

At a meeting of the PROSPERITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on WEDNESDAY, 15TH JUNE, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Mordey in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Bell, Ellis, S. Foster, Gallagher, Howe, Snowdon, Walton and Wilson.

Also Present:-

Councillor D. Tate – Chairman of the Management Scrutiny Committee.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor P. Gibson.

New Members

Prior to the commencement of the formal business the Chairman welcomed and introduced Councillors Ball, Ellis, S. Foster, Gallagher, Walton and Wilson. He also paid tribute to former Members of the Committee Councillors Cuthbert, D. Forbes, Old, A. Wright and T. Wright and thanked them for their contribution to the business and meetings of the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Item 6 – Seaburn Masterplan and Design Code

Councillor Snowdon declared a personal interest in the item as a Member of the Seafront Steering Group.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 13th April, 2011

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 13th April, 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

City Centre Improvements

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which appended a report on the Programme of City Centre Improvements undertaken during 2010/11 which was considered and agreed by Cabinet at its meeting held on 1st June, 2011.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Graeme Farnworth, Head of Regeneration Programmes presented the Cabinet report which:-

- (i) provided Cabinet with an evaluation of the projects supported by the Council's provision of £1 million capital expenditure during 2010/11 to deliver 'quick wins' within the City Centre.
- (ii) identified lessons learnt through this exercise.
- (iii) put forward proposals for expending the additional £1 million capital provision for the City Centre for 2011/12.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Howe, Mr. Farnworth informed the Committee of potential development opportunities with regard to the former Art Centre building which Councillor Howe believed had quickly become an eyesore, and being in a gateway position detracted from the welcome given to visitors to the City.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Ellis, Mr. Farnworth explained that proposals for areas such as Washington, Houghton and Hetton were contained within the City Village Plans. The report before Members related specifically to the City Centre and improvements which would help to drive the economy of the whole City.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Wilson, Mr. Farnworth advised that discussions were at an advanced stage with regard to a £15 million extension to the Bridges providing accommodation for a new Primark store. Work was progressing to ensure that an empty building was not left behind on Fawcett Street.

Councillor Snowdon suggested that the £50,000 in the Street Scene Improvement budget allocated for Park Lane/Derwent and Olive Street could be used to provide free parking to encourage shoppers to visit the City. Mr. Farnworth replied that free parking had been a long standing request from the retail trade. As a result this had been introduced on a 15 month trial basis on Sundays and Bank Holidays. Analysis showed that the trial had failed to provide a net increase. The loss of income over the trial had amounted to £60,000. This could not be justified given the lack of benefit. The project had ceased in January 2011.

Councillor Ball referred to the proposals to dress the City for the Take That concerts and felt the end result had not lived up to expectations.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Mr. Farnworth confirmed that investigations were being made into developing the approach to the Park Lane Markets. Trials had been undertaken as to which was the most appropriate day (Saturday, Friday or Match days). Some traders at the Farmers Market had reported that it had been more profitable trading in Sunderland than in Alnwick. The aim was to raise the Markets to a position where the Council was no longer needed to fund them.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Mr. Farnworth explained the reasons for the previous short lead in times with regard to planning for the Christmas events programme. He advised that the previous problems had been overcome and the programme of events had been outsourced. Planning for the events had started in March 2011.

Councillor Howe referred to the less favourable aspects of the evening drinking culture and asked how conflict with theatre goers could be avoided. Mr. Farnworth advised that crime in the City Centre had been driven down significantly and was now below the national average. LMAPS had carried out a great deal of work on the problem and initiatives such as the Best Bar None and Taxi Marshalling had been extremely successful. Although actual crime had been driven down work was still required to address the public's perceptions and fear of crime.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. Farnworth for his report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Annual Work Programme and Policy Review

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) for Members to determine the Annual Work Programme for the Scrutiny Committee during 2011-12, including the main theme for a detailed policy review.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, proceeded to brief Members on the report. He referred the Committee to paragraph 3.5 of the report, which provided details of the topics highlighted from the Scrutiny Conference as potential issues for the Committee to consider.

Mr. Diamond briefed the Committee on each suggested policy review topic and the draft work programme for 2011-12.

Members of the Committee proceeded to give consideration to the 5 policy review proposals detailed at paragraph 3.5 and following discussion, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) 'University City' be approved as the Committee's main theme for a detailed policy review, and
- (ii) a one day conference be organised for early in the new year to consider the issue of 'Sub National Economic Development'.

Seaburn Masterplan and Design Code

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised the Committee of the responses received following the public consultation on the Seaburn Masterplan and Design Code.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Dan Hattle, Principal Planner presented the report highlighting the key issues arising from the consultation and the Council's response to the comments made.

Councillor Howe stated that in general he supported the Masterplan however he recognised that it was another plan that was aspirational in nature with a timescale of 10 to 15 years. With regard to the Seaburn Centre he stated that there was a notion it would be replaced through private developers. He believed the site would be ideal for a new swimming pool which would be linked by tram way to St. Peter's Metro Station reducing the need for parking at the Seafront. He also suggested that an ice rink would be a good idea to attract visitors to the Seafront outside the summer season. On the less positive side he expressed concern at the lack of toilet provision on the Seafront and highlighted that he had received numerous complaints from residents concerned at proposals to provide housing on the former school camping site to the north of Morrisons.

Councillor Wilson welcomed the report and noted that toilet provision appeared to be a major issue for people. There was also a wish to see change happen rather than proposals remain on paper.

Councillor Foster concurred with Councillor Howe that an ice rink or swimming pool would prove a popular attraction. The Chairman believed that given the current financial constraints for the Council, such facilities were likely to remain aspirational. Councillor Snowdon agreed that financially a lot would depend on what private developers were able to offer. She welcomed the plan and believed that a hotel/conference centre and or a major music venue would be useful additions to the Seafront.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. Hattle for his report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st June, 2011 – 30th September, 2011

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st June to 30th September, 2011 which related to the Prosperity and Economic Development Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

5. RESOLVED that the contents of the Forward Plan be noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance and wishing them a safe journey home.

(Signed) M. MORDEY,
Chairman.