ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT of a meeting held on 29 November 2012

Members of Committee:

* A.J. Hopkins (Chairman)
* B.J.F. Cheyne (Vice-Chairman)

* M. Axton
* I.T. Donaldson
* C.J. Elmer
* B.W. Fairclough
* G. Herbert
* A.C. Kelly
* Mrs. R.J.M. Lyon
* Mrs. M. Odone
* Mrs. L.M. Samuels

δ F. Dabell
* Mrs. E.E. Dünweber
* B. Fairbank
* R.J. Gray
* Mrs. T. Izard
* Rachael I. Lake
* Mrs. R. Mitchell
* C.R. Sadler

* Denotes attendance
δ Denotes Substitution

(δ Mrs. J. Turner was present as a temporary substitute for F. Dabell.)

(N.C. Cooper, Ms. B.A. Cowin, Mrs. C.J. Cross, Mrs. C. Elmer and J. O’Reilly were also present.)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In respect of agenda item 2 - ‘Discussion with HP-Projects regarding the project to develop Hydro Power at Sunbury Weir’ (Minute No 3 refers), whilst not a disclosable pecuniary or other interest under the Code of Conduct, C.J. Elmer wished that it be noted that he was a member of the Thames Anglers’ Conservancy and a member of the Angling Trust which incorporates Fish Legal. Fish Legal had recently secured an injunction to stop a hydropower development on the River Trent at Sawley Weir.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET ON 9 JANUARY 2013

2. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE CONSULTATIVE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2012

(Link to Council Priorities: A5, A6, P4, P5)

The Committee considered a report with regard to the recommendations of the Countryside Consultative Group in respect of a request for a new path to be constructed across Downside Common.
In June 2012 the Council had received a request from St Matthews Infant School for consideration of a new path across Downside Common. The proposed path would run from the Cricketers Public House across the common to the School. The Ward Councillors had been canvassed and had expressed their support for a path.

Following initial contact with Leisure and Cultural Services, and an on site meeting with representatives from the School with the Countryside Team, an alternative route for a path was suggested. The School had indicated that they would undertake fundraising activities to meet the cost of the path.

One Member enquired whether there had been any liaison with Surrey County Council’s Safe Routes to School Scheme as they considered that it would be a great opportunity for them to be involved. The Committee supported this suggestion.

In this regard, the Committee endorsed the recommendations from the Countryside Consultative Group and suggested liaison with the Surrey County Council’s Safe Routes to School Scheme:

RECOMMENDED: THAT
A) APPROVAL BE GIVEN TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PATH ACROSS DOWNSIDE COMMON ADJACENT TO THE TRACK LEADING TO THE CRICKETERS PUBLIC HOUSE FOR THE BENEFIT OF LOCAL RESIDENTS; AND

B) SURREY COUNTY COUNCILS SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL BE LIAISED WITH IN THIS REGARD.

MATTERS OF REPORT

3. DISCUSSION WITH HP-PROJECTS REGARDING THE PROJECT TO DEVELOP HYDRO POWER AT SUNBURY WEIR

(Link to Council Priorities: Commitment to our Community)

The Committee received a presentation from Paul Parker, Technical Director and John Heather of Heather-Parker Projects (HP-Projects) in relation to a Hydro Power development at Sunbury Weir. HP-Projects had been chosen by the Environment Agency to develop this installation, which consisted of four Archimedes Screws located within the island and the existing weir at Sunbury. The development site would also incorporate a pond, a fish pass together with improvements and maintenance for the Kayaking community.

The four Archimedes Screws would sit within concrete channels and be angled through the island. The existing metal footpath by the weir would also be moved back from its current position. It was envisaged that the machinery would be screened by extensive planting and landscaping. The current fish
ladder at the weir was not deemed to be very effective and would often become clogged. The new fish pass would improve the passage for both fish and eel species and facilitate greater upstream migration. Archimedes Screws were the preferred technology of the Environment Agency due to the minimal impact on downstream migration of fish. Multiple studies had concluded that fish could pass unhindered through the screws and would suffer minimal damage if hit.

The Screws could generate approximately 500kW, 1.9GWh yield per annum of clean green renewable energy which would be sufficient for about 600 homes. Other tangible benefits could include the potential for community ownership through a share issue, a portion of the profits being donated to a dedicated community fund, community re-investment in further low-carbon projects and carbon saving (1,000 tons per annum). The electricity would be sold to the grid and revenue would be obtained from the Government’s feed in tariffs which would guarantee index-linked payments for 20 years.

There were a number of funding routes available for the development which included the following: Community Share Issue; Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS); Venture Capital Trust (VCT) funding; Traditional credit from banks etc. and through Grants.

During the development of a hydropower scheme, a number of detailed environmental assessments were required to be undertaken. These included a flood risk assessment, environmental site audit carried out by the Environment Agency’s approved consultants and the design of the fish pass. In addition, all schemes were required to hold a licence issued from the Environment Agency for operation. At this stage HP-Projects were going through a pre-application process for the licence and were at a 90% completion stage. It was also highlighted that a planning application would be submitted to Elmbridge Borough Council in the New Year.

The Committee thanked Mr Parker and Mr Heather for the informative presentation and took the opportunity to ask questions.

A number of matters were raised by members that included what the overall size and appearance of the Archimedes Screws would be, how would any noise related issue created by the Hydropower development be addressed and whether there had been any planning problems identified considering that the development site was located within the Green Belt.

Mr Parker responded to the matters raised and advised that there would be a further opportunity for discussion on this Hydropower scheme at a meeting being held the following at the Elmbridge Xcel leisure complex.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINDINGS OF TASK AND FINISH GROUP REVIEWING THE ELMBRIDGE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

(Link to Council Priorities: P1, P2, P3)
The Committee considered a report that outlined the key findings and recommendations from the Task and Finish Group that had reviewed the Elmbridge Community Safety Partnership (ECSP).

A meeting of the Task and Finish Group was held in November 2012 and the following areas were discussed: CCTV, Police Crime Commissioner, Partnership Working, Antisocial Behaviour Legislation, Crime Figures and the Partnership Action Plan. The Group also received a presentation on the achievements and challenges of the Partnership from the Elmbridge Community Safety Partnership Manager.

The Task and Finish Group had fulfilled its terms of reference as set out by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee however the findings had identified a number of general community safety issues that fell outside of the remit of the Partnership that the Group felt warranted further consideration. These included an update on the Council’s CCTV arrangements and a review of the benefits of the co-location with Surrey Police. It was recommended that the terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group be amended to reflect this.

The Task and Finish Group recommended that a further meeting be held in February 2013.

In this regard the Committee,

AGREED that

(a) the findings of the Task and Finish Group reviewing the Elmbridge Community Safety Partnership be agreed;

(b) it be noted that the Task and Finish Group had fulfilled its requirement to scrutinise the decisions made and other actions taken by the Elmbridge Community Safety Partnership;

(c) the report of the Task and Finish Group be circulated to the Elmbridge Community Safety Partnership for information;

(d) the terms of reference of the Task and Finish Group be extended to review community safety matters within the control of Elmbridge Borough Council; and

(e) the Police Crime Commissioner be invited to attend a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5. SCRUTINY OF CABINET MEMBERS

The Portfolio Holders for Community Development and Corporate Development were invited to attend the meeting to provide an update on the work currently being undertaken as part of their Portfolios, highlighting any
issues or challenges and providing Members of the Committee with an opportunity to ask relevant questions.

The Committee welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Community Development to the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted three main areas from the Community Development Portfolio under the following headings: Our Delivery - Alcohol Awareness Project, Our Leadership - Elmbridge Enterprise and Our Future - the Family Support Package.

One of the Elmbridge Community Partnership main priorities for 2011/12 was Alcohol Awareness. A number of activities were undertaken to increase awareness of sensible drinking limits. This included a competition for local schools whereby an Alcohol Awareness film was produced to promote the idea for parents to think about reducing their alcohol intake. The message made was not necessarily to stop drinking but to reduce the intake. Another project currently being undertaken was in support of the National Alcohol Awareness Week. A competition was being held to create a non-alcoholic cocktail drink called a “Mocktail”. The winning mocktail would be featured on the Council’s website and it was hoped that local licensed premises would offer the drink for sale over the Christmas period. Alcohol Awareness was an on-going project and work would continue during 2013 and this would be more important with the changes that were happening to public health.

Enterprise Elmbridge was a key project for the next year. It had been acknowledged that a commitment in support of Enterprise Elmbridge was needed to be made and built upon to support the Elmbridge economy. A number of areas had been identified and acted upon including the agreement of the Enterprise Elmbridge Action Plan, the Business Charter and the allocation of a budget. In addition a recent successful recruitment exercise had procured a dedicated Economic Development Officer and it was anticipated that they would commence work within the next month.

The Portfolio Holder advised that a future key area of work would be the Family Support Package, which would look at how families in need could be supported. It was confirmed that Surrey County Council had provided £245,000 of funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government to work with Spelthorne Borough Council in the development of this project. There would be a joint team who would work with families in need over the coming years. The key to the project was to provide family support through one family support co-ordinator. The project would commence in March 2013 and complete in 2015 and further information would be provided as the programme developed.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for Community Development for her update and invited Members of the Committee to ask any questions.

In answer to a question on how the recent increase in parking fees and
charges this was not an area within the Community Development Portfolio remit however the concerns would be raised with the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport.

A Member enquired whether the Corporate Plan target relating to an increase of 10% in the number of residents to be made aware of sensible drinking guidelines, given that the target date was by November 2012, had been met. The Portfolio Holder advised that unfortunately this information could not be provided at that time however it would be provided to Members following the meeting.

The Committee then welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development to the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted the following four main areas from the Corporate Development Portfolio: Customer Service Excellence, Emergency Planning, Elections and Communications.

The Committee was pleased to note that the Council gained Customer Service Excellence in July 2012. Elmbridge achieved 100% compliance in all 57 elements of the inspection which put the Council at the top of the local authority sector. The external assessor said that the authority was “…found to have a deep understanding and a commitment to Customer Service Excellence. The commitment was found from Senior Management levels through to operation and front line staff”. Elmbridge was one of only a few Councils in the Country that had received this recognition nationally and it was a great achievement that should not be underestimated.

The Portfolio Holder explained that the Council had a significant role in preventing, mitigating and dealing with the impact of major incidents that could strike suddenly, unexpectedly and anywhere. An example of this was the Olympic Cycling Events held this summer, whilst not an actual incident, the potential of having over 1 million visitors to the area meant that all emergency plans needed to be robust enough to cater for any potential issues that could have arisen. To enable this, the Council’s Borough Emergency Control Centre arrangements had been adapted to form a Borough Olympic Control Centre to carry out its responsibilities.

With regard to Elections, the Council had undertaken 3 different elections during the year. This included the new Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Elections held in November. In order to accommodate this election, the Annual Canvass was undertaken at a slightly earlier stage in the year, during the summer rather than in the autumn. In addition, this election was the first time to utilise the supplementary voting system manually. The turnout for the PCC election was quite low with an overall turnout of 15.7 % across Surrey. The Police and Crime Commissioner, elected for Surrey Police Area was Kevin Hurley.

The Portfolio Holder provided the Committee with an update with regard to the
communication methods utilised by the Council. As well as the more traditional ways of informing Elmbridge residents using the Elmbridge Review, Press Releases and the Website, a number of other social media platforms were being trialed including Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube amongst others. The Council was also looking at other different ways to engage with residents including a number of “Let’s Tweet” sessions conducted via Twitter. These sessions consisted of a live hour long question and answer session whereby questions could be posed to the Head of Service or Senior Officer who was sitting in the “Hot Seat” for that session. In addition, during 2012 a number of Let’s Talk Elmbridge events were undertaken and were currently being evaluated and a programme for the coming year was being developed.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development for her update and invited Members of the Committee to ask any questions.

In answer to a question about the future development of the Let’s Talk Elmbridge, the Portfolio Holder advised that the Let’s Talk Elmbridge programme of events was currently being evaluated. Finding the right location to hold the event was important and the event at the Hurst Park School had been well attended as the event happened at the end of the school day when the parents were able to attend, whilst collecting their children. It was acknowledged that this type of event was still experimental but was an excellent opportunity for all Council services to be represented alongside other agencies and for residents to obtain information and ask questions.

In answer to a question regarding the current flooding situation that was being faced in some areas of Walton and with regard to the improvements to the Flood Risk Management that the Environment Agency had previously set out, the Portfolio Holder noted the request for this area to be followed up in the appropriate way. With regard to the current flooding situation, the Council had been on alert as soon as the flood risk was known and would continue to monitor the situation and act accordingly if or when the situation changed.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holders for Community Development and Corporate Development for attending the meeting and providing an update with respect to their portfolios.

6. CABINET DECISION MAKING

(Link to Council Priorities: All)

The Committee considered the Cabinet’s Forward Plan, which covered the period 1 December 2012 to 31 March 2013 and contained matters which the Leader of the Council had reason to believe would be the subject of consideration by Cabinet or Individual Cabinet Members during this period. The Committee was also asked to identify any relevant matters for inclusion within the Work Programme in 2012-13.

AGREED that:
These Minutes should be referred to in conjunction with the Minutes of the subsequent meeting of the Council, where they are presented; and for completeness to the next relevant meeting when the Minutes are adopted.

(a) the Cabinet’s Forward Plan be noted; and

(b) the decisions taken by Cabinet at its meeting on 21 November 2012 be noted.

7. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

(Link to Council Priorities: All)

The Committee was invited to review progress against its work programme, identify any additional items for consideration at a future programme and add, amend or delete items from the work programme as appropriate.

AGREED that the progress of the Committee’s work programme for 2012-13 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.45 p.m. and concluded at 9.26 p.m.

A.J. HOPKINS
Chairman

Committee and Member Services Officer

M. Clarke - Committee and Member Services Officer

Other Officers in attendance

Mrs. N. Anderson  -  Head of Corporate Policy & Partnership Division
Mrs. A. Gale     -  Corporate Group Accountant
Miss. K. Mills   -  Policy Manager
Ms. A. McHugh   -  Solicitor