

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

**Held on Thursday, 29 May 2008 at 2.15 pm in the  
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mrs D.K.R. Irving
Mr A.J. Byrne	Mr A.P. Joel
Mr J.P. Cowen (Chairman)	Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr R.F. Goreham (Vice-Chairman)	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mrs S.R. Howard-Alpe	Mr J.D. Rogers

**In Attendance**

Mark Broughton	- Scrutiny Officer
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Member Services Officer

**41/08 MINUTES**

(a) 17 April 2008

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(b) 13 May 2008

A correction was made to the first line of the final paragraph on page 15 in minute 39/08 changing the word "walked" to "driven". Subject to this correction, the minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**42/08 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Messrs. K. Martin and B. Rose.

**43/08 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

The following declarations were made:

- Mr. J.D. Rogers – Personal and prejudicial interest in relation to LDF matters affecting Carbrooke generally and as he had submitted an application to include land in his ownership in the LDF in connection with the minutes of Panel 1 under agenda item 8.
- Mr. R.G. Kybird – Personal interest by virtue of his profession as a builder in relation to LDF matters in connection with the minutes of the meeting of Panel 1 under agenda item 8.
- Mr. M. Kiddle-Morris – Personal interest as recorded under minute 21/08 of the meeting of Policy Development and Review Panel 1 held on 6 May 2008.
- Mr. A.P. Joel – Personal interest as member of Old Buckenham Parish Council in relation to minute 26/08 of the last meeting, as

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the village had a post office listed for closure.

- Mr. S.G. Bambridge – Personal interest by virtue of his profession in relation to LDF matters under the minutes of Panel 1 under agenda item 8 and in regard to agenda item 6 as his village had a payphone box listed for removal.
- Mr. P. Cowen – Personal interest by virtue of his profession as an architect in practice in relation to LDF matters in connection with the minutes of Panel 1 under agenda item 8.

**44/08 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

Member of the public from Necton in regard to agenda item 6.

**45/08 BT PUBLIC PAYPHONES RATIONALISATION PROPOSALS IN BRECKLAND (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

Mr. Derek Seaton and Mr. Martin John of BT were in attendance to speak on this item and answer questions.

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which set out the background to the proposals by BT to remove 65 public payphone services across Breckland and the issues involved. The report included a breakdown provided by BT of the usage figures for the affected payphones. Since the report was prepared, it was noted that the payphone at Eastfields, Narborough had been added to the list of proposed closures; the usage figure given for this box was 97 calls in the last 12 months.

BT's public consultation period was due to end on 2 July 2008. The Council had written to all town and parish councils in the district for their views and a list of the responses to date was circulated at the meeting, as follows:

Town/Parish	Payphone Location	Object / Agree to removal
Ashill	Goose Green	Agree
Billingford	Festival Road	Object
Caston	The Green	Object
Cranworth	Woodrising	Object
Cranworth	Swathing	Object
Dereham	Shipdham Road	Object
Dereham	Moorgate Road	Object
Hardingham	High Common	Object
Hilborough	Westgate Street	Object
Hockering	The Street	Object
Holme Hale	Browns Lane	Agree
Holme Hale	Cook Road	Object
Horningtoft	Fakenham Road	Agree
Lt Cressingham	Watton Road	Object
Mattishall	Welgate	Object
Oxborough	Oxborough	Object
Sporle	South Acre Road	Agree
Swanton Morley	Primrose Square	Agree
Swanton Morley	Greengate	Agree
Thetford	Glebe Close	Object
Thetford	Anne B'olomew Road	Object
Wellingham	Wellingham	Object
Wretham	Watton Road	Agree

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Mr. Seaton then explained BT's proposed closure programme, the main reasons for closure being:

- Significant decreases in usage – overall usage had halved over the last three years.
- Unprofitability, with some 65% of payphones being identified as unprofitable.
- Increased use of mobile telephones (90% of the population had mobiles) and the increased number of homes now having a telephone landline.
- Vandalism and theft, the resultant increased cost of reinstatement/repair and maintenance making sites unviable.

A member questioned the inclusion of sites at Anne Bartholomew Road and Glebe Close, Thetford, which had some of the highest use figures. The site at Anne Bartholomew Road was located near to a large school and that at Glebe Close was important for migrant workers in that area. While many children had mobiles, access to a payphone was still considered a necessity for those who did not and who were likely to be the most vulnerable. For these reasons, it was argued these payphones should be retained.

It was explained that the Anne Bartholomew Road site had been subjected to repeated robbery and vandalism and had been identified for closure on grounds of cost associated with that. Even if it was changed to a cashless facility, such units typically only saved about 20% of the overall costs. However, an undertaking was given that BT would specifically review the case for the site at Anne Bartholomew Road.

So far as cashless facilities were concerned, it was noted that phone card facilities had been abandoned some years ago and current cashless provision was by way of credit/debit card or reverse charge calling. The extension of such provision was supported by members.

The case for the social value of payphones in the rural areas was strongly made by members. While it was accepted some boxes were not profitable, there was still a need for facilities for use in emergencies and to take account of the fact that the adequacy and strength of signal reception for mobile telephones was still a problem in some areas.

So far as the unit at Shipdham Road, Dereham, was concerned, it was explained that although this payphone had high usage, it had also suffered five robberies in the last few months. In such cases, BT carried out a cost analysis and while usage might be high, where the cost of maintaining such boxes exceeded call use, such sites would be considered for closure.

While more frequent collection of monies from boxes had been piloted to address the issue of theft, the results showed robbery still occurred (in fact, even more frequently) and although less money was being taken, the costs to BT remained.

Members also raised the issue of the standard of reinstatement of sites following removal of boxes. It was explained that reinstatement was made to the original condition of the site as far as possible. Another

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Member suggested the alternative option of offering the defunct boxes (once the equipment was removed) to the local parish council to obviate the need for removal of the box and reinstatement of the ground. It was noted, however, that while this option had been explored, the present Licence under which BT Payphones operated did not permit this approach, but the idea was still being pursued.

Other options to address changes in the pattern of usage included a managed payphone service in shops, pubs or other outlets but there had been a decline in take up of this by proprietors.

Members strongly reiterated the case for recognition of the social value and importance of payphones in the rural villages, particularly in such a rural area as Breckland where 51% of the population lived in the villages and where other services were also being lost. It was felt that BT had a duty to maintain a service in the villages and, although it was recognised that BT Payphones was an independent business from the parent BT Company, and it was felt to be incumbent on BT to address the special needs of rural areas.

In the case of sites in the Dereham area, it was reported by a Member that Dereham Town Council opposed any removals unless they were supported by evidence of persistent anti social behaviour associated with them.

BT was urged to take a much more proactive and positive approach to how it might grow its business more constructively as an alternative to closing facilities, particularly bearing in mind the potential from the planned growth of the district.

Mr. John replied that BT was looking at new revenue streams for payphones, including advertising and ATM units for example.

In concluding the debate, the Commission agreed to a proposition to appoint a working group to look at the responses from the town and parish councils and to draw together relevant information to enable a formal response to be formulated for submission by the consultation deadline of 2 July.

Accordingly, it was

**RESOLVED** that

- (1) a Task and Finish Group be appointed, with the following membership: Mrs. S.M. Matthews, Mrs. D. Irving and Mr. M. Kiddle-Morris;
- (2) the Task and Finish Group be given delegated power to formulate a response on behalf of the Commission for submission to BT to meet the consultation deadline of 2 July 2008; and
- (3) the findings of the Task and Finish Group be reported back to the Commission at its next meeting on 10 July 2008.

Mark  
Broughton

Action By

**46/08 BRECKLAND DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME - YEAR 1 REVIEW  
(AGENDA ITEM 7)**

The Policy Officer (Equalities) presented the report and explained the background to the Year One review of the Breckland Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan covering the period December 2006 – December 2009. The Commission's views were sought prior to consideration of the report by the Cabinet on 10 June 2008.

Members questioned the Action that "for all new housing schemes in the market towns (of a suitable size and nature to trigger an affordable housing contribution), the Council will seek at least one wheelchair bungalow as new provision". It was felt that this could be discriminatory against people with other types of disability and removed freedom of choice both from an individual's point of view and that of developers as it would dictate where the provision should be located. There were also cost implications arising from the various design features that would be needed to address all the different types of disability to fully equip a dwelling. The Council needed to be clear about the needs and level of disability it was attempting to address through this provision. Members were also concerned that this Action was related only to the market towns of the District and felt that the needs of the rural villages also needed to be considered. A member also questioned the calculation of the quota, i.e. one wheelchair bungalow on sites of over 25 units; the Member felt that this should be reflected in % terms so that the provision of these homes went up proportionately with the size of the site.

For these reasons, it was felt there was a need for this Action to be reviewed.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet be asked to take into account the Commission's views regarding a need to review the definition of the Action as outlined above.

**47/08 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANELS (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

(a) Panel 1 - Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 6 May 2008

(i) LDF Core Strategy and Development Control Policies:  
Preferred Options Consultation (Minute 21/08)

Attention was drawn to the concern raised about the issue of a 40% affordable housing target on new developments. While it was noted that the challenge in this regard had been in relation to the evidence from the Housing Market Assessment used in arriving at this target, a member felt it would be useful for Panel 1 to discuss the difference between the East of England's affordable housing target of 35% compared to Breckland's proposed 40% target.

(ii) Adoption

**RESOLVED** that the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of Policy Development and Review Panel 1 held on 6 May 2008 be adopted.

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(b) **Panel 2 - Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2008**

(i) **Mental Health Issues (Minute 12/08)**

The Chairman of the Panel reported that this had been a very good debate that had addressed members' concerns.

A member highlighted the problems that arose from the fact that Thetford fell within a separate delivery structure to Norfolk so far as mental health services were concerned and the difficulties this posed for joined-up working and provision of services.

Another member felt that there were gaps in mental health service provisions, for example the lack of drop-in centres, and the need to look at outreach services. In this connection, it was noted there was a consultation presently under way in Norfolk on a GP drop-in service.

(ii) **Culture Update (Minute 13/08)**

The Chairman of the Panel recorded members' congratulations to the officers on the success and growth of the sports and arts development programmes.

(iii) **Adoption**

**RESOLVED** that the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of Policy Development and Review Panel 2 held on 8 May 2008 be adopted.

**48/08 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

The Chairman outlined the following priority areas for future scrutiny review in the work programme:

- Business Transformation – to look at the processes involved in this fundamental change project
- Local Strategic Partnership – to look at relationship of objectives between the LSP and Breckland and to monitor achievements.
- Market towns and their feeder villages – to understand their needs and issues and feed these through to the LSP.
- Primary Care Trust – to look at how PCT and other health providers will meet needs of Thetford Growth Point to ensure adequate planning. Include taking evidence from local doctors' and dental practices.
- Thetford Growth Point – to understand background and issues to work of this major project.

It was noted that there was now a small budget for research work which could be utilised to support these reviews.

A member drew attention to the need to avoid duplicating work currently

being carried out by the Norfolk Health Scrutiny Committee and also work on mental health by carried out by the County Council.

Other issues for future scrutiny or monitoring included:

- Business Plan 2008-14
- Dog & Pest Control Services – allocate to Panel 3
- Economic Development
- CCTV – scheduled in programme for September 2008
- Car Parks Review
- Street Lighting Levy – allocate to Panel 2
- Empty Homes Policy - allocate to Panel 2
- Affordable Housing – existing item allocated to Panel 3
- Political Management Structure – to monitor results from changes
- Post Offices Network Change Programme – to monitor progress/outcomes
- Royal Mail – to look at impact on post boxes in light of post office closures

It was suggested Task and Finish Groups be established for the following reviews:

1. Thetford Growth Point
2. Market Towns and Villages
3. CCTV

It was agreed the Task and Finish Groups should be chaired by a Member from the Overview and Scrutiny Commission with two other members drawn from other non-Executive members of the Council and that the chairmanship of the Market Towns and Villages Groups should not be a member of the market town in question.

**RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Officer be asked to make adjustments to the future work programme and to establish the Task and Finish Groups as proposed above.

Mark  
Broughton

#### **49/08 NEXT MEETING**

The arrangements for the next meeting on 10 July 2008 were noted.

#### **Chairman's Closing Remarks**

The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking outgoing members Mrs. T. Hewett and Mr. C. Jordan for their contribution and work on behalf of the Commission and welcomed Mr. M. Kiddle-Morris and Mr. A.C. Stasiak as new members of the Commission.

The meeting closed at 4.25 pm

CHAIRMAN