

**At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor S. Watson in the Chair

Councillors M. Dixon, Errington, Essl, Foster, Kay, Maddison, McClennan, Rolph and A. Wilson.

**Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor I. Richardson.

**Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2010**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2010 be confirmed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest**

Item 6 – 'Former Vaux Brewery Site – Sunderland' City Centre

Councillor A. Wilson declared a personal interest in the item as an employee of Tesco.

Item 4 – 'The Role of Culture in Supporting Sustainable Communities – Policy Review Archives and Museums Update'

Councillor Rolph declared a personal interest in the item as an employee of Durham County Records Office.

**Change in the Order of Business**

The Chairman advised that in order to allow Mr. Clark to leave thereafter, he would take Item 6 on the agenda (Former Vaux Brewery Site – Sunderland City Centre) at this juncture.

## **Former Vaux Brewery Site – Sunderland City Centre**

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced Colin Clarke, Head of Land and Property, who was attending to provide Members with a verbal update on the former Vaux Brewery site.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Clark informed the meeting that in terms of the Economic Masterplan the former Vaux Brewery was a key development site with regard to employment led regeneration. Significant progress had been made towards the end of last year with an agreement reached in principle to transfer the Vaux site into the public sector. Whilst this agreement in principle had been reached it was clear that Tesco were currently focussing their efforts in securing the delivery of their project on the Sunderland Retail Park. With regard to the Vaux site, things were at a relatively delicate state with regard to the contractual negotiations. The details were currently being worked through between Tesco, the Regional Development Agency and the Council.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Rolph, Mr. Clark advised that it was not envisaged that there would be any effect on the site development should the Regional Development Agency be abolished prior to final transfer of the site into the public sector.

Councillor Kay stated that the biggest single step would be securing the site, however, this would only be the beginning of the story rather than the end. He suspected that opportunities for development would be limited in the current economic downturn. Mr. Clark advised that significant effort had been expended in trying to secure the site and there was no doubt that delivering the development of the site would take time. There was, however, every likelihood that both processes could be twin tracked. The site was such a development opportunity for the private sector that it was believed that it remained an attractive proposition for developers.

With regard to an enquiry from Councillor McClennan regarding timescales, Mr. Clark advised that funding was secured for the acquisition of the site. Procurement of a developer could take 12 to 18 months following this and once appointed, development of the site could perhaps take a further 5 to 10 years.

Councillor Foster welcomed the update and asked whether it would be viable to either tidy up the site or screen it until development took place. Mr. Clark replied that he was conscious of the visual impact of the site and once it transferred to the public sector it would be addressed. A decision would need to be taken as to the scale and cost of any works to tidy the site and Members would be consulted over how this was managed.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor M. Dixon regarding use of the site on a temporary basis in the interim period, Mr. Clark replied that the site remained in the ownership of Tesco and therefore there was nothing that could be done in this regard until the site transferred into public ownership.

There being no further questions for Mr. Clark, the Chairman thanked him for his report and looked forward to receiving further updates in due course.

2. RESOLVED that the verbal update provided in respect of the Vaux site be received and noted.

### **Change in the Order of Business**

The Chairman advised that at this juncture he would be taking items 4 and 5 on the agenda, together with the addendum in respect of item 4 as one item.

### **The Role of Culture in Supporting Sustainable Communities – Policy Review – Archives and Museums Update**

#### **The Role of Arts and Creative Development in Supporting Sustainable Communities – Policy Review 2010/11**

#### **The Role of Libraries in Supporting Sustainable Communities – Policy Review 2010/11**

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report in respect of each of the above items.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

Jane Hall, Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism, Allison Clarke, Library Manager, together with Ian Watson and Helen White of the Tyne and Wear Archives Service were in attendance to present their reports and address any comments or questions from Members.

Councillor Rolph congratulated Mr. Watson on his recent appointment. She stated that it was the first time the Archives had contributed to a Policy Review and there was a lot to digest. It was also apparent that the services provided by the Archives contributed to each of the priorities of the Sunderland Strategy. Councillor Rolph advised that the people of Sunderland were very proud of the City's heritage and Area Committees such as the Coalfield were currently compiling an audit of heritage assets within their areas. She stated that she would be interested in the Archives' comments on future working with communities and noted that as Archives don't reflect local authority boundaries there was a need for close working relationships.

Mr. Watson explained that joint working was second nature to the service. It was true that a lot of people didn't recognise local authority boundaries and that these boundaries had altered over time. As a result a lot of documents covering the historical area of Sunderland were held at the County Durham Records Office. The Regional Archives Council enabled a lot of collaborative projects to be undertaken and allowed the service to 'tap into' funding. The North East Learning Arc covered an area from Berwick to Middlesbrough and provided initiatives such as the

'Challenging History Project' which encouraged school children to look at current issues through historical events. The service also held the records of the Association of North East Councils and was a truly regional resource.

With regard to community engagement a lot of work was being done in schools particularly with regards to maths and literacy at Key Stage 2. Attention was also being paid to the transition from years 6 to 7 in order to maintain pupils' interest. There was however only one school and outreach officer for the whole of Tyne and Wear. Digital access was the obvious way forward. The Archives were working closely with Sunderland's library service to ensure levels of access in Sunderland. The Archives had recently been successful in a funding bid to catalogue Sunderland's shipyard records. Work was also being undertaken to develop digital access to the Mediatheque facility housed at the Discovery Museum.

With regard to an enquiry from Councillor Errington regarding the Regional Museums Hub, Members were advised that funding would transfer to the Arts Council. The Museums Service had funding for a further year, however, this would be reduced by 14%.

Councillor Errington stressed the importance of creating and maintaining links with local history groups. He also asked that all schools were made aware of the 'Box of Delights Project'. Members were advised that all schools were provided with a termly newsletter and many were also on specific mailing lists.

Councillor Errington referred to attempts to maintain a sustainable city centre economy and asked if investigations had been made into providing evening opening hours at the libraries together with a café facility in the central library. Ms. Hall advised that provision was constantly being reviewed however a café would have to be economically viable and provided at no cost to the Council.

With regard to the libraries report, Councillor Kay stated that it painted a picture of considerable activity, some of which was core funded, others being funded via sponsorship. He asked that given the current funding environment, would the service look different in a year's time. Ms. Hall stated that it was difficult to say at this stage, however, the libraries would be striving to minimise service reduction as much as possible.

In response to a request from Councillor Dixon he was advised that the visitor figures for Monkwearmouth Station Museum were not to hand and that they would be forwarded to him.

Councillor McClennan referred to paragraph 3.11 of the libraries report regarding the two UK Online projects and asked if perhaps the service was trying to do too much. Were such projects already being undertaken by the voluntary sector and was the service missing a trick by not working with them? Ms. Hall replied that this was a good question and would be considered as part of the libraries review. Consultation had not been undertaken with the voluntary sector in this regard, however, they would be in the future. Councillor Rolph stated that excluded groups used IT in libraries more than any other group, the knock on effect being that library usage was higher in deprived areas.

Councillor Dixon asked how far the service looked at other areas to check on developments. He stated that he used the library every Monday night and had noticed a decrease in patronage, whilst usage in Newcastle still appeared vibrant. Ms. Hall confirmed that the Sunderland library service met on a regular basis with 12 other local authorities to share best practice and the service was also represented at a national level. The opening hours operated by the service were based on budget and expenditure.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Rolph regarding a sustainable library service, Ms. Hall advised that the Library Improvement Programme which was being piloted in 10 local authorities would soon be coming to an end and it was hoped that the outcomes could be used to inform the Sunderland libraries review.

With regard to Culture and the Arts, Councillor Errington referred to the loss of funding and the push from Central Government for cultural bodies to increasingly seek funding from philanthropic donations to the Arts. Ms. Hall confirmed that funding was a key part of the Service Review and that sponsorship was being looked at across the whole of Cultural Services.

Councillor Rolph referred to the support provided for local shopping centres in Dursley whereby empty buildings were used to display art work to help revitalise areas and bring units back into use. Ms. Hall advised that the service was working with the National Gallery for Contemporary Art to do just that during February and March in the City Centre and investigations would be undertaken to see if the initiative could be extended to shopping areas outside the City Centre.

With regard to the promotion of local talent, Members were informed explained that the Council had a clear policy to support local artists. In the commissioning process the long list was always opened up to local artists to ensure they gained a foothold on the ladder. The competition to design the new pier gates at Roker had been won by an artist trained in Sunderland.

Councillor Kay expressed surprise that the reports did not provide mention of the performing arts or creative writing. Members were advised that the Council's Art Strategy was available on the intranet. The Authority had good relations with the Royalty, Empire and No Limits theatres and provided advice, support and guidance. The service also worked closely with the Bunker, music venues and promoters in the City.

Councillor McClennan suggested that the service should investigate the opportunity to maximise and exploit the potential for Gift Aid. There being no further questions the Chairman thanked the officers for their reports and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the evidence presented as part of the policy review be received and noted.

## **Forward Plan – Key Decision for the Period 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2011 – 30<sup>th</sup> April, 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<sup>st</sup> January, 2011 – 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2011 which related to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Rolph requested that the item on Low Carbon Homes would need to come before this Committee in February prior to Cabinet consideration in March. She also suggested that the item on the Internal Waste Plan may be of interest to the Committee.

4. 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.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

5. RESOLVED that the Committee's Work Programme for 2010-11 be received and noted.

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

(Signed) S. WATSON,  
Chairman.