waste transfer station on the corner of Melbourne Avenue and Hundred Road. The relocation is necessary as the existing site's planning permission is due to expire in 2024. The facilities on the proposed new site were noted, including split level design and a dedicated reuse shop. A number of designs had been considered, and pre-application discussions had been held with partners including planning and highways colleagues. The preferred design was option 2 which would be subjected to public consultation prior to formal planning submission. Any public consultation would include those designs that had been discounted and explain why the preferred option had been

selected. Officers outlined how they had considered the inclusion of a canopy, but there was no justifiable operational need at this stage to provide this feature, which would incur additional capital and revenue costs not currently allocated to the project.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that Option 2 included separate pedestrian and cyclist access, which was not a feature at all existing sites. The design also featured safe segregated access for Heavy Commercial Vehicles (HCVs) from residents entering the site.

Members noted that the new site was to the south of the current HRC and east of the existing waste transfer station, which butts on to Hundred Road, which was where the proposed new HRC access would be. A Member observed that the location was convenient and known by residents of March and surrounding area.

A Member commented that whilst agreeing in principle with most of the report recommendations, he felt that the site should be made as green as possible and the canopy should be incorporated to accommodate green energy generation infrastructure. He suggested that Option 2 had been selected as the canopy was more expensive and would require more effort. He suggested that the report should include the calculations for all options to enable Members to make an informed decision. Officers suggested that some ducting and space for additional equipment could be included in the detailed site design and construction proposals to allow retrofitting of green energy generation infrastructure if this proved feasible. Another Member suggested that the Planning Application should include the solar canopy so that resources could be saved in future i.e. it would not need to go through a second planning application process. Officers commented that there was currently no operational benefit, from a waste perspective, of having a canopy over the site, so a detailed appraisal including a canopy had not been developed at this stage. Moreover, to create a canopy to support solar panels would probably require a more robust canopy and additional cost. Timescales were quite tight to provide a new site, as the existing HRC needed to vacate its current location within a relatively short timeframe, and it would be undesirable for March residents to not have a HRC for any period of time.

Officers explained that, from a planning perspective, fundamentally any planning application needed to demonstrate how the proposal met “green” elements. Climate Change and futureproofing aspects would be included in the application, and options for a canopy could be an option at a later date. The recent experience of the solar canopy at Alconbury Weald car park had demonstrated how the robustness of these structures was critical. Facilitating infrastructure to enable solar generation at a later date was key, but the site energy use was unlikely to warrant a canopy of any significant scale and likely to be accommodated by green energy generation on the buildings proposed on the new site. Members were aware that the challenge with solar generation was often the ability and cost of connecting to the distribution network, if energy generated was in excess of the site’s requirements. In terms of carbon emissions, the issues around embodied carbon also needed to be considered. The Chair highlighted that the report clearly stated the process by which consideration of the technical and operational issues, such as need for a canopy, feed back into that mix.

Arising from the report:

- A Member welcomed the new recycling facility, but expressed concern that the addition of the canopy appeared to be discounted. She observed that if the decision was taken later to construct the canopy, the site would need to be closed anyway;
- A Member agreed that the default position was that the County’s estate should be used to generate as much renewable energy as possible, and if it was not, explanations

should be given in the report. He also suggested that the EV charging options for refuse vehicles needed to be factored in, as such schemes should take a long term view;

- A Member commented that a canopy to enclose the site and make it more pleasant for workers and site users was very different to a canopy to accommodate renewable energy generation infrastructure, and if the canopy was not required for the purposes of the application, it should not be incorporated;
- A Member asked if there was any potential conflict of interest for those Committee Members who were also Planning Committee Members. Officers advised that as the report was only seeking authority to go out to public consultation on a preferred design before formal planning submission, Members would not be pre-determining the application by making comments at this Committee;
- A Member stressed the importance of giving Parish/Town Councils early notice that the consultation would be issued, to ensure that they would have time to respond;
- The Committee noted that there were two sites currently undercover, Witchford, which was a new build split level site, and St Neots, which was a retrofitted site in an existing industrial building. Bluntisham was a split level site, without a canopy. The new Milton site was also designed to be split level without a canopy. Members discussed the merits of other HRCs, and the differences between a canopy to make the environment more pleasant for visitors and workers, and a canopy for generating green energy;
- A Member suggested waiting to see if the Environment Agency felt that a canopy was necessary for waste management purposes. Officers advised that until they had agreement to go out to consultation on a preferred design, they would not have sufficient detail to enter into pre-application discussions with the Environment Agency which also incurred a financial cost to the Council;
- A Member stressed that whilst he supported the scheme in principle, it was vital that projects coming forward maximised the level of green potential, and for that reason he requested that a separate vote be held on recommendation (c). The Chair commented that it was not possible to extricate recommendation (c) from the other report recommendations. She further suggested that the report demonstrated that a balance needed to be struck in terms of what could be achieved within the deadlines, whilst at the same time not ruling out canopies and providing the necessary green energy generation infrastructure, which could then be determined at a later date through the Capital Programme Board and the Strategy & Resources Committee;
- Members discussed the challenges of connecting to the distribution network, noting that there was always a cost of connecting to the grid, but these costs could be very significant in areas where there was a deficit of infrastructure on distribution networks. It was agreed that a briefing on how this process worked would be helpful for Committee Members. **Action required;**
- In response to a Member comment, officers advised that the Alconbury Weald solar canopies were designed to British and European Standards, and were robust and properly engineered. However, difficulties had been experienced as a result of climate change and more frequent extreme weather events, which may mean that those Standards needed to be revised to address an increased frequency of extreme weather events.

It was resolved, by a majority, to:

- a) support the recommendation in paragraph 2.2 to relocate the March Household Recycling Centre to land adjacent to March Waste Transfer station located on Melbourne Avenue.
- b) support the recommendation in paragraph 2.7 to take forward design Option 2 for further design development, public consultation (as set out in point d) below) and a planning submission (that takes account of the consultation feedback set out in point e) below),
- c) agree to decouple the Household Recycling Centre relocation and construction project from wider considerations around the potential need to construct a canopy at the site through the Environment Agency's (EA's) permitting regime. Noting that if such a canopy is required by the EA the potential to accommodate green energy generation infrastructure, to allow energy developments can be reviewed and progressed in a separate planning application, if feasible (see paragraph 2.8).

Members are asked to delegate responsibility to the Executive Director Place and Economy in consultation with the Chair and Vice chair of Environment and Green Investment Committee to:

- d) carry out pre-application consultation with the local community on the preferred site design option, to include reference to all the initial designs considered with an explanation of how the decision was reached to select a preferred option;
- e) agree how any significant issues that are raised during public consultation will be addressed in the final design, which can be evidenced in the planning application submission;
- f) prepare and submit a planning application to relocate the March Household Recycling Centre to land adjacent to March waste transfer station, where it can be expanded and redeveloped as a split level facility.

66. Land West of the Avenue, March: Planning Consultation Response (F/YR21/1497/O)

The Committee considered the proposed response to a planning application for 1200 dwellings and associated infrastructure on land in the west of March. This planning application had been submitted to Fenland District Council (FDC), and the County Council was a statutory consultee. FDC had allocated land in this area in The Fenland Local Plan (2014), under Policy LP9, for up to 2000 dwellings. The main issues for relevant County Council service areas were noted. Since 2019, the applicant had held pre-application discussions, including contact with County Council services, which had shaped the Council's proposed response. Members noted those areas where the Council still had holding objections, which were Highways and as Local Lead Flood Authority, where there were a number of outstanding issues.

Arising from the report:

- In response to a Member question on the off-site secondary school provision, it was confirmed that Neale Wade Academy was the nearest secondary school. The

County Council would be seeking a contribution per additional pupil in mitigation, for approximately 300 additional pupils. It was confirmed that there was not currently sufficient secondary education capacity in March;

- A Member asked if the County Council was making every effort to ensure the permeability of the site, including connections to other residential areas, countryside (including Rights of Way), shopping, schools etc. Officers advised that there was a holding objection from the Transport team around permeability, traffic movements and public transport, with the Transport team keen to see more routes and permeability into the development. Rights of Way were critical in this regard, but improving existing Rights of Way alone would not be sufficient, especially to the east of the development, where more were required. The public Right of Way network beyond the town of March was quite poor, and opportunities to enhance it would be welcomed. Officers agreed to raise some of the detailed points highlighted by the Member with Transport colleagues;
- Discussed Community Heat Zones (CHZs), following on from the CUSPE presentations about CHZs at a previous Committee meeting. It was noted that CHZs were not currently in Local Plans as a mechanism to compel or require developers to install heat networks. For this application, the key consideration was to ensure good energy efficient standards: the Future Homes standard, which would be coming forward in 2025, would require new homes to be 75% more efficient. The homes coming forward should ideally accommodate space to enable Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs) or heat networks to be installed in future, and also allocate space for energy centres. It was noted that developers were regularly challenged at the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel on these issues, especially space for adaptation, and there were a number of issues that could be taken up under Reserved Matters and Design Coding about indoor and outdoor space. However, this would be an addendum to the response, and would probably not be resolved until the detailed planning stage. The Chair stressed the importance of flagging up as much as possible at an early stage;
- There was a discussion around the 0.7 hectares of land described as green “extension land” for the southern primary school. A Member asked if the County Council could stipulate that the land was not used for heavy plant storage during the construction phase. She was concerned that if this happened, the existing biodiversity would be destroyed, and the land would become compacted and nothing would grow. It was noted that this “proposed primary school extension land” would only be used to expand the first primary school in event there was no demand for the second primary school. The developers could be asked to retain this as green space for the expansion of the school, and if it was not required, retained as green open space. Members agreed that the point raised about not using this land as plant storage space should be made as part of the response;
- In response to a query on zero carbon schools, it was noted that whilst the County Council was committed to deliver zero carbon schools, there was nothing in policy to require developers to fund zero carbon schools;
- Noting the developer contribution for bus services, with half hour frequency to March town centre, Peterborough and Ely, a Member asked why Ely had been selected, when there was direct rail link? She suggested there were opportunities to connect to other communities e.g. Chatteris and communities towards the Guided Busway at Longstanton, to provide new connections into Cambridge. Officers agreed that there may be opportunities to expand bus services in different directions, rather than Ely.

The Democratic Services Officer read out comments from one of the Local Members, Councillor Steve Count (attached at Appendix 1).

In response to the points raised by Councillor Count, officers:

- Advised that BT Openreach had a statutory duty to share infrastructure, but this was enforced by Ofcom rather than the planning authority. At least four fibre providers had been accommodated by BT Openreach in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough;
- In terms of the S106 funding, FDC were currently prioritising affordable housing and developments should always achieve 25% affordable housing. This was a challenge for the County Council and NHS in terms of providing services for the new development. Regarding Councillor Count's point around S106 requests not being to the detriment of existing residents, it was noted that the County Council could only ask for contributions to mitigate based on this development only, i.e. it would not be appropriate to target existing deficits in infrastructure. The response was very specific on this, and the Council needed to be mindful of what was necessary and relevant to the development;
- Officers responded on the comments regarding drainage strategy, advising that based on the Flood Risk Assessment, there should be no major flood risk issues for the site. However, there was still a holding objection on flood risk grounds, as it was unclear how individual housing parcels would manage, store and transfer their water to the strategic balancing ponds so this needed to be resolved. In terms of ongoing SUDS maintenance, options being considered included the local highway authority adopting some structures, and for Anglian Water to be involved. In terms of maintenance there were wider considerations regarding flooding on the highways network. Lead Local Flood Authority colleagues had advised that at the outline stage it was not usual to have this level of detail, as adoption of drainage systems was dealt with once those systems had been designed and approved.

A number of Members commented on the extent of flooding, noting that a number of areas of the site and adjacent areas were at a high risk of flooding, and that extreme weather events had become more frequent.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Endorse the consultation response to the West March planning application as set out in Appendix 1; and
- b) Delegate to the Executive Director (Place and Economy) in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee the authority to make minor changes to the response.

67. Environment & Green Investment Committee Agenda Plan and Training Plan and Appointments to Outside Bodies and Internal Advisory Groups and Panels

Members noted the Agenda Plan.

The Chair strongly encouraged Members to attend the Carbon Literacy training, and to encourage their colleagues to do so too.

68. Exclusion of Press and Public

It was resolved unanimously that:

the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following item contains exempt information under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

69. Waste Management PFI Contract – Update on Variations to Waterbeach Facility Permits

The Committee considered an update on the Waterbeach waste processing facilities, specifically the In-Vessel Composting (IVC) facility and Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) facility.

It was resolved unanimously to agree the report recommendations.

APPENDIX 1 - Application on March West response: comments from Local Member Councillor Count

Dear committee, I am generally in favour of the points in the technical response, however I have some comments I wish you to consider, whether further refinements could be made.

Regarding digital infrastructure, where broadband is to be provided by BT Openreach. I have experience of BT not allowing competitors to access their ducting. The only option then is to dig up the streets at a later date to install further ducting and connecting to alternative providers. I am perfectly content for BT Openreach to be the original provider however believe this can only be on the basis that the ducting has capacity and is available for wholesale providers that allow open access.

For the residents of March, their keenest interest is probably in terms of any impact on flooding. Attenuation basins are proposed with an agreed discharge rate. Whilst this rate may or may not be appropriate (I am no engineer) under normal circumstances, the present surface water system in March is easily overwhelmed. Therefore, proposals should be tested at much more extreme scenarios, than may normally prove necessary in other parts of the county. Furthermore, I understand SUDS are to form part of the proposals. I believe SUDS require maintenance over the years. So any proposal would need to incorporate a service plan and permanent funding proposal to deal with that.

In terms of S106 funding, the County has made a number of comments as to what it expects. You are all no doubt aware there are always greater aspirations for funding than a site allows, and this plays out to a greater extent in Fenland. This is due to lower property values than any other part of the County. Whilst there will be negotiations to be had, as to who gets what, I believe the impact of this development should avoid any potential detriment to the people already resident in the Town of March, rather than using a tick box exercise of the County gets the first or lions share. For example: Should there be a need for extra GP capacity or extra schools the funding can go either way, with the NHS or CCC or Government making up the shortfall. Therefore, when the S106 request list is first examined, rather than striking out those with the least ability to argue their case, so something is not delivered, it is vital that the alternative means of funding are utilised so the site delivers all requirements to make it viable, without negatively impacting on the people of March.

Thank you all for taking these points on board and hope you can incorporate some of this thinking in a final version.