

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 15TH NOVEMBER, 2010 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Bonallie, E. Gibson, Kelly, Padgett, Tye, Wakefield, L. Walton and Wood

Also Present:-

Councillor Tate - Chair of Management Scrutiny Committee

Apologies for Absence

An Apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor A. Wright.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 18th October, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 18th October, 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 6 – Flood Planning in Sunderland

The Chairman declared a personal interest as a Council appointed Member of the Northumbria regional Flood Defence Committee.

Sunderland ‘The Place’ Policy Review 2010/11: Progress Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the progress made on the Committee’s Policy Review into Sunderland ‘The Place’

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Helen Lancaster, Acting Scrutiny Officer, presented the report and advised Members of the work that had been undertaken to date and also the future evidence gathering that would be taking place.

Councillor Wood advised that since the visit to the University had been arranged there had been a briefing session for all Members with Northumbria Police arranged for the same date. He would have liked to have been able to attend both and asked that in future precautions was taken to ensure that these diary clashes did not occur.

The Chairman stated that the visit to the University had been arranged before the briefing session and agreed that checks needed to be made when scheduling meetings.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Lancaster for presenting the report and consideration having been given to the report it was:

2. RESOLVED that the dates of the forthcoming evidence gathering sessions be noted and the report be received and noted.

Sunderland 'The Place' Policy Review 2010/11: Sunderland Economic Masterplan

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a background to the recently launched Economic Masterplan in the context of the Committee's Policy Review; Sunderland 'the Place' and introduced the Presentation delivered by Vince Taylor.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Vince Taylor, Head of Strategic Economic Development, delivered the presentation and advised Members of the five aims set out by the Masterplan.

These aims were:-

- Aim 1 – 'A new kind of university city'
- Aim 2 – 'A national hub of the low-carbon economy'
- Aim 3 – 'A prosperous and well connected waterfront city centre'
- Aim 4 – 'An inclusive city economy – for all ages'
- Aim 5 – 'A one city approach to economic leadership'

Mr Taylor advised that there had been extensive consultation on the Masterplan and that it had been approved by Cabinet on 21st July 2010 and the launch events had taken place on 18th and 19th October 2010.

Councillor Wakefield commented that it seemed that the Masterplan was a wish list and he was unsure of how achievable the aims were. He raised concerns over the suggestion that the out of town business parks were wrong and that they should have been built nearer to the city centre. The residents of

Hetton, Houghton and Washington often felt like they were not a part of the city as they were physically separated from the rest of the city. There was a need to embrace all residents from all areas of the city without losing the historic character of the outlying villages.

Mr Taylor replied that the Masterplan did not say that the out of town business parks were wrong; the problem lay in the fact that there were only out of town business parks when there was a need to have these businesses located within the city centre as well.

Councillor Wood expressed his disagreement with some of Councillor Wakefield's comments. He felt that while the Masterplan was a wish list it was however wishing for the right things and was a step towards improving the whole city. There was a need to redevelop the Vaux site as there was a need for the city to be attractive as well as economically viable; it was clear what the preferred developments for the Vaux and Farringdon Row sites should be.

Councillor Wood then asked what businesses were looking for when they were deciding whether to invest in the city and also how to make sure that businesses actually came to the city if they liked what they saw.

Mr Taylor advised that Nissan still required suppliers to be nearby and this attracted some businesses to the area. Other more mobile businesses looked for an area with a high quality workforce with skilled and loyal employees; cost of labour was a lower priority for most businesses. High quality low cost property was also important as was the infrastructure available. The Broadband spine of the UK ran along the route of the A19 and as such areas including Doxford Park and Rainton Bridge were well connected to high speed internet in addition to having good transport links. Sunderland City Council was also one of the few Local Authorities in the UK to offer incentives to attract businesses.

Councillor Wood then expressed his concerns over the list of suggested topics for questions which had been circulated to Members; he did not feel that this was conducive to effective scrutiny as he felt that individual Members should be able to devise their own questions as they feel necessary.

The Chairman advised that it had been his idea to trial this list of suggested questions to see how well it would be received by Members; as it had not been well received he did not feel it would be necessary to provide a list like this again.

The Chairman then stated that both the Masterplan and the Policy Review were broad, wide ranging subjects and both were also highly detailed.

Councillor Kelly commented that there had been numerous meetings with Mr Taylor where various issues had been raised; it appeared that some of these issues had not been included in the Masterplan. There was a need for investment in the city. He was not convinced by the proposals to make the city a University City. As a Masterplan for the City Centre the plan was excellent,

however as a whole city Masterplan it was not as good as it missed out large areas of the city. Residents of Washington often did not feel as though they were a part of Sunderland. The outlying areas were still a part of the city and there was a need to ensure that the residents felt like they were a part of the city. Nissan had been permitted to erect a number of large wind turbines however other businesses in Washington had been refused permission to erect wind turbines.

Councillor E. Gibson commented that the existing Business Parks were in the right places and were successful. There was a need for investment in the City Centre. Improvements to the infrastructure such as Metro extensions were vital if new businesses were to be attracted to the city.

Councillor Tye commented that Silksworth had been part of Houghton at one time. The residents had embraced the change to being a part of Sunderland. There was a need for the residents of Hetton, Houghton and Washington to accept that they are a part of Sunderland as this was the only way to reduce the divide between the areas.

Councillor Kelly stated that there were areas such as Ryhope which were integrated with Sunderland but had however kept their own historic identity. The problem for the outlying areas was that there were natural boundaries between them and the city which made the residents feel more isolated and as though they were not a part of Sunderland.

Mr Taylor advised the Members that the Masterplan focused on the whole of Sunderland; only Aim 3 was based solely around the city centre and Aim 2, the low carbon economy, would be mostly out of the city centre with a lot of the development taking place in the 'Coalfield' area of Hetton and Houghton.

Councillor Wakefield expressed his concerns over the Hetton and Houghton areas being referred to as the 'Coalfield'. These areas contained some of the greenest places in Sunderland and they should be a tourist attraction however the 'Coalfield' moniker would discourage people from visiting the area.

The Chairman commented that Sunderland was a diverse city and there was a need to remember that the central areas as well as the outlying areas were all one city. He felt that if the city were to become a University City there would be a need for campuses in places other than the City Centre. There was a need to improve the leisure provision across the city; the lack of hotel accommodation across the city also needed to be addressed. There was still a need to improve the transport links across the city. He hoped that the Economic Masterplan would help the city to sell itself which would then lead to improvements being made.

Mr Taylor advised that there was a need for influence to be used a lot more and there was a need to look at how organisations worked together. It was unlikely that the University would build another campus however it was possible that the University could enter the schools to encourage young people within the city to attend the university. There were enquiries received

from developers looking to build hotels and some went on to be granted planning permission however there was nothing would then come of the development. At some point there would be a hotel built and then others would be likely to follow; Mr Taylor hoped that the first hotel would be built within the next year or two.

With regards to transport issues Mr Taylor advised that there would be meetings with the bus operators in order to identify potential improvements; there were currently areas of the city which were not well served by public transport. Sunderland did not have a strong enough sense of place for people arriving in the city although the city was performing well considering the weak physical sense of place. It was important to improve the reputation of the city, when Nissan had announced their plans to build an electric car the city's ratings had increased.

The Chairman thanked Mr Taylor for his presentation and it was:

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the information provided be given consideration as part of the Policy Review for 2010/11.

Flood Planning in Sunderland

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with details of flood planning in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Barry Frost, Security and Emergency Planning Manager, presented the report and advised Members that this report followed the report which had been presented to the Committee on 14th December, 2009. Mr Frost advised that the Pitt Review had been undertaken by Sir Michael Pitt following the floods of summer 2007 and this had led to Sunderland City Council contracting Jeremy Benn Associates Ltd to carry out a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment in 2009.

In March 2011 the Council would be participating in a nationwide exercise called "Watermark" which would test the arrangements that are in place for responding to severe, wide-area flooding.

Councillor Wakefield commented that the work carried out was reassuring; especially for people living in low lying areas of the city which were at risk from flooding. There had been water rescue training which had taken place in the Houghton area.

Mr Frost advised that the Council had been involved in the training and it was referred to in the response plan.

Councillor Padgett referred to the properties in the Sedgeleth area of Houghton which had been built below the flood level. He asked whether any work had been undertaken to protect these properties from flooding.

Mr Frost stated that he believed work had been carried out and that the area was classified as being at risk from flooding. He agreed to find out what works had been undertaken and provide this information to Councillor Padgett.

Councillor Padgett then queried whether the water authority had carried out any works at the Sewage Works.

Mr Frost advised that he was not aware of any works being carried out here.

Councillor Wakefield then advised that the stream had been bunded along its length from Rainton Bridge however there was still an issue with the capacity of the Sewage Works.

4. RESOLVED that the report be given consideration and that Members comments be noted.

Ryhope Village Conservation Area: Character Appraisal and Management Strategy

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised Members of the responses received following consultation of the draft Ryhope Village Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy and sought Members comments on the revised document.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mark Taylor, Senior Conservation Officer, presented the report and advised Members that there had been documents produced for other areas and this was the 11th document in the series. There were 14 Conservation Areas in Sunderland and each would be having one of these Character Appraisal and Management Strategy reports produced.

The Committee's comments were being sought as part of the consultation process; a process which had already led to twelve written responses being received and comments being made by 21 attendees at a public exhibition.

The Committee's comments would be reported to the Cabinet Meeting on 1st December, 2010 when approval would be sought for the adoption of the document as formal Planning Guidance.

Councillor Kelly congratulated Mr Taylor for producing such an excellent document which was of the usual high standard achieved by these Character Appraisal and Management Strategies.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the Character Appraisal and Management Strategy be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 November 2010 – 28 February 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 1 November 2010 – 28 February 2011 which related to the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Helen Lancaster, Acting Scrutiny Officer, presented the forward Plan and advised Members of the updated plan which had been circulated to Members. The Chairman having thanked Ms. Lancaster for her report it was:

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

Work Programme 2010-11

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached for Members' information, the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2010-11 Council year.

Helen Lancaster, Acting Scrutiny Officer presented the work programme.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Kelly stated that he had attended a visit to Washington Front Street where there had been concerns raised over the lack of daytime business in the street. There were a large number of Takeaways and bars; this did not help to attract visitors to the area. He asked whether it would be possible for the Committee to look at this and investigate the possibilities of attracting businesses to the area.

Councillor Wakefield commented that the Coalfield Area Committee had been looking at the shopping centres within Hetton and Houghton. The Remembrance Parade in Houghton had passed a lot of shop units which were closed with the shutters down; he felt that improvements could be made if there was an increase in policing to reduce the need for shutters.

Councillor E. Gibson advised that it was difficult to refuse planning applications for Takeaways or bars unless there were valid grounds for refusal. There needed to be another way to improve the quality of shops.

The Chairman agreed that the degradation of shopping centres was unacceptable. It was a broader issue than just that of planning as there was a need to find a way of encouraging small businesses back into the shopping streets.

Councillor Kelly stated that there needed to be some mechanism in place to tackle the issue. There were complaints from residents about the number of takeaways and the amount of shops which were closed during the day.

The Chairman stated that this issue could be linked into poverty of place.

Ms Lancaster stated that she would liaise with the Area Officers and look into this issue further.

8. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be received and noted.

The Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.